

Freepost RTEZ-YBJA-HSRS
Back Heathrow
HOWNSLOW
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16 October 2013

Dear Sirs,

"Back Heathrow" newspaper

Introduction

I am writing to express my concerns about the newspaper you recently published to promote your campaign.

In my view, the newspaper is a crudely crafted, misleading and illogical attempt at scaremongering. If you think that more than a minority of people will be duped by it, you have seriously misjudged the residents of London who suffer daily from Heathrow Airport's noise and pollution and who are used to years of downright dishonesty from the airport's operators. This is clearly a desperate attempt by Heathrow Airport (the financial backing of which is very briefly admitted towards the end of the editorial) to try to arrest the growing tide of opposition to yet more expansion of the airport.

Jobs

The sensational claim that more than 100,000 jobs will be lost is based on the very unlikely premise that Heathrow will be shut down. It ignores the simple fact that Heathrow will not shut down if, for example, new runways are built at Gatwick and/or Stansted.

Even if Heathrow did eventually shut down (and this would hardly happen overnight), 12Km² of some of the most prized land in the UK would become available for a massive construction project, creating tens of thousands of new jobs. Daniel Moylan, the Mayor's aviation chief, has said that there has been a failure to look at the bigger picture when making gloomy predictions. He believes that the effect on jobs, even in west London, will be positive over time.

It may sound harsh, but the only constant is change and many of us have had to accept that reality. Since the recession began, UK unemployment has risen

by around one million and more than one hundred thousand jobs have been lost in the City. During my own working life I have had to move from Cambridge to Bristol and subsequently to London to find work. Countless others have had to undertake similar moves to stay in employment.

Noise

The assertion that a third runway will reduce noise is a breathtaking affront to common sense. Do you really think that many of the people who suffer daily from aircraft noise will swallow the argument that a 58% increase in flight numbers will cut noise? The calculation is based on the outdated 57 decibel contour, but people living well outside this contour are gravely affected.

Will you be extending this logic to claim that fourth and fifth runways (which past experience confirms you would certainly lobby for if you get your way with a third runway) will deliver absolute silence?

The arguments advanced about the development of quieter aircraft conveniently ignore the fact that current fleets will not, in many cases, be renewed for years. You report that 60 quieter planes will eventually be in service, but we will apparently have to wait patiently for 7 years just for this limited relief. Even if these 60 planes operate from Heathrow twice a day (which must be highly unlikely), they will represent only 9% of the total traffic using Heathrow and disturbing the local population.

Additionally, the claims of dramatic noise reduction are not universally supported by studies. For example, the February 2012 ERCD report confirmed that there is not much difference between the landing noise of the A380 and 747 if you live in Putney, Barnes or Chiswick. Indeed, some variants of the A380 are said to be noisier than some variants of the 747.

Your newspaper states that other European countries such as France, the Netherlands and Germany are better connected to emerging economies such as the BRIC countries. However, you omit to reveal the fact that Heathrow is in a league of its own in terms of the number of people affected by noise. A population of 725,500 lives within the 55L_{den} contour of Heathrow. The corresponding populations for France are 170,000, the Netherlands 43,700, and Germany 238,700.

Infrastructure

Astonishingly, there is no mention in your newspaper about the implications for the communications infrastructure serving Heathrow, which is already woefully inadequate. Anyone who has suffered the gridlocked M25 and other roads approaching the airport will perceive this is a laughable omission from a case proposing yet further expansion of the airport.

Health

The recent study published in the British Medical Journal has found that deaths from stroke, heart and circulatory disease are 20% higher in areas with high levels of aircraft noise. While noise has yet to be confirmed without doubt as the cause, Professor Stephen Stansfeld of London's Queen Mary University said: "These results imply that the siting of airports and consequent exposure to aircraft noise may have direct effects on the health of the surrounding population." "Planners need to take this into account when expanding airports in heavily populated areas or planning new airports."

Safety

It is, I think, not argued by even the most fervent proponents of Heathrow's expansion that its location is the result of rational analysis and careful planning. It is an accident of history. No other major city in the world allows aircraft to over-fly it in the same way as London, and it is Londoners who pay the price - with noise pollution, their mental and physical health, and the risk of a terrible disaster waiting to happen (not least in an era of increasing terrorism). Unfortunately, most politicians have consistently turned a blind eye to this.

I am also very concerned about the public safety implications that it seems likely will arise if Heathrow expansion is approved. Internet chatter in forums and blogs points to a danger of serious civil unrest that would make the poll tax riots seem like minor protests. Having lived through the riots in Ealing in 2011, I am worried about the impact this would have for law-abiding citizens.

Objectivity and Honesty

The poll reported in the newspaper is considered by HACAN to be selective and out-of-kilter with previous surveys, which have shown most residents to be against expansion. In May over 70% of people in Richmond, Hillingdon and Hounslow voted against expansion in borough-wide surveys which used a much wider example of people.

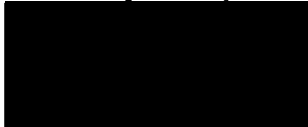
The newspaper reports supportive comments from a number of people, but these were hardly surprising, given that their livelihoods were admitted to rely directly or indirectly on Heathrow Airport.

I referred earlier to the dishonesty that has characterised this debate for many years. No clearer evidence of this can be found than the promises made in the letter to Heathrow's neighbours from Sir John Egan in 1999, extracts from which are attached.

Conclusion

I would actually like to thank you for reminding me of this debate. It has alerted me to the fact that many people will either be too young to be aware of, or have forgotten, the past (and clearly enduring) tendency of the Heathrow Airport authorities to deploy any lie to get their way, regardless of the misery that they cause to millions of people. As a result, it has invigorated my determination to spread this message through social and other media in the coming months.

Yours faithfully,



ccs:

- Airports Commission
- HACAN
- Angie Bray, MP Ealing Central & Acton
- Councillor Daniel Moylan

Attachment:

- Extract from "a letter to our Heathrow neighbours" from Sir John Egan, Chief Executive, BAA plc, April 1999