



**Correspondence address:**

South East England Councils  
Room 215 County Hall  
Penrhyn Road  
Kingston  
Surrey  
KT1 2DN

**t:** 020 8541 7553

**e:** [heatherbolton@secouncils.gov.uk](mailto:heatherbolton@secouncils.gov.uk)

Sir Howard Davies  
Chairman  
Airports Commission  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

*By post and email*

16 October 2013

**AVIATION GROWTH AND THE SOUTH EAST – A STRATEGIC CONSENSUS**

Dear Sir Howard

**Introduction**

Here in the South East of England there is enormous interest in the debate on the future of UK aviation and the potential economic and environmental impacts for our area.

Whatever your final recommendations, there will be significant implications for South East local authorities and residents. Within this context, we write to set out a number of important issues of consensus agreed by our members. Following your recent announcement on the likely need for future runway expansion in the South East, we highlight three areas that will need to be addressed in detail in your interim report later this year.

Together South East England Councils (SEEC) and South East Strategic Leaders (SESL) represent the interests of 76 local authorities and their 9.5 million residents. Our membership comprises democratically elected councillors from county, unitary and district councils across the South East, giving us a strong mandate to present our case. The size and scale of the South East also makes our views significant – we have the UK's highest population, some 1.2m higher than London's 8.3m residents.

We specifically chose not to respond on the detail of the individual proposals received by the Commission this summer. We feel others are better placed to provide technical advice and comment on the feasibility of these schemes. However we have reached agreement with our members on a number of high level, strategic issues that we feel must be taken into account in your interim recommendations later this year. These are set out below in more detail but can be summarised as:

1. There is agreement in SEEC and SESL that, from the perspective of the South East as a whole, there is a need to expand airport capacity to support future economic growth both in the South East and UK-wide. Individual councils will form their own

positions on airport expansion but there is general agreement that doing nothing is not an option. If we do nothing the UK will lose out to competition from other countries – but we must develop extra capacity in a way that minimises the environmental impact including noise and congestion.

2. Opinion is divided on the merits of a single hub versus a dual hub but there is clear opposition to a Thames Estuary airport. It is also recognised that, in the long term, expansion is likely to be needed at more than a single airport – for example further expansion outside the South East should not be ruled out.
  3. Infrastructure investment is critical both in the short term and the long term. A step change in transport is needed both to improve surface access for travellers and to reduce the impacts of road congestion for businesses and local residents. Action is needed to deliver access improvements in the short term and to ensure that your long term recommendation can be genuinely globally competitive. Our members highlight three key points in this discussion:
    - A truly integrated approach to transport infrastructure is essential to ensure a comprehensive package of road, rail and other public transport improvements support all airports, especially those earmarked for expansion.
    - Transport investment is needed in advance of airport development and must address both existing infrastructure deficits and new needs resulting from aviation growth. Currently, for example, several UK airports are let down by inadequate transport infrastructure and need investment merely to stand still.
    - Wherever possible, the aim should be to develop existing airport sites and infrastructure to deliver growth more quickly and more cost effectively than building major new developments from scratch. New infrastructure – particularly new transport links – will still be required but the aim must be to maximise usage of existing assets first, as a quicker, cheaper route to growth.
1. **Expansion is vital for economic growth – do nothing is not an option**
    - 1.1 SEEC and SESL members agree that airport expansion is vital to maintain UK and South East economic competitiveness. Estimates show that aviation demand is growing steadily and that – without change – the South East’s five largest airports could be turning away 13 million passengers by 2030. Neither the South East nor national economies can afford to surrender the economic potential of aviation growth to competitor countries.
    - 1.2 However, while there are economic benefits to be realised these must not overshadow the need to address a number of practical and environmental issues that fall within the Commission’s remit.
    - 1.3 In your short term recommendations, for example, we would like to see the issue of short haul and freight flights addressed. This includes the potential to encourage modal shift and relocation of short haul and freight services away from Heathrow to free up runway capacity for long haul passenger flights.
    - 1.4 Another immediate requirement is better public transport access to Heathrow and Gatwick. This is essential to improve their attractiveness, accessibility and reduce road congestion for passengers over the next few years while planning is underway for a longer term solution.
    - 1.5 Both short term and long term there needs to be action to tighten regulations on noise, pollution and night flying to minimise disruption to residents living near a flight path. This should encompass work with airports and the aviation industry to encourage technical advances that reduce the environmental impact of aircraft. Increasing capacity should also support regulation of night flights, as has been

achieved in other European cities. Action on these factors would gain strong support from the South East. There are significant environmental impacts for South East residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick, the UK's two largest airports, but the principle of reduced impact applies equally to other areas too.

## **2. Where to expand – single hub versus dual hub**

2.1 We recognise there are – and will continue to be – many different views on the best location or locations for airport expansion. Among our members opinion is divided between the merits of a single hub at Heathrow or a dual hub based at Heathrow and Gatwick. We will therefore leave individual local authorities to make separate representations where they favour a particular option.

2.2 There is negligible support for a dispersed hub model or a new airport in the Thames Estuary. Indeed, all options for an airport in the Thames Estuary face significant opposition from the vast majority of our membership. Opposition centres on the high cost of development, the length of time required to deliver the project and essential supporting infrastructure such as transport links and housing for the workforce.

2.3 There are also major concerns that a hub airport in a completely new location would have a significant detrimental effect on the South East as the UK's most profitable economy. In 2010-11 the South East generated a £6.3bn profit for the national Treasury as taxes paid in the South East exceeded public spending in the area by this amount. This compares to a net profit from London of £0.7bn in the same period. All other areas of the UK recorded a deficit. The South East's economic value is well established – over the period 2003/4 to 2010/11 the South East provided the Treasury with a net profit of £91.1bn compared to a net profit of £58.3bn from London.

2.4 Airports are an important part of the South East economy. Locations including Heathrow, Gatwick and Southampton create significant employment and supply chain opportunities for the South East, and attract business headquarters. The recent passenger numbers are a proxy for their scale of impact:

<b>Airport</b>	<b>Million passengers pa</b>
Heathrow	70
Gatwick	34
Stansted	18
Luton	10
London City	3
Southampton	1.7
Southend	0.6

2.5 If Heathrow were to close following development of a new hub airport elsewhere, many jobs and economic opportunities would relocate away from the surrounding areas, including Surrey and the Thames Valley. This would clearly have a major impact on the South East's economic performance, its profitability and – inevitably – its ability to help drive the national economy out of recession. As the South East competes globally not nationally, there is also a significant risk that closure of Heathrow would see companies move overseas to competitor nations rather than to another part of UK.

2.6 While member opinion is divided on the merits of a single hub versus a dual hub, there is a recognition that in future expansion needs may not be limited to one or two sites. In the long term, additional runway expansion may also be needed at other

airports outside the South East to keep pace with the expected continued growth in demand for air travel.

### **3. Infrastructure investment is critical to successful aviation growth**

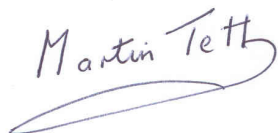
- 3.1 Our members see infrastructure planning and investment as an absolute prerequisite for aviation growth. There is an urgent need for short term surface access improvements while longer term plans are finalised.
- 3.2 Airports need extensive supporting infrastructure to operate effectively. In planning long term aviation expansion there must be a fully integrated approach to improving infrastructure such as housing, passenger transport, workforce commuting and environmental mitigation. Without an integrated approach across all Government departments, we will fail to deliver successful expansion that genuinely enhances the UK's global economic potential. Local authorities can also play a key part, helping to plan and deliver local services to support the area(s) that will be affected by growth. Government needs to work closely with South East local authorities to ensure a fully integrated approach to managing the impacts of expansion on our communities.
- 3.3 **Short term needs** – The South East already has an infrastructure deficit, with a strained and overcrowded road and rail network that is beginning to undermine our global competitiveness. In 2011 motorways in the South East carried 25% of all motorway traffic in the UK (22.3 billion kilometres) and the strain is showing as congestion rises, leading to increasing costs for business and the environment. The Freight Transport Association, for example, estimates that road congestion costs its members £1 a minute.
- 3.4 **Long term needs** – In the longer term, plans for surface access, public transport and reduced road congestion must be developed as an integral part of airport expansion proposals and implemented on the ground before runway development takes place.
- 3.5 There also needs to be investment in excellent public transport between airports. Regardless of the decision on a single hub vs dual hub, better links between UK airports will offer significant benefits. High quality links to all key airports could help encourage a modal shift that would reduce road congestion and offer highly effective connections across the UK for both business and leisure travellers. In the South East, better rail and public transport to – and between – Heathrow and Gatwick would play a major role in relieving congestion on sections of the M25 and M23 that link the two airports.
- 3.6 There is no doubt that the South East needs heavy investment in new transport infrastructure to support aviation growth. However, the scale of investment required could be mitigated in some instances by building on existing assets rather than developing greenfield sites from scratch. A key illustration of this point is our members' opposition to a new Thames Estuary airport on the basis of the very high costs and time involved in developing such a site and brand new transport links.
- 3.7 There is support for a more cost effective, quicker solution based on expanding existing airport sites and improving and extending current transport networks. However our members stress that building on existing assets should not be seen as a bargain basement solution. The cost of improvements to a global standard will still be substantial but will offer a way to deliver growth more quickly and cost effectively while minimising the risk of losing existing economic strengths.

- 3.8 To maintain our members' support for airport expansion in the South East there must be a clear commitment on future infrastructure development that will:
- Address existing short term transport access deficits for all current airports. Particular mention was made of the lack of public transport access to Heathrow from the south and west.
  - Deliver advance investment in a world class, modern transport infrastructure to support surface access to expanding airports.

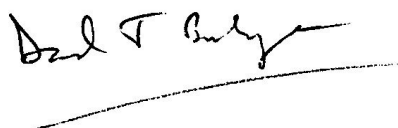
**Note on membership**

South East England Councils and South East Strategic Leaders members represent county, unitary and district councils in the following county areas: Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, Kent, East and West Sussex, plus the unitary areas of Isle of Wight, Wiltshire and Central Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely



**Cllr Martin Tett, Vice Chairman of South East Strategic Leaders  
Leader, Buckinghamshire County Council**



**Cllr David Burbage, Chairman of South East Strategic Leaders  
Leader, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**



**Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE, Chairman of South East England Councils  
Leader, Tandridge District Council**



**Cllr David Hodge, Deputy Chairman of South East England Councils  
Leader, Surrey County Council**