



Department  
for Transport



# Policy briefing note

## Airport capacity and air quality

Air quality is a national health issue, which this government takes very seriously. Transport has an important role to play in tackling emissions, and whilst the contribution from aviation is relatively small, airports need to play their part.

This note adds further detail to the report 'Air Quality Re-Analysis: Impact of New Pollution Climate Mapping Projections and National Air Quality Plan' on how airport expansion could be compatible with our air quality obligations.

### The Government has worked to understand the air quality impacts of expansion

The Airports Commission concluded in July 2015 that a new runway could be delivered without impacting the UK's compliance with air quality limit values for nitrogen dioxide.

We subsequently conducted further analysis to compare the conclusions of the Airports Commission with the updated projections provided in the Government's 2015 UK Air Quality Plan.

This analysis concluded that, based on the Government's Air Quality Plan, the Heathrow and Gatwick schemes would neither cause nor worsen exceedances of air quality limit values.<sup>1</sup>

Since this work was carried out, new international evidence on vehicle emissions forecasts has been released. Further work is needed to understand the implications of this evidence, but our initial assessment suggests that revised forecasts would be likely to be within the range of scenarios already considered by our re-analysis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The air quality re-analysis acknowledges that, subsequent to the Airports Commission's work and modelling on air quality, further iterations of surface access plans have been proposed by the promoter of the Heathrow Extended Northern Runway scheme. Most elements of its plans have remained unchanged, but there have been some changes to road layout. Although these iterations have not been considered in the reanalysis, it is acknowledged that they were developed with one aim being to reduce air quality impacts associated with the proposal considered by the Airports Commission.

<sup>2</sup> The re-analysis also considered a 'worst case' scenario which assumed higher diesel vehicle emissions.

As we have made clear previously, the Government will review new and emerging evidence in relation to air quality to ensure that it is taking the right approach to achieving compliance for the UK.

## Air quality is a national issue

The Government recognises that it could, if required, undertake supporting measures over the next decade that could mitigate air quality impacts nationally, in London and at Heathrow.

Government is already taking action to improve air quality and ensure the UK can meet its commitments as set out in the Government's national Air Quality Plan. For example, the UK is already delivering a programme of measures to support the long-term transition to low emission vehicles and meet the Government's target that by 2040 all new cars will be ultra low emission. The programme, which has been backed by £600m of investment from 2015-2020, includes measures to encourage uptake of cleaner vehicles, long-term support for developing low emission technology and funding for new electric and hydrogen buses.

Over the next decade, measures such as these will ensure a rapid transition to a cleaner, low emission UK vehicle fleet, leading to tangible improvements in air quality ahead of the new runway beginning operation. If necessary to meet air quality limit values, the UK could consider further measures to encourage the uptake of cleaner vehicles.

Getting solutions right locally is also key to improving air quality nationally.

On 13 October the Government published its consultation on a framework for implementing both voluntary and mandatory Clean Air Zones, a key measure towards delivering the UK Air Quality Plan.

In London, the Mayor has set out his plans to improve air quality in the capital by implementing an Ultra Low Emission Zone and is consulting on further changes to meet his responsibility to deliver clean air in London.

DfT, Defra and the Treasury have also been working closely together to consider the measures necessary to achieve a long-term reduction in emissions. This arrangement will be formalised in a cross-government working group to continue to ensure that we respond appropriately to the evolving evidence base in this area. We will respond proportionately to any new evidence over the coming year if required.

## The airport must play its part

Heathrow is already taking action to reduce its air quality impacts, including:

- Improving infrastructure to allow continued improvements in the numbers of people using public and sustainable modes of transport to access the airport;
- Introducing low emission vehicles to their fleets; and
- Over half of the aircraft using Heathrow are of the latest emission standards.

## An expanded airport will need to go even further

The new runway at Heathrow will be underpinned by further industry leading measures to mitigate air quality impacts both during the construction and operation of the new runway.

These will be determined through the National Policy Statement and the development consent process and could include measures which an expanded Heathrow have committed to:

- Encouraging more people to use public and sustainable modes of transport to get to the airport, with the airport committed to getting at least 55% of people on to public and sustainable modes of transport by 2040;
- Providing new infrastructure for zero or low emission vehicles including charging and fuel facilities and priority parking;
- Making all airport vehicles ultra low emission by 2025;
- Reduced landing charges to reward airlines for using cleaner aircraft;
- Supplying electrical power and pre-conditioned air to reduce emissions from aircraft at the gate and incentivising reduced-engine taxiing; and
- Ensuring that surface access plans are appropriately ambitious in their focus on improving air quality.

The airport will also need to consider what further measures may be required to encourage cleaner vehicles to enter the airport boundary.

## This includes the construction period

During construction of the new runway we expect the airport to use industry-leading measures and best practice from similar large infrastructure projects, which could include:

- Developing a construction traffic management plan to control the times and routes that construction vehicles use to access the site, including restricting or relocating traffic movements around residential or ecological areas and introducing speed controls on local roads;
- Using low emission construction vehicles with cleaner engines and fitting particulate filters to older engines;
- Selecting construction materials to minimise transport distances and combining loads off-site to reduce the number of lorries accessing the airport;
- A worker transport scheme to encourage construction workers to travel at less-busy times and by less-polluting modes of transport;
- Connecting to the electricity grid to avoid running generators on site; and
- Using barriers to prevent the spread of emissions.

## The airport will need to demonstrate compliance to receive development consent

To ensure the expanded airport is compliant with air quality limit values we will lay before Parliament and consult on a draft Airports National Policy Statement that will outline measures which Heathrow will have to consider in preparing its development consent application. The final measures will be decided through the development consent order process.

Final development consent will not be granted unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that the scheme would comply with air quality legal requirements.