



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

02 February 2015

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

Dear Sir Howard

I am writing in response to the Consultation Document that the Airports Commission has published regarding additional runway capacity in the South East of England.

The potential expansion of Gatwick Airport is of major concern to the thousands of my constituents who live under one of the flight paths for Gatwick. The number of people disturbed by overflying planes has significantly increased recently due to the shifting of the flight path eastwards which has resulted in more planes flying over more densely populated areas.

In order to better gauge the views of constituents, I carried out a survey of 7,500 households in the areas of my constituency most affected by aircraft noise. The response rate was very high indeed (29%). I also recently met with the parish councils most affected by aircraft noise and their comments are also reflected in my response. In addition, I have reflected the balance of opinion of constituents who have corresponded with me or come to speak to me about the issue at my advice surgeries.

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I have attached a summary of the survey results, which speak for themselves, but I would like to highlight some of the key points:

- 67% said that they were disturbed by noise from overflying aircraft and 56% said that this had increased a lot in the last three years.
- There was no clear consensus as to whether people thought there should be more airport capacity in the South-East (46% were in favour and 54% were against).
- There was support for the two Heathrow options (76%) as opposed to building a second runway at Gatwick (24%).
- The majority of respondents (61%) believe West Kent residents should be eligible for compensation for noise disturbance.
- There was also strong support for an Independent Noise Regulator. Many people distrust Gatwick and feel unrepresented on forums such as GATCOM. Despite repeated requests, Tunbridge Wells has not been allowed representation on this group.
- In terms of noise mitigation measures, the top three actions that people would like to see implemented are:
 - **Spreading flight paths over a wide area to spread the impact thinly over more people.**

It is my understanding that Gatwick wishes to move towards a point merge system which could result in a much narrower flight path – a closed transition point merge.



The majority of my constituents affected believe very strongly that the blight of aircraft noise should be more equally shared i.e. that any flight path should be a much broader swathe.

Within such a broad swathe, areas of exclusion could then be introduced to avoid highly populated locations.

Any intention to introduce a narrow flight path across my constituency would be unacceptable.

- **Retrofitting planes with equipment to reduce whining sounds.**

There are particular problems with the A320 family of aircraft which emit a high-pitched whining noise which I understand is caused by Fuel Over Pressure Protector (FOPP) cavities. The recent Civil Aviation Authority report "*Noise Exposure Contours for Gatwick Airport 2013*" identified the largest increase in types of plane to be in short-haul aircraft including the Airbus A319, A320 and A321.

On p100 of your report "*Gatwick Airport Second Runway: Business Case and Sustainability Assessment*" you acknowledge that "response to noise is subjective, and likely to be affected not only by the magnitude of the sound but also to its duration, regularity, and the time of day at which it occurs". In my opinion, and that of a large number of my constituents, the pitch of the sound is also significant in terms of noise disturbance. As your Noise Scorecard is currently drafted, the particular problem with the A320 family of aircraft is not taken into account and needs to be addressed.

I understand that at a recent meeting of the Department for Transport's Aircraft Noise Management Advisory Committee (ANMAC), the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) agreed to look at the fleet replacement plan of airlines using the A320 family of aircraft at Gatwick, to model the noise to illustrate impact on noise contours at Heathrow and Gatwick, and to consider monitoring actual noise levels to provide comparisons between aircraft with and without flow deflectors. It is important that this work informs your consultation.

The solution to the high pitched whine is to retrofit all the relevant planes with vortex generators which, indeed Lufthansa and Air France have done but the biggest operator from Gatwick, EasyJet, refuses to do.

In a recent meeting, the management of EasyJet told me that the costs – both financial and environmental – of retrofitting equipment which reduces this particular noise outweighs the benefits. However, when I asked Airbus about the environmental impact of fitting, they said there were none.

EasyJet say that they are addressing the problem by the replacement of their fleet but this is a long and slow process – meanwhile my constituents are suffering from sleepless nights as a result of the noise.

- **Reducing night flights.**

In the qualitative responses I received from the survey, many people asked for a ban on night flights between 10.30pm and 7.30am. If such a ban were introduced, this would be a significant mitigation factor.

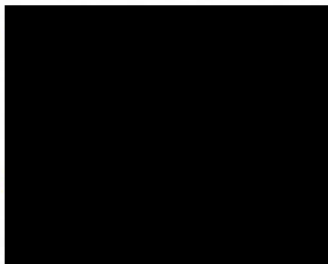


In terms of other qualitative responses, the question that most people raised was why the Thames Estuary option had been ruled out so early on in the process.

Another issue many people have commented on is transport infrastructure. The accessibility of Gatwick by public transport from my constituency is poor. The direct rail link from Tonbridge to Gatwick should, I believe, be reinstated.

To many of my constituents, Gatwick Airport offers benefits – it is closer than other airports for leisure and business travel. However, the impact of noise – which is considered by many to be badly and unreliably managed by Gatwick currently – and the lack of acceptable public transport connections from West Kent mean that these matters must be robustly, dependably and permanently resolved before any expansion of runway capacity could possibly be contemplated.

I would be grateful if you would consider this as a formal response to the consultation – on behalf of myself and my constituents.



AIRCRAFT SURVEY RESULTS

1 Are you disturbed by noise from overflying aircraft?

- ☐ Yes: 67%
- ☐ No: 33%

2 Do you think this has increased in the last three years?

- ☐ Yes - a lot: 56%
- ☐ Yes - a little: 29%
- ☐ No: 16%

3 Do you think there should be more airport capacity in the South East?

- ☐ Yes: 46%
- ☐ No: 54%

4 Of the three options that the Airports Commission is assessing, which would you prefer?

- ☐ A second runway at Gatwick Airport: 24%
- ☐ An extension to Heathrow Airport's Northern Runway: 17%
- ☐ A third runway at Heathrow Airport : 6%
- ☐ Either of the Heathrow options: 53%

5 If the Commission recommended a second runway at Gatwick, what would you like to see in terms of noise mitigation? (Ranked 1 to 7, '1' being the highest priority)

1. Spread the flight paths over a wide area to spread the impact thinly over more people.
2. Ensure all planes are retrofitted with equipment to reduce the whining sound.
3. Reduce night flights
4. Ensure planes have a steeper angle of descent which means that they would fly at a higher altitude over the Tunbridge Wells area.
5. Alternate between flightpaths to give respite to people below them.
6. Segregate arrivals and departures between the two runways so that there is only one arrivals flight path. If the airport uses mixed mode i.e. arrivals and departures on both runways, as currently proposed, there would be two arrivals paths which would affect more people.
7. Concentrate flight path over a narrow area, avoiding most populated areas.

6 At the moment people living in West Kent are not eligible for any compensation for noise disturbance from overflying planes. Do you think they should be?

- ☐ Yes: 61%
- ☐ No: 39%

7 Do you think an Independent Noise Regulator should be appointed?

- ☐ Yes: 79%
 - ☐ No: 21%
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