

## **Greg Hands MP's submission to the Airports Commission**

### **Consultation on Shortlisted Options**

**February 2015**

#### **Overview**

The Airports Commission established in 2012 has been tasked with resolving an issue of great importance for Britain, how to meet the UK's long term aviation needs.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority, in 2013, 228m passengers travelled across all UK airports, with 139m London area airports (Heathrow, Stansted, Gatwick, Luton, City, Southend). Planes from London also carried 1.75m tonnes of freight, and 119,000 tonnes of mail in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Additionally the British Air Transport Association (BATA) report the broader UK aviation industry employs 234,000 staff, contributes £18.4 billion to the UK Gross National Product, and £7.8 billion in taxation to the Exchequer.<sup>2</sup>

The Government's own forecasts predict that the UK aviation industry is set to grow over the coming decades. 2013 figures from the Department for Transport forecast that passenger numbers at UK airports would increase from 219 million passengers in 2011 to 315 million in 2030, and 445 million by 2050. This is an increase of 225 million passengers over the next 40 years compared with an increase of 185 million since 1970. The DfT also predicts that major South East airports are forecast to be full by 2030. However, there is a margin of error around this projection, meaning South East airports could be full as soon as 2025 or as late as 2040. Heathrow is forecast to remain full across all the demand cases considered.<sup>3</sup> Therefore having airports that put our country at the front of global competition, and allow people to get to where they want to go, is vital to our prosperity.

It is also important, however, that this need for greater capacity is balanced with the need to make our airports quieter and more environmentally friendly. I believe in deciding these matters it is just as important to give consideration to those on the ground, living under the flight path, as well as direct users of the airports and passengers.

It is therefore my pleasure to respond to this consultation, which is of significant importance to the community I represent in west London. I am responding in my capacity as Member for Parliament for Chelsea & Fulham.

#### **Constituency Concerns**

As Member of Parliament for Hammersmith & Fulham 2005 - 2010, and for Chelsea & Fulham since 2010, as well as a local Fulham resident since 1990, I know that aircraft noise is a regular source of complaint in my constituency.

Chelsea & Fulham, like many other areas across west London, must face, on a daily basis, more than a thousand planes coming in to land at Heathrow. This includes night flights, which land before 6 am and disturb the sleep of a number of residents every night.

As a constituency MP I have received correspondence from hundreds of residents who have been woken by flights early in the morning or had their evenings or weekends ruined by noisy aircraft. More than 766,000 people suffer considerable noise from Heathrow, which amounts to 28 per cent of those impacted by aircraft noise in Europe. An additional runway at Heathrow would, of course, mean additional noise over west London and thus the potential for more disruption for my constituents.

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<sup>1</sup> Civil Aviation Authority – Annual Reports 2013 - [http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/80/airport\\_data/2013Annual/](http://www.caa.co.uk/docs/80/airport_data/2013Annual/)

<sup>2</sup> BATA - Aviation Connectivity and the Economy - April 2013 - <http://www.bata.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/BATA-Response-to-AC-paper-02.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> DfT - UK Aviation Forecasts - January 2013 - [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/223839/aviation-forecasts.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223839/aviation-forecasts.pdf)

It is estimated that Heathrow Airport expansion would result in an increase in annual air movements from 480,000 per annum to some 740,000, an increase of more than 50% on top of an already aggravating situation. With the disruption the airport currently causes my constituents, I believe the case to build a further runway at Heathrow is very hard to justify.

### **The end of the 'Hub' airport era**

International air travel is changing, and the importance of hub airports is not as great as it once was.

In the early decades of international aviation, the 'jet-set era' of the 1960's and 70's, passenger numbers were low by today's standards. In order to make long haul routes viable, large intercontinental planes need to be full. Yet local airports often did not have the passenger bandwidth required to fill such planes. As a result, passengers would travel on small planes, to hub airports, where they would transfer flights, and mix with passengers from other regions, on to larger intercontinental flights. This 'hub-and-spoke' model was the basis of international air travel for several decades, and one on which Heathrow, as the UK's only two runway commercial airport, thrived. Furthermore, the global geography, with Britain as a convenient point between Europe and Africa, and the Americas, led to the UK, and specifically Heathrow, serving as a significant hub airport of the world and thus help secure an important share of in world aviation.

However the hub-and-spoke model is now less dominant and may be giving way to increased point-to-point travel. This in turn means a single hub airport is less critical to the UK's aviation industry.

Some of the most significant driving factors in this are advances in aerospace and aeroplane design. The advent of new lighter composite materials, better engines, and improved aerodynamics mean planes can fly further on less fuel than before. A new generation of smaller and mid-size planes are able to achieve the range that was once only possible for large 'jumbo jets', such as the Boeing B747, B777 and Airbus A380 or A330. Thus transatlantic flights, or flights to the Middle and Far East are now possible in smaller planes. The routes are now economically viable from smaller local airports, without the reliance on transfer passengers.

The launch of Boeing's 787 Dreamliner and the similar Airbus A350 show a very different vision of how passengers will travel in future. The long-range, lower-seat number, Dreamliner is a point-to-point aircraft which is designed to take 240 to 350 passengers from regional airports direct to their destination. Such 'hub-busting' aircraft make a hub airport less meaningful as there is no need to transfer passengers on board.

This is in contrast to the new Airbus A380 'super jumbo', which although equally impressive as the Dreamliner from a perspective of cutting edge technology, at over 500 seats fulfils a very different aviation niche.

To date, 1,071 Dreamliners and 780 Airbus A350s have been earmarked for service on long-haul routes. In contrast, only 317 of the bigger A380s have been ordered which are primarily designed for use to hub destinations.<sup>4</sup>

Expanding Heathrow in order to creating one 'mega-hub' therefore does not appear to be the direction in which airlines or air travel are expanding. Passengers, in general, wish to travel from a nearby airport and onward to their final destination, not through a hub airport. The A350 and the Dreamliner appear to cater for that desire. It is therefore not obvious that there is a need to build a third runway at Heathrow, if it were assessed as an option mainly motivated by its suitability as a hub airport.

### **A 'Distributed Hub'**

However, I believe more economic and less invasive solutions to our nation's airport capacity problem are available. Like New York City, I believe that London can have three or more major international airports which do not necessarily have to be 'hub' airports. In New York, La Guardia Airport serves destinations within the United States, while JFK and Newark have a mixture of domestic and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://active.boeing.com/commercial/orders> and [http://www.airbus.com/no\\_cache/company/market/orders-deliveries](http://www.airbus.com/no_cache/company/market/orders-deliveries)

international routes. Newark is something of a 'hub' for Continental Airlines, but not their most important one.

Looking at the 'BRICS' countries as a leading indicator of connections with the developing world, we can see that long haul flights to new destinations and emerging markets are spread between each of the airports included in the shortlisted options under consideration by the Airports Commission.

Heathrow currently offers flights to four destinations in China, with Gatwick providing a route to Beijing. Eight cities in India are also accessible from Heathrow with routes to Vietnam and Russia added in recent years to Gatwick's portfolio.

The addition of these routes shows that airports can adjust when demand increases even when close to capacity. More importantly, new routes have been not only focused on Heathrow, but also on Gatwick, dispelling the myth that flagship airlines do not wish to fly into London's other airports. Heathrow may have been the dominant "jewel in the crown" of the UK's airport industry for decades, but that was during the period when BAA held London's main airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, and Stansted) in monopoly. Since Gatwick was sold off in 2009, and thus has been competing privately with Heathrow for just over five years, it has shown an ability to innovate, improve passenger services and facilities, and to add new routes.

## Conclusions

I believe therefore that the Airports Commissions should be cautious of placing too much emphasis on the arguments for preserving the hub status of Heathrow. I believe that the current debate on the future of London's airport capacity has mistakenly drawn links between it and other European cities such as Frankfurt and Amsterdam. Instead, New York should provide us with a working example of how a city can have three major airports serving different routes and complementing each other, without the need for a single 'hub' airport. Indeed, in terms of size of the city and its position geographically at the edge of a continent, London is far more akin to New York than it is to Amsterdam or Frankfurt.

Instead we should focus on treating the whole of London as a distributed-hub with each of its three main airports - Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted – operating an optimum mix of point-to-point and transfer passengers. Together, and in fair competition with each other, they should be able to respond and adapt to the needs of London's airlines, freight users, and passengers, now and in the future, as demand for international air travel is set to increase. As a distributed hub they will also retain more flexibility in order to adapt, should these needs and demands ever shift significantly.

Heathrow, Gatwick, and Stansted all have a place to play in maintaining or expanding Britain's global connections and securing trade for British industry. A distributed hub would provide the extra capacity airlines need, and the routes businesses desire, without afflicting west London residents with additional noise. For the reasons outlined above, I believe that further expansion at Heathrow, in order to preserve the hub model, is very hard to justify. Rather, I hope the Commission gives serious consideration to plans that would not burden West London residents with additional flights overhead.

On a general note, whichever option the Airports Commission decides to recommend, more should be made of our current infrastructure with the aim of cutting travel times to central London and to each airport. In addition, connections to other transport modes such as Crossrail, HS2 and the Underground will be of benefit to all Londoners, not only airport passengers visiting the capital or transferring flights.

Finally, as a Member of Parliament with a considerable interest in this issue as it affects so many of my constituents, I have watched this Commission's work and process closely over the last three years. I have responded to previous stages of consultation and have met personally with Sir Howard Davies. I wish to thank the Commission for the hard work and dedication it has shown over the past years and, for the further work it has to come.

I would note that a large body of the evidence, and the loudest voices in the debate, have come directly from the aviation industry. It has concerned the interests of those direct users and employees of the industry, such as passengers, airlines, pilots and crew, airport staff, hauliers, support logistics,

and other associated transport workers and users. However I fear this could have been to the detriment of the voices of those people who live and work near airports or under their flightpaths; who may not be direct users of the airports but are nonetheless deeply affected by their operation.

Indeed the feeling of being overlooked has been felt keenly by some of my constituents. Chelsea and Fulham lies outside the 57 dB (Leq) noise contour for Heathrow. As a result, its constituent boroughs Hammersmith and Fulham, and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, have been the subject of less consultation than our neighbours to the west such as Richmond and Hounslow. However my residents are still profoundly affected by noise from arriving aircraft as they line up their final approaches to Heathrow directly above Fulham.

I would therefore like to urge the Commission that due consideration should be taken for those on the ground and living under the flight path as well as direct users of the airport and passengers.

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