Department for Transport

Aviation Forecasts 2017 Yearly Airport Data

The department publishes aviation forecasts looking at the longer-term strategic picture for UK aviation. In the Aviation Forecasts 2017 publication[1], we have published long term forecasts for 2030, 2040 and 2050. These forecasts have been used to inform decisions around the need for and location of an additional runway capacity in the south-east by 2030. They will also play a role along with other evidence in informing future aviation strategy and feeding into the work of other government departments and the wider aviation sector.

Following on from our aviation forecast 2017 publication, we are releasing forecast data for every modelled year between 2016 and 2050 inclusive, for the baseline case (no airport expansion), Gatwick 2nd runway (LGW 2R), Heathrow extended northern runway (LHR ENR), Heathrow North West Runway (LHR NWR) and phased LHR NWR scenarios. Demand figures for the phased LHR NWR scenario were referenced in the Updated Appraisal Report published alongside the further consultation on the draft NPS[2]. This scenario looked at the impact on the appraisal of the LHR NWR scheme of the capacity delivered by a runway being phased in linearly over 10 years from 2026.

In providing the data, we would like to point users to the scope of the department's forecasting model in the context of the strategic nature and capability of the model, particularly around the appropriate use and interpretation of the short-term data that is now being supplied.

The department's aviation model forecasts overall demand at the national level, which is subsequently distributed geographically at the district level. Following this, the model allocates passengers out at airport level. Based on extensive testing and review we are confident in our forecasting of aviation demand at the national and regional level stemming from the economic drivers. The allocation is based on estimated drivers of passenger preference, along with developments in the industry observed in the baseline data, in this case up to 2016.

It is widely known that there is inherent uncertainty in any forecast, the uncertainty associated with these forecasts and those supporting the revised draft Airports National Policy Statement is dealt with through the use of extensive sensitivity tests and scenarios. The UK Aviation Forecast 2017 report and Updated Appraisal report present the impact of a number of scenarios and sensitivities to test overall uncertainty, and for some tests – specific uncertainties at Heathrow and Gatwick.

Of particular relevance to this data release is that, where airports compete for passengers in overlapping catchment areas for the same demand there may be uncertainty in the short term around forecasts for individual airports. Airport allocation can be impacted by a broader set of short-term drivers that our model doesn't account for and was not designed to pick up. For example, this could occur when commercial deals are carried out between airports and airlines which could affect route frequencies or destinations year-on-year, which can give rise to some volatility in the early modelled years. This can be particularly true for airports in highly competitive catchments, but also at smaller airports where routes being added/removed can have a larger proportional impact on overall passenger numbers.

This means that where there is an interest in the short term forecasts, particularly where high levels of competition between airports occur, the department recommends the use of alternative forecasts or sensitivities (for example, alternative local forecasting) be considered alongside the department's forecast, particularly ones that contain and examine short-term drivers of demand.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-aviation-forecasts-2017

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653879/updated-appraisal-report-airport-capacity-in-the-south-east.pdf