



**“No ifs, no buts,
no third runway.”**

Chiswick Against Third Runway
<http://www.chatr.org.uk/>

The unbelievable case of the third runway at Heathrow

‘That is what fires me up. Not pounds and pence, plans and policies, but people.’

David Cameron. Speech to 2015 conservative party conference.¹

Some flying statistics

It is often assumed that the majority of the UK population fly frequently. However, data shows that 70% of flights last year were taken by just 15% of the population, and that over 50% did not fly at all. Only 12% of flights were for business; the rest were for leisure². Moreover, at Heathrow, in 2014 36% of passengers were transit passengers, who did not leave the airport³. Yet for the benefit of those who fly occasionally for leisure, and for those transit passengers (many of whom are international), underneath them at Heathrow 725,000 people suffer noise and air pollution from a constant daily stream of aircraft, starting from 4.30 am, and frequently continuing into the small hours; there is an aircraft movement every 45 seconds⁴. Heathrow *already* accounts for 28% of all those affected by aircraft noise in the whole of the EU. Yet, unbelievably, the Airports Commission has recommended a third runway at Heathrow, which would, according to EU estimates, extend the affected area to include around a further 300,000 people, making over one million people in total.

Environmental damage

It is unbelievable firstly because of the extent of the conscious environmental damage that is proposed. Heathrow’s current operations and two runways developed as a result of a bad planning decision after the war when the current level of flying was not anticipated, compounded by further piecemeal planning decisions. However, assuming that more flights are compatible with the government’s carbon emissions targets, a third runway would *knowingly* blight a much wider area.

First and foremost, the Commission proposes the destruction of 783 homes and a school in the villages of Longford and Harmondsworth⁵, and more could be necessary. This is a scale of destruction that would be unprecedented, and would have incalculable human costs. Moreover, it sits ill with the acute housing shortage in the south-east of England.

For the wider community, the Airports Commission maintains that there would be less noise overall with a third runway. This claim lacks credibility. It is based on complex statistical modelling that uses noise averages, and assumes that noise would be distributed more widely among communities. It further assumes that aircraft will be quieter and will use steeper descent paths; the beneficial impact of both of these changes is likely to be minimal. The precise whereabouts of future flightpaths has yet to be disclosed, and there has been no consultation with affected residents. What is clear is that areas that are already under flightpaths would have less respite than under the present system, substantial new

populations would find themselves under flightpaths, and some areas would be affected by two flightpaths simultaneously. Moreover, as highlighted in evidence given to the Parliamentary Select Committee, the Environmental Audit Committee, if bio-fuels are used to reduce carbon emissions, there would be a corresponding increase in noise levels⁶.

Air quality around the airport already breaches legal requirements. The Airports Commission maintains that there would be no reduction in air quality with a third runway. They argue that air pollution is caused by car traffic rather than by aircraft, and that a third runway would cause no increase in traffic congestion and resultant added air pollution. Transport for London disagrees, and think levels of congestion would be significantly worsened: 'congestion on the road network, congestion on the rail network of a scale that we haven't seen'⁷. Again, evidence given to the Environmental Audit Committee has raised real concerns about air quality with a third runway. Scientific studies have shown that a large number of diseases are associated with noise, sleep deprivation, and air pollution, and there are economic costs attached to disease as well as personal suffering.

Uncertain economics

The Airport Commission's case rests on a claim for substantial economic benefits both to the aviation industry and to the nation as a whole. Yet, here too, there is a lack of credibility. Optimism pervades the report. Fresh stark warnings of the financial effects of climate change by the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chief of the International Monetary Fund cast doubt on the risks, and notably the capping or greater cost attached to carbon emissions in the future⁸. It is not clear whether account has been taken of the business lost abroad through leisure flights. Costs appear to have been underestimated: for example, the provision for over-runs is conservative, there appears to be no provision for legal challenges, or for the delays and inconvenience of a 10 year (at best) construction project impacting the M4 and tunnelling the M25, and there is minimal provision for compensation. Moreover, Transport for London estimates that the cost of providing additional transport links would be in the order of £15 billion to £20 billion, as opposed to the £5 billion estimated by the Airports Commission⁹; it would also appear that these costs would have to be met by the taxpayer.

The Commission's own economic advisers, Professor Mackie and Mr Pearce, counselled caution in attaching significant weight to the economic modelling that had been used, which was designed for use by the Inland Revenue, and not for transport economics. Similar concerns have been raised by other economists¹⁰ and by Deloitte in careful reviews of the Airports Commission's work¹¹. Distinguished economist Professor Kay, writing in the FT, opines that 'little weight should be attached to the model relied on by the Airports Commission for its decision', that essentially projects the present into the future 60 years' hence, when the world will be a very different place¹². As Professor Kay also points out, it would be the most expensive runway in the world, when cheaper alternatives are available, and with much less environmental damage. Anatole Kalesky, a former economics editor of The Times has written in even more forceful terms: 'expanding Heathrow would be environmental, economic and political madness'¹³.

The Airports Commission includes large monetised values for 'consumer surplus' that incorporates intangible social benefits such as 'being able to travel home conveniently and affordably', and 'being able to travel to a wide range of holiday destinations' on those few

trips a year¹⁴. Yet, when it comes to residents of the area who are permanently affected on a daily and nightly basis, it seems unbelievable that almost no compensation is suggested. Although the Commission's Report repeatedly refers to the importance of 'generous/world class compensation' to residents, this generous compensation appears to consist of noise insulation of about £4,300 per house for the 160,000 homes the most badly affected, which hardly appears handsome. For the remaining population, no compensation is proposed. Insulation makes only partial improvement, is of no use in summer with windows open, and you cannot in any case double-glaze a garden, a playground, or a park against noise or air pollution. No compensation is proposed for the loss of property value that is likely to accompany new flightpaths and loss of respite from existing flightpaths. Thus, effectively, there would be a transfer of value from residents to the shareholders of Heathrow. This value has not been calculated by the Airports Commission, but is likely to be extremely large as many affluent residential areas are affected. And this quite apart from the long list of major heritage sites along the Thames blighted by Heathrow, such as Kew Gardens (once a place of great tranquillity), Hampton Court, Runnymede, and Windsor. While some areas are affluent, other areas overflowed by Heathrow are poor communities whose dense populations would find it difficult to move.

Conclusion

Optimism pervades the proposal, both in terms of the environmental damage and danger to public health, and in terms of the projected economic benefits. As Simon Jenkins writes: 'Don't buy the idea that Heathrow expansion is 'good for the nation'¹⁵. Many of those who would be affected are as yet blissfully unaware of the implications of the third runway. How can all this be permitted in a democratic society, and in an age conscious of the need to safeguard the environment? The Leader of the Opposition, local MPs, the Mayor of London, all London Mayoral candidates for 2016, the London Assembly, Transport for London, the Councils of Hillingdon, Richmond, Wandsworth and Windsor, environmental groups, and distinguished economic and other commentators are against Heathrow expansion, and are asking such questions. The Parliamentary Environmental Audit Select Committee is currently holding an inquiry. Alongside long-established residents' groups, new residents' groups are rapidly emerging: for example, in Chiswick CHATR (CHiswick against Third Runway); in Elmbridge, encompassing Esher, Molesely and Weybridge, RAGE (Residents Action Group Elmbridge); and in Teddington, TAG (Teddington Action Group). What does David Cameron say to all those who voted him into Government, and who made major life decisions, on the basis of his promise that "The third runway is not going ahead, no ifs, no buts"?

Jane Davison, Professor of Accounting, Royal Holloway, University of London, and longstanding resident of Bedford Park in Chiswick

[The views expressed are the author's own]

¹ David Cameron. (2015). <http://blogs.new.spectator.co.uk/2015/10/full-text-david-camerons-2015-conservative-conference-speech/>

² Hacan (June, 2015). <http://hacan.org.uk/hacan-backs-frequent-flyers-levy-to-replace-air-passenger-duty-as-both-green-and-equitable>. The proportion of business travellers at Heathrow is higher at 30%.

-
- ³ Heathrow (2014). <http://www.heathrow.com/company/company-news-and-information/company-information/facts-and-figures>
- ⁴ Wicks, R. (2014). *Heathrow Airport Manual* (London: Haynes).
- ⁵ Airports Commission (2015). *Final Report*, p. 214.
- ⁶ Parliamentary Select Committee. Environmental Audit Committee. (October, 2015). <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environmental-audit-committee/the-airports-commission-report-carbon-emissions-air-quality-and-noise/oral/23191.html>
- ⁷ Greater London Authority (November 2015). <https://www.london.gov.uk/media/assembly-press-releases/2015/11/heathrow-third-runway-risks-grinding-london-transport-to-a-halt>
- ⁸ Carney, M. (September, 2015). *The Guardian*, 29 September 2015; Lagarde, C. (2014) <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2014/02/05/imf-chief-lagarde-warns-of-merciless-climate-change/>
- ⁹ Greater London Authority (November 2015). <https://www.london.gov.uk/media/assembly-press-releases/2015/11/heathrow-third-runway-risks-grinding-london-transport-to-a-halt>
- ¹⁰ Laird, J. and Stroombergen (2014). *Airports Commission*. https://www.gatwickairport.com/globalassets/publicationfiles/business_and_community/all_public_publications/second_runway/airports_commission_july15/ac-lgw-203---laird-and-stroombergen-2015-peer-review---airports-economic-impact-study---march-2015.pdf
- ¹¹ Deloitte. (October 2015). *Review of PwC analysis conducted for the Airports Commission*. http://www.gatwickobviously.com/sites/default/files/downloads/deloitte_report_review_of_pwc_analysis_conducted_for_the_airports_commis.pdf
- ¹² Kay, J. (3rd November, 2015). Heathrow v Gatwick: the flawed case for expansion. *Financial Times*. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a7965b96-8216-11e5-a01c-8650859a4767.html#axzz3sGkQngWW>
- ¹³ Kalesky, A. (28.2.2008). *The Times*.
- ¹⁴ Airports Commission (2015). *Final report*.
- ¹⁵ Jenkins, S. (November, 2015). Don't buy the idea that Heathrow expansion is 'good for the nation'. *Evening Standard*.