

January 2009

Media Briefing



Heathrow terminal 5 and runway 3

A chronology of worthless promises:
1993-2008

This briefing offers a chronological summary of broken promises by BAA over the expansion of Heathrow airport 1993 - 2008

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1993

RUCATSE, a study into Runway Capacity in South East England, says another runway will be needed in the South East by 2005. Various options explored include a runway to the north of the existing boundary of Heathrow. This would mean the destruction of 4,000 houses, a church and one of the finest tithe barns in the country.

1994

BAA plc, which was a member of the RUCATSE study, distances itself from the report: "We must stress that this company is not planning or proposing to build a third runway at Heathrow. The airport requires extra terminal capacity, rather than runway capacity." (Uxbridge Informer, 25 March 1994)

Hillingdon Council allows BA to build its new headquarters on Harmondsworth Moor (on Prospect Park, now known as Waterside). The Council does not allow general development on this Green Belt land. This means that if the land is wanted for a new runway, only BA's HQ will have to be moved.

1995

Friends of the Earth and other groups start giving evidence to the Terminal 5 (T5) Public Inquiry, showing that T5 will lead to and is a Trojan horse for a third runway. They produce a map showing the likely location of a short runway. This is north of the airport, between the A4 and the M4, and would minimise demolition of property. The evidence is not challenged by BAA, BA or the Government.

BAA mounts a PR campaign denying there will be a third runway. Sir John Egan, BAA's Chief Executive writes to residents in surrounding boroughs and says "T5 does not call for a third runway" (BAA's 'Dear neighbour' letter to residents in a wide area around Heathrow; 16 May 1995).

Inside the T5 Inquiry BAA says something different: "We could not rule out the option of considering Heathrow when another runway is required...We could not give a guarantee about seeking further expansion" (Michael Maine, BAA's Technical Director). The T5 inspector says "I am not sure that we have received evidence of that nature...it does not hit you forcibly that it (ruling out more runways) is said with total certainty" (Inspector Vandermeer, QC, November 1995, during the cross examination of Alison Munroe, a Department of Transport witness).

1997

BAA continues to proclaim that runway capacity is not an issue. In a public newsletter it suggests that the inquiry hearings had put to rest concerns raised by Friends of the Earth that T5 was a Trojan horse for a third runway: "...some legitimate fears have been put to rest. We now know for example that there will be no third runway at Heathrow - a widespread concern before the inquiry started" ('Heathrow News, Produced For Local Residents by BAA Heathrow', May 1997).

BAA also claims that runway capacity at Heathrow was not a problem: "The problem at Heathrow is not the lack of runway capacity but shortage of terminal space...The inevitable overcrowding until T5 is build is likely to cause...problems...". (BAA News Release - BAA warn of potential "national crisis..", 12 October 1997)

Labour wins general election; BAA is an early visitor to John Prescott the new transport secretary at the then DETR, lobbying on T5 and aviation growth generally.

1998

The Government effectively admits that it has already decided on T5, by announcing the widening of the M25 where BAA's spur road into T5 needs to be connected. "The only sour note (in the Roads Review) lies in the decision to approve the widening of the M25 between Junctions 12 and 15. All other such plans have been scrapped. But the Government has decided that with Terminal 5 at Heathrow due to open in future, the M25 needs this extra space." (Daily Express, 1 August 1998)

1999

BAA continues to say it does not want a third runway: "...Additional runway ruled out forever whether T5 is approved or not" (BAA press conference, 12 March 1999).

In another 'Dear Neighbour' letter to residents (April 1999) Sir John Egan writes: "We have since repeated often that we do not want, nor shall we seek, an additional runway. I can now report that we went even further at the Inquiry and called on the Inspector to recommend that, subject to permission being given for T5, an additional Heathrow runway should be ruled out forever.

"We said: 'it is the company's view that the local communities around Heathrow should be given assurances...BAA would urge the Government to rule out any additional runway at Heathrow, and BAA would support a recommendation by the Inquiry Inspector in his report that the Government should rule it out. Indeed BAA invites the Inspector to make such a recommendation."

BAA then goes a step further, not just saying that T5 does not "call" for another runway, but that it will not "lead" to another runway: "Our position could not be clearer, nor could it be more formally placed upon the record. T5 will not lead to a 'third' runway."

Friends of the Earth continue to regard BAA's claims as worthless promises. The Terminal 5 inquiry nears its end with BAA-backed community groups criticising Friends of the Earth for misleading the public about T5 leading to a third runway.

2001

British Airways (BA) call for a third runway: "Mr Eddington insisted that it was essential that Heathrow had a third runway as well as a fifth terminal..." (Daily Mail, 5 January 2001 - reporting on a speech to a business conference on 4 January) But Mr Eddington changes his line when speaking to local residents: "BA is not pushing for a third runway at Heathrow..." (Ealing Times, 1 February 2001).

BAA echoes BA's denial and says it is not pushing for a third runway at Heathrow. "It is the company's view that the local communities around Heathrow should be give (sic) assurances. BAA would urge the government to rule out any additional runway at Heathrow."

In November 2001, having sat on the Inspector Vandermeer's report for almost a year, the Government announces its decision on T5 and releases the inspector's report. The inspector says that a third runway could have "unacceptable environmental consequences". He recommends a cap on the number of flights at 480,000 a year in order to prevent the need for a third runway.

In approving T5 the then transport secretary, Stephen Byers, MP, accepts the cap on flights but refuses to rule out a third runway: "... the third runway will be considered in the context of both the South East of England study and the Aviation White Paper which we shall publish next year."

Friends of the Earth points out that these two stances are inconsistent. If the cap of 480,000 flights a year is to remain, a third runway is not needed. Friends of the Earth conclude that the Government is already planning to renege on this cap - one of very few meaningful conditions set when granting permission for T5.

2002

Just months after the T5 application is approved, lobbying starts for further expansion. "Airport infrastructure will require new development. T5 was just the beginning." (Roger Maskell of the Amicus trade union, speaking on BBC London breakfast radio news, 16 April 2002)

On 23 July, the Government publishes its UK-wide regional air studies including SERAS, the South East and East of England Air Services study. One of the options is a short runway north of Heathrow. This is the location that Friends of the Earth identified at the T5 inquiry 7 years before (see 1995 above).

As part of the announcement, Transport Secretary, Alistair Darling, MP, weaves New Labour spin on the 480,000 flights a year cap at Heathrow, saying in effect that the cap will last only until it is broken: "So the position on terminal 5, and on the cap on the number of flights that was referred to at that time, remains good in relation to Heathrow's current situation (i.e. four terminals and less than 480,000 flights a year). Everybody knew that we would look at Heathrow in the context of the other London airports over a longer period." (House of Commons statement, 23 July 2002)

2003

On 13 May 2003, BAA plc admits publicly that it wants third runway at Heathrow. In its response to the Government's airport consultation BAA shortlists a third runway at Heathrow and claims that this is part of the company's approach of 'responsible growth'.

BAA says that a new runway at Heathrow, Gatwick or Stansted should be decided on promptly and that land should be safeguarded for two more runways. So, even if Heathrow does not get the first new runway, it is likely to get the second or third. This finally proves that BAA was being dishonest and deceitful when it called for a third runway to be ruled out.

The anger of local groups is predictable. Hacan branded it the "mother of all U turns". Friends of the Earth says that BAA's claim to be acting responsibly was "a sick joke". Politicians also condemn it; the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for the Greater London Authority accusing BAA of breaking its promises.

But the comments of the independent press are perhaps most accurate. Planning Magazine says "Even by the dubious ethics of the airline industry, this is lower than a rattlesnake's stomach."

BAA and BA are very concerned that the studies carried out for the airports consultation and Aviation White Paper show that air pollution would be likely to breach standards set by the Government and the EU to protect human health. They therefore employ the same consultants, AEA, to come up with 'better' results. AEA is given some more optimistic assumptions and duly shows that only 5,000 instead of 30,000 people would be exposed to air pollution levels in breach of standards.

On 16 December 2003 the Government launches its long-awaited Aviation White Paper. This says quite clearly that Heathrow would have been the preferred location for the next runway in the South East, but for concerns about air pollution. Clearly the lobbying of BAA and BA has paid off.

There is no suggestion that BAA, BA or the Government was concerned about air quality or its effects on health per se. After all, there is already a National Air Quality Strategy (NAQS) which could and should have been invoked. In fact it was completely ignored in the consultation and the White Paper.

The only concern is that the European Union (EU) would be likely to impose sanctions if the Government knowingly breached its own and EU standards by deciding on a third runway. Even BAA's and BA's attempts to show that air pollution would be okay, by getting their consultants to re-do the estimates, would not overcome the EU problem for at least the next 10 years.

2004

BAA's Tabitha Stebbings, tells the Heathrow Area Consultative Committee that BAA would seek permission to exceed the annual 480,000 flight limit set by former Secretary of State for Transport Stephen Byers, when approving Terminal 5 Public Inquiry. (Ealing Times, 13 August 2004)

2008

The T5 public inquiry inspector, Roy Vandermeer, gives a TV interview in which he says: "At the moment I have not for my part seen enough to persuade me that I would be altering my recommendations about the third runway, were I doing it now. But that's not to guarantee I wouldn't, but I have not seen the material that would make me convinced that I would change my mind." (Ealing Times, 1 February 2008)

In November after years of worthless promises, Colin Matthews, BAA's new Chief Executive, tries again but uses the same BAA tactic of old - bargaining environmental standards for promised runway expansion. He says his company will respect air quality and noise standards and flight numbers set by any new independent body but only if it gets its wish for a third runway.

This 'promise' ignores that it is the Government which should set and abide by these environmental standards. Proper control by the Government obviates the need for a new independent body.

Ruth Cadbury, a Labour Party Hounslow Councillor for Brentford, says: "I think it's a crazy idea given how environmental limits have already been set. I don't have any faith that his statement actually means anything. A third runway means the destruction of hundreds of communities and misery for those living under the flight path. Collin Matthews appears to have forgotten past promises that BAA have failed to act

upon. If we can't trust him, how can we trust an environmental watch dog?" (Hounslow Chronicle, 26 November 2008)