

January 2009

Media Briefing



Heathrow Announcement

Why the Government must say NO to expansion

Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon will shortly announce whether it will allow a new runway to be built at Heathrow.

This briefing examines the climate change impacts of expansion.

It reveals flaws in the Government's economic case and shows why expansion isn't necessary for London to remain competitive and accessible.

It also highlights the social impacts of expanding Heathrow on local communities.

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Why Friends of the Earth is against Heathrow expansion

- The latest climate science and the Government's new climate change law require big cuts in UK carbon dioxide emissions - expansion will result in a huge increase in emissions;
- Expansion will have serious impacts on local communities including the demolition of homes, increased noise disturbance and local air pollution that will breach EU health standards;
- The economic justification for expansion is based on flawed assumptions which underestimate the environmental and social impacts and overstate the economic benefits;
- London doesn't need an expanded Heathrow - many routes are served by low-carbon rail alternatives and London is, and is likely to remain, much better connected for business and tourists than its EU competitors

Background

The Government's 2003 Aviation White Paperⁱ announced plans for a third runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow 'provided that strict environmental limits can be met'. Since then the Government has conducted a number of studiesⁱⁱ on the impacts of expansion and how these limits might be met, and it held a public consultation on the results between November 2007 and February 2008ⁱⁱⁱ.

The imminent announcement will confirm whether or not it is the Government's policy to allow expansion at Heathrow. If, as expected the Government gives the go-ahead, airport operator BAA will make a planning application in 2009. Originally expected in summer 2008, the announcement was delayed by a legal challenge by Friends of the Earth on race equality grounds^{iv}.

Friends of the Earth's executive director Andy Atkins said:

"The Government's economic case for Heathrow is fundamentally flawed - if it wasn't for this financial 'sleight of hand' the case for airport expansion would collapse.

"Aviation is one of Britain's fastest growing sources of carbon dioxide - cutting growth in air travel would help Britain develop a new green economy and reduce our dependence on insecure and dirty fossil fuels.

"The Government must fundamentally review its entire aviation strategy, abandon its airport expansion plans and invest in alternatives to short-haul flights such as fast rail travel."

THE FUTURE IMPACTS OF HEATHROW EXPANSION

Climate change implications of airport expansion

Aviation is one of the fastest rising sources of carbon dioxide emissions. It currently represents 6.4 per cent of UK carbon dioxide emissions – but when the impact of other gases is included, represents 13 per cent of total climate damage^v. A study by the respected and independent Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in 2005 found that if current growth and technology improvement rates continue, aviation could use up the entire UK carbon budget by 2050^{vi}. Departing flights from Heathrow alone are currently responsible for 18 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year or 3.1 per cent of total UK emissions^{vii}. The Government's expansion plans are expected to increase Heathrow's emissions by 32 per cent by 2030, taking the total up to 25 million tonnes^{viii}.

The Government's new climate change law – which Friends of the Earth led the campaign for through its Big Ask campaign – requires an 80 per cent reduction in UK greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, based on 1990 levels. This includes the UK's share of international shipping and aviation, and interim five year greenhouse gas 'budgets' will be set to keep the UK on track. The Government says that emissions from aviation can rise if other sectors compensate by cutting their emissions more, but so far this has never been achieved. Since Labour came to power in 1997 total emissions have increased. They have also risen in each of the last four years^{ix}.

The latest science tells us that developed countries must cut their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80 per cent to avoid catastrophic climate change. Friends of the Earth is deeply concerned that the

Government may find it impossible to achieve this reduction if it allows expansion at Heathrow and other UK airports.

Impacts of expansion on local communities

Expansion will mean the demolition of 700 homes. It will also mean an increase in noise disturbance for thousands of Londoners and local air pollution that will breach new EU health limits^x. BAA has a history of broken promises on Heathrow^{xi} so a recent proposal to cap flights to prevent environmental limits being exceeded^{xii} cannot be trusted. The proposed expansion will have a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority communities, yet the Government did not adequately assess those impacts or consult local people. As a result, a successful legal challenge by Hounslow Race Equality Council represented by Friends of the Earth's lawyers in the summer forced the Government to issue a further consultation and assessment^{xiii}.

Why the economic case for expansion is flawed

The Government claims that further expansion of Heathrow is essential for the UK economy and that our economic interests will be damaged if the airport isn't expanded in order to compete with other European hub airports. It estimates that the net economic benefit of building a third runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow will be around £5billion. However, there are major flaws in the Government's case. If corrected there would be no net economic benefit from expanding Heathrow: but instead a net £3billion cost^{xiv}.

1. Cost of climate change and other impacts

The Government's case heavily underestimates the cost of climate change. It assumes the rest of the world will take strong action to cut carbon emissions - but this is not something we can rely on. It also fails to take into account the cost of air pollution, and values the noise impacts of expansion on the most affected communities at as little as 40p per day. The Stern review estimates the real cost of climate change to be far higher, and when a more realistic value such as this is considered, the net economic benefit of expanding Heathrow quickly turns into a net economic loss.

2. Tourism deficit

The Government claims that expanding Heathrow "may well generate net tourism spending to the UK. This would be between £0.4 billion and £3.2 billion". But the UK currently runs a major economic deficit from flying. There are far more UK tourists and business people flying abroad on holiday and working than there are foreigners coming to the UK. Overall, in 2004 foreign visitors arriving by air spent nearly £11 billion in the UK in 2004, but UK residents flying out spent £26 billion abroad – a loss to the UK economy of £15 billion pounds. The Government forecasts that UK business and leisure passengers at Heathrow will increase from 34 million in 2005 to 64 million in 2030, and foreign business and leisure passengers will increase from 17 million to 35 million. In other words, people going out of Heathrow will increase by 30 million, where as people coming in will increase by 18 million. So the tourism deficit is set to increase.

3. Interests of UK economy

Only one per cent of the Institute of Directors think airport expansion is a priority^{xv}. Video conferencing is becoming a popular, time saving, low carbon alternative to business travel. 36 per cent^{xvi} of passengers using Heathrow are on business flights – and many could be using video conference facilities instead^{xvii}.

Why London doesn't need more airport capacity

1. Rail alternative

Rail travel has much lower carbon emissions per passenger than flying^{xviii}. At least 50,000 flights per year leaving Heathrow are on routes with a viable rail alternative. One of the most popular destinations served by Heathrow is Amsterdam (27 flights per day). Other short haul destinations with fast rail links served by the airport include Paris, Brussels, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Glasgow, Leeds/Bradford, Lyon, and Teeside^{xix}. If passengers on these routes took the train instead thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year would be saved each year

2. Competition with other EU airports

The Government says that Heathrow is falling behind other European competitors because it offers fewer destinations than some of them. A fairer comparison would be between all London airports serving these

cities compared to their EU counterparts. If this more realistic comparison is made London, through its five airports serves many more destinations and passengers than its nearest rival, Paris. London's airports have direct flights to 378 destinations, Paris is next with 317 destinations, Amsterdam trails with just 249^{xx}.

Passengers using European Cities Airports (2006) millions^{xxi}

London	137
Paris	82
Frankfurt	52
Amsterdam	46

BA argues that not expanding Heathrow will damage the economy because it will mean transfer passengers (35 per cent of people passing through Heathrow) will change at other EU airports instead. If this turns out to be true it may mean less business for BA and BAA's airport shops - but that is not the same as damage to the UK's economic interests.

What the Government should do instead

Friends of the Earth believes that:-

A Government decision in favour of expansion would be:-

- irresponsible in the face of its new legal obligations to cut carbon emissions;
- impactful on local communities;
- based on a flawed economic case;
- unnecessary for the economy of the UK;
- unjustified when many flights could be replaced by rail.

Instead the Government must:-

- cancel plans to expand Heathrow and other UK airports;
- press for emissions from international aviation (and shipping) to be included in the post 2012 international climate agreement;
- Revive its plan to introduce 'Aviation Duty' a 'per plane' tax which would cover freight flights and transfer passengers;^{xxii}
- revise its economic appraisal methodology to factor in a more realistic cost of climate change;
- work with rail and video conferencing providers to improve low carbon alternatives to flying.

Further information

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NOTES

ⁱ "The Future of Air Transport" – DfT, December 2003

ⁱⁱ "Project for sustainable development of Heathrow" see:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/aviation/environmentalissues/heathrow/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Friends of the Earth's consultation response is at:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/consultation_responses/dft_heathrow_consultation.pdf

^{iv} April 2008, See our press release:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/race_equality_group_in_gov_15042008.html

^v Other gases from aircraft contribute to climate change, 2005 Government estimate, see:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070502/text/70502w0005.htm#column_1671W

^{vi} "Growth Scenarios for UK and EU aviation", see: http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/transport/news/tyndall_launch.html

^{vii} FOE calculation from Government figures, see our Heathrow consultation response

^{viii} Government figures assuming technology improvements, see our Heathrow consultation response

^{ix} DEFRA figures 2002-2006, UK domestic plus UK share of international aviation and shipping emissions, see:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gakf07.htm>

^x See EU parliament PQ: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20080619+ANN-01+DOC+XML+V0//EN&query=QUESTION&detail=H-2008-0366)

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- ^{xi} See our briefing note on BAA history of broken promises:
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/media_briefing/heathrow_broken_promises.pdf
- ^{xii} See BAA press release 26/11/08 -
http://www.baa.com/portal/page/Corporate%5EMedia%20Centre%5ENews%20releases%5EResults/eb30f72eb48dd110VgnVCM10000036821c0a_____/a22889d8759a0010VgnVCM200000357e120a_____/
- ^{xiii} See ref iv
- ^{xiv} See FOE briefing "Heathrow expansion – its true costs"
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/heathrow_expansion.pdf
- ^{xv} 2005 "Transport Matters" survey:
http://www.iod.com/intershoproot/eCS/Store/en/pdfs/policy_paper_transport_matters.pdf
- ^{xvi} 2007 fig, CAA passenger survey:
<http://www.caa.co.uk/application.aspx?catid=14&pagetype=65&appid=7&newstype=n&mode=detail&nid=1679>
- ^{xvii} See "Travelling Light" 2008 WWF Survey of FTSE350 companies, 89% said they expect to want to fly less in future:
http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/travelling_light.pdf
- ^{xviii} Between 5 and 7 times less CO2 emissions per passenger/km, see study by UK Commission for Integrated Transport, 2001: <http://www.cfit.gov.uk/docs/2001/racomp/racomp/index.htm>
- ^{xix} See BAA flight schedules:
<http://www.heathrowairport.com/portal/site/heathrow/menuitem.c0e2e5751a4b6450b4b12871120103a0/>
- ^{xx} FOE research from airport flight schedules, spreadsheet available on request
- ^{xxi} Source: Eurostat and Airport websites,
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007_MONTH_12/7-14122007-EN-BP.PDF
- ^{xxii} The Treasury abandoned planned introduction of Aviation Duty in its pre Budget Statement, in November 2008, FOE response to Treasury consultation: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/consultation_responses/aviation_duty.pdf