

Heathrow Expansion Consultation

Background Briefing

What will be included in the Government Consultation?

It will consult on proposals to:

- end **runway alternation** on the existing runways (and introduce **mixed-mode**);
- build a **3rd runway** and a **6th terminal**;
- abolish the **Cranford Agreement**;
- review **Westerly Preference**.

The Aviation White Paper said the new runway would be a 'shorter' runway. There have been persistent rumours that BAA would like a longer runway but the consultation is expected to be on a shorter one. The idea is that the smaller planes - mainly the short-haul flights - would use the new runway, with all the larger planes using the existing runways. The new runway would be in constant use for landings and take-offs throughout the day but, we are told, no night flights.

Decoding the jargon

Runway Alternation

This is the current practice where planes, when they land over West London, switch runways at 3pm. This gives the people in many parts of West London a half day's break from the noise. Runway alternation does not apply when planes land from the west over Berkshire because of the Cranford Agreement - see below.

Mixed-Mode

At present, when the landing planes switch runways at 3pm, so do those taking off. It means that planes land and take off from separate runways. If runway alternation is abolished, planes would be landing and taking off from the same runway (at least for part of the day). That is called mixed mode. This is what the Government wants to introduce.

Cranford Agreement

There was an agreement made in the early 1950s forbidding planes to take off over Cranford because it is so close to the easterly end of the northern runway. That means that planes flying over Berkshire must all land on the northern runway and take off from the southern runway. So there can be no switching of runways at 3pm. But, of course, since mixed-mode requires planes to land and take-off from both runways at the same time, the Government would need to get rid of the Cranford Agreement before it could introduce mixed mode.

Westerly Preference

As a rule, planes land and take-off into the wind. In the UK the wind blows from the west about 70% of the time. When the west wind blows, planes land over London and take off over Berkshire. But they also do this if an east wind is blowing to a strength of up to five knots. This is known as westerly preference. The consultation is likely to ask whether westerly preference should be brought to an end and, if so, whether it should be replaced by easterly preference or no preference at all.

The Impact of the Proposals

1. 800,000 flights using Heathrow each year

If the Government's proposals go ahead, the number of flights using the airport will nearly double. Former Aviation Minister Gillian Merron told Parliament in early 2007 that flight numbers could reach 800,000 if a third runway goes ahead and runway alternation on the existing runways is abolished. That's up from 473,000 last year.

- A **third runway** on its own would mean flight numbers reach **720,000** per year
- The **end of runway alternation** would bring in an extra **80,000**

Total = 800,000

• There is a cap of **480,000** on the number of flights which can use Heathrow in a year. It was imposed in 2001 when the Government gave the go-ahead for Terminal 5. If numbers were to exceed the limit, BAA would need to get permission from a Planning Inquiry

2. Many more flights across London and the Home Counties

800,000 flights a year translates into around **500 extra flights a day**. This will result in more flights and more noise for residents across London and the Home Counties.

3. Community destruction

A third runway would be built between the A4 and M4, north of the existing airport. It would require the demolition of over 750 houses, including the entire village of Sipson. More than 3,000 people would lose their homes. Schools, pubs and churches would all be demolished.

4. New flight paths

The Government is unlikely to provide exact details of the new flight paths in the consultation. It will claim it is only in a position to show 'indicative' routes because there will be a wider consultation on new flight paths over the South East of England, to be carried out by Air Traffic Control, during the course of 2008. But, because planes need to line up with the runway several miles from touchdown, it is clear the new landing flight path will be over:

- Holland Park and High St Kensington;
- the northern parts of Earls Court, Hammersmith and Chiswick;
- Heston.
- To the west, the flight path is likely to be over Maidenhead and Slough.
- New take-off routes are more difficult to predict.

5. Loss of West London's half day's peace and quiet

The ending of runway alternation - where planes landing over West London switch runways at 3pm - will take away the valued half day's peace and quiet enjoyed by residents in these areas. **This will include removing the half day's peace and quiet at the National Trust's property in Osterley.**

6. Climate Change

The World Development Movement has calculated that the annual CO₂ from a 3rd runway would be equivalent of all the CO₂ produced by Kenya in one year.

Why is the Government consulting now?

The 2003 Aviation White Paper outlined the Government's belief that a 3rd runway and 6th terminal were required at Heathrow. It also argued that runway alternation should be abolished so that more planes could use the existing runways. But the proposals were put on the back-burner because there were fears that, if the expansion went ahead, **air pollution levels** in the Heathrow area would exceed the EU legal limits (due to come into force in 2010). So BAA pressed ahead with its plans to expand Stansted first, while the Department for Transport set up a working group to re-assess future air pollution levels around Heathrow - the Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow (PSDH).

Future Air Pollution Levels: expected to be given the all-clear

The Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow report on future air pollution levels at Heathrow will be published alongside the consultation and is expected to form and central part of the Government's case for expansion. The Department for Transport is expected to argue in the PSDH report that its reassessment of future levels of air pollution at Heathrow would allow expansion to take place as aircraft will become cleaner in coming decades and it will implement measures to reduce the air pollution from car and lorry traffic in the West London area (it has studied things like a congestion charging scheme around Heathrow, a £20 charge for dropping or picking up passengers at the airport and even the idea of putting the M4 Spur Road in a tunnel).

It is thought that the main reason this consultation has been so long in coming - it was originally expected more than 18 months ago - is that the Department for Transport has been having difficulty in coming up with measures which achieve a big enough reduction in future air pollution levels to meet the EU legal limits.

The challenge is certainly immense. At present there are areas around Heathrow which exceed the legal limits and, with flight numbers expected to reach 800,000 a year (from 473,000 last year) if the expansion goes ahead, most observers believe it would be difficult to stay within the limits.

The consultation paper, therefore, may propose a phased approach to expansion - that BAA Ferrovial is only allowed to expand if it can show that Heathrow will stay within the EU legal limits. In practice, that would probably mean the introduction of mixed-mode first followed by an incremental increase of the number of flights using a third runway.

The Government will also argue expansion meets key noise targets

It said that expansion could only go ahead if the area affected by aircraft noise once any expansion has taken place would not be greater than the area affected in 2002. That is not as challenging as it sounds for two reasons:

1. Concorde was still operating in 2002. Because of the way that the Department for Transport measures noise, the retirement of Concorde in 2003 would allow BAA Ferrovial to bring in many more planes without extending the area affected. Using DfT noise measurements, one Concorde every 4 hours followed by 3 hours 58 minutes of silence is the equivalent of 120 Boeing 757s coming over every 2 minutes.

2. The area which the Aviation White Paper said should not be expanded is the '57 decibel contour', i.e. the area where noise levels average out at 57 decibels or higher over the course of a year. But the recent ANASE Study, which the Government published earlier this month, found that, in order to match the area where people start to get annoyed, the Government should be talking about a 50

decibel contour. It is thought that the reason the Government said the findings of the ANASE Study would not be used in policy-making is that it would render meaningless the White Paper pledge on noise. Certainly many commentators were surprised by the Government's immediate dismissal of the first major aircraft noise report in over 20 years, one that took years to complete and cost over £1 million.

How long will the consultation go on for and what happens next?

European law requires that the consultation lasts at least 3 months. The consultation would also need to end before the official start of the London Mayoral elections - the so-called 'purdah' period - in the second half of March. The Government has indicated that it hopes to make up its mind about the expansion proposals in the summer. If it is minded to approve the expansion in principle, it is likely to invite BAA Ferrovial to bring forward proposals in due course.

Public Inquiry required?

The Planning Bill, which is going through this session of Parliament, would restrict future public inquiries to simply looking at the local impacts of a new development. A 3rd runway or 6th terminal would require a public inquiry of this sort. The introduction of mixed-mode would not normally require a public inquiry as no new land would be needed but in this case there would need to be a planning inquiry because the introduction of mixed-mode would mean the annual cap on the number of flights using Heathrow would be exceeded and the Government said in 2001 that, if it were to be exceeded, BAA Ferrovial would need to get permission from a planning inquiry.

When could the expansion take place?

The Government may well not set out a timescale in the consultation as it will argue that it is up to BAA to bring forward the proposals. In theory, mixed-mode could be introduced within a couple of years, but a lot will depend on the terminal capacity at the airport. Although Terminal 5 will open in March 2008, BAA then intends to take terminals 1 and 2 out of action for several years while they construct the new terminal facility, Heathrow East. A 3rd runway would take several years to go through the public inquiry and construction process.

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