The case against a third Heathrow runway

Osterley will be badly hit if a third runway goes ahead. The new flight path would be over Osterley Park. Residents under the existing northern flight path could find their half day’s alternation reduced.

With a third runway in place the number of flights using the airport would rise by 260,000 a year. That is just over 700 a day. Heathrow argues that, because planes are becoming less noisy and operational practices are improving, the overall noise climate will be better than it is today. In my view, the jury is very much still out on that. What is certain is that countless numbers of people in West London will be hearing more planes than they are today.

Traffic Levels

There are also worries about traffic levels on the motorways and local roads. Heathrow has made the commitment that there will be no more airport-related traffic on the roads if a third runway is built than there is today. That is setting the bar very high indeed. It would require considerable investment – and considerable public investment – in new rail schemes. It not is clear yet how much money the Government is willing to commit.

Air Pollution

Air pollution levels, too, are dependent on these public transport schemes coming on-stream. Traffic is the main cause of air pollution in London, including in the areas around Heathrow. Given the public concern about air quality, I would expect both the Government and the Mayor of London will put in place measures to cut it significantly but, realistically, it could take 15-20 years before these improvements are felt on the ground.

Jobs and the Economy

Heathrow makes the argument that a new runway will benefit the local and national economy. There is little doubt that any project of this size would create jobs and boost the economy.

However, things are not quite as simple as that. Given the huge demand for air travel coming from the emerging economies of the world over the coming decades, there will be pressure to expand airports in London and the South East. The evidence suggests that even if aviation fuel were to be taxed or some other sort of levy was introduced to dampen down demand, a lot more people will want to fly. And it’s not all bad. Flights can facilitate business and can increase trade which, historically, has brought prosperity and opened up closed societies.

The key question is whether Heathrow needs to expand in order for London and the South East to improve tap into these new markets. London is already well connected to the rest of the world. It has six airports and seven runways. It has more flights to the world’s key business destinations than any other airport in Europe. This is one reason why London continues to be the top city in the
world in which to do business. Surveys suggest the others are its good internal transport system and its high-quality telecommunications.

London is the hub, not Heathrow. The vitality of London is what draws business people and tourists in world-beating numbers. If airport capacity is provided – at whatever airport – people will flock to the capital in even larger numbers, drawn by the magnetic pull of London. It need not be at Heathrow.

Indeed, in my view, it should not be at Heathrow. According to EU figures, noise caused by Heathrow flights affects over 725,000 people; that is, 28% of all people impacted by aircraft noise across Europe. At HACAN we get complaints from people living 25 miles from the airport. And, for communities as close to the airport as Osterley is, a third runway would potentially simply ruin the quality of life of many, many residents.

It is not as if Heathrow will close if it does not expand. That is not on the cards. Heathrow will continue to be a thriving airport, an important contributor to the economy of West London. Interesting, a report published by Hounslow, Ealing and Slough found that even a second runway at Gatwick would have a ‘negligible’ impact on future employment levels at Heathrow.

**Amber Light**

In October 2016 the Prime Minister gave the amber light to a third runway at Heathrow. She said it was the Government’s preferred option. The announcement was followed by a public consultation earlier this year. Technically, the consultation was on the National Policy Statement (NPS) on Airports, but it was essentially about the third runway.

Parliament will vote on the NPS in spring 2018. If it votes in favour, a third runway will become Government policy. That clears the way for Heathrow to draw up the detail plans for the runway (including its flight paths); to consult on those plans before they are considered by a local Planning Inquiry. Heathrow expects to be given permission in 2020/1 and for the runway to open in 2024/5.

**Conditions**

If the Parliamentary vote is in favour of a third runway, it is expected it will make approval dependent on a number of binding conditions. These are likely to include levels of compensation for people who will lose their homes or experience more noise as well as a tougher night flight regime.

HACAN believes a third runway is the wrong answer and will continue to oppose it but, should it go ahead, we will be pressing for the best possible deal for residents including world-class compensation and mitigation, an eight hour night flight to be the norm and for everybody within 25 miles of the airport to be get a period of respite from the noise each day.

HACAN is part of a diverse coalition of organizations campaigning against a third runway. Each has its own issue: noise; climate change; air pollution; community destruction. It includes Brentford and Hounslow Stop Heathrow Expansion: [http://bashr3.betternotbigger.org.uk/](http://bashr3.betternotbigger.org.uk/)

The outcome of the campaign is uncertain. What is certain is that the question of Heathrow expansion will still be in the news for many years to come.

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