

Summary note of London APPG meeting on airport capacity 11 October 2016

Bob Neill MP Co-Chair of the London APPG opened the meeting, saying that it was immensely topical. The decision on airport capacity was a critical one for the UK and London.

Stewart Wingate set out the case for expansion at Gatwick Airport. He said a network of competing airports of a similar size was beneficial for consumers. Since the BAA monopoly had been split up Gatwick's passenger numbers had grown from 31 million to 43 million in six years, ahead of the Airports Commission's predictions. Gatwick was now serving 50 long haul routes; the Airports Commission said it would do this by 2050. Gatwick's cost was privately funded at £7.8 billion and it had pledged to keep airport charges low; at a maximum of £15, whilst they were already £25 at London Heathrow. Stewart Wingate said surface transport access was a key question for the Heathrow schemes, and how the M25 would be tunnelled or bridged. Gatwick came top of the cost-benefit analysis on Treasury Green Book rules. Gatwick's second runway could open in 2023 with the terminals open in 2025. Planes would fly over more sparsely populated areas and Gatwick had a 10 year track record of meeting air quality targets. Gatwick had commissioned a YouGov survey of Londoners the previous weekend which had found 43% supported Gatwick (a majority of respondents).

Emma Gilthorpe set out the case for Heathrow Airport's northwest runway. She said Heathrow was London's hub for lots of reasons. The UK was slipping behind its competition and other countries were backing their hub airports. Brexit meant the UK could not afford to throw away its connectivity. Heathrow Airport had developed a new and better plan for expansion which the Airports Commission had endorsed. It had specified 11 conditions that had been met or exceeded. Expansion at Heathrow meant 40,000 new jobs and apprenticeships and the potential to eliminate unemployment in the five neighbouring boroughs to the airport. Crossrail would bring people within easy access of the airport.

Captain William Lowe set out the case for the Heathrow Hub proposal. He said that if the UK wanted to stay connected, it had to invest in infrastructure. The Hub proposal was to expand Heathrow with minimal fuss, and use the space to the west of the airport, and take-off over the reservoirs. He said Heathrow's slots had been full for a long time, and Gatwick was in the wrong place. Heathrow had more international passengers. The Hub proposals did not require major airspace changes and were less disruptive compared to the northwest runway proposals. A runway expansion was quicker to build and could be completed in three years. Expansion could be phased, meaning the government would stay in control and the airport could not expand until air quality targets were met.

Steve Reed MP suggested that the proponents quiz each other's schemes.

Stewart Wingate said that the Heathrow scheme had undergone enormous changes in the last few months, and the cost had been reduced. He questioned the ease of moving the M25 without disruption, and did not believe another runway at Heathrow could be open and running in 2023.

Emma Gilthorpe said that Gatwick was a fantastic airport but government had asked where hub capacity should go, something Gatwick could not offer. The UK needed hub capacity if it was going to compete internationally. She said Heathrow Airport would look at the Heathrow Hub proposal if that was the government's preference. She said the airport had a strong record of delivering infrastructure on time and on budget.

William Lowe said that the costs of the Heathrow Hub scheme had not changed and the £9.7bn cost including alterations to the M25. £2-£3bn of the Heathrow Airport northwest runway proposal was costed to add an extra lane on the M4, which he did not think was anything to do with Heathrow Airport. He said Gatwick already had a second runway but couldn't use it until 2019. The Hub proposal had undergone due diligence and could alter the M25 without disruption.

Rupa Huq, MP for Ealing Central and Acton asked about Brexit and the impact this had had on the proposals. William Lowe said that it could affect the UK's ability to market itself, and low-cost carriers were struggling. Emma Gilthorpe said it made the decision on airport capacity even more important, as trading links were crucial. Outside the EU, countries worked on a hub to hub model because operators couldn't fill point to point planes. Heathrow had a large cargo role.

Stewart Wingate said that since Brexit Gatwick had experienced its strongest ever monthly passenger growth. Airlines were ordering aircraft to service the low-cost model. Fuel prices had fallen. He said that it was important that flying was something available to all and affordable.

Baroness Handel said she was worried about the people underneath flight paths and where airports would be expanded. She asked for information on the numbers of homes destroyed, the compensation packages being offered, and where the new homes for people would be built.

Captain Lowe said the Heathrow Hub proposal was a concept, and that it would adopt the same compensation package Heathrow was proposing, albeit that fewer homes would be affected. They had not identified where replacement houses would be built.

Emma Guildford said that they were reducing all the time the numbers of houses affected by noise. There would be more opportunities for respite with the new proposals. Heathrow had consulted its communities on noise. Whilst new homes would be needed, it was working with local boroughs and existing housing plans were thought to cover the need arising from displacement. A £1 billion compensation package had been offered by the airport.

Stewart Wingate said that there were far more people affected at Heathrow than at Gatwick. Gatwick was matching the compensation package offered at Heathrow but for smaller number of affected homes. They were offering to pay £1,000 towards the council tax of all properties in the 57 dB contour whilst those households remained resident. Gatwick estimated 10,000 new homes would be needed. He said that local authorities received New Homes Bonus for the new homes they built, and Gatwick would match this with a £50 million commitment. London Heathrow affected 800,000 people; with improved technology this would reduce to 450,000 people; but the new runway would affect a further 350,000 more people and different people would be affected.

Theresa Villiers MP asked about the cost of surface access and how much London Heathrow was contributing. Emma Gilthorpe said that the cost had not been fixed, but Heathrow would pay its share, and government contribution would be required. William Lowe said the costs of surface access transport had been included in the Hub scheme's costs. The road changes are part of this. Stewart Wingate highlighted TfL had raised concerns about the costs of the proposed transport surface access improvements at Heathrow.

Ruth Cadbury MP for Brentford and Isleworth asked what would happen if Heathrow did not fund the transport improvements. She asked Gatwick to address the hub airport argument being made by Heathrow, and asked if Gatwick could be a hub airport.

Emma Gilthorpe said Heathrow had contributed to Crossrail and the amount had been set by its regulator. Stewart Wingate said Heathrow had backtracked from its original intention to contribute £250m when the regulator had only required £100m. He said Gatwick had reached out to long haul destinations, and it was now in the Premier League of airports serving this number of destinations.

William Lowe said that having a hub airport was important as it allowed interconnections. Transit passengers were crucial for the start of new routes.

Baroness Lovell asked about the benefit of transfer passengers to the UK. She also asked about noise and how the Airports Commission could say fewer people would be affected by noise after expansion.

Steve Pound MP for Ealing North asked about the demand for air travel and whether a hub airport was needed. He asked when London Heathrow would be compliant on air quality.

Captain Lowe said that there were already hotspots of air quality problems around the airport, caused by road traffic. A congestion charge could address this.

Emma Gilthorpe said that Heathrow was air quality compliant today and would remain so. They had a surface access strategy to get people to use public transport.

Stewart Wingate said Gatwick was supportive of competition and wanted to encourage the use of new aircraft technology. He said that the area London Heathrow resides in already breaches air quality, which Gatwick did not. Gatwick had said that if expansion breached air quality limits they would stop expansion until remedied.

Emma Wingate said sites around Heathrow were still non-compliant such as the M4 and that this could be improved through service transport access. Stewart Wingate asked why you would expand an airport in an area of existing poor air quality.

Zac Goldsmith MP for Richmond Park and North Kingston asked why Heathrow had not put a figure on its contribution to surface transport access. He highlighted that TfL felt the cost would be £10 billion. He asked how there could be 300,000 more flights and reduce the number of people affected by noise. He expressed disappointment that John Holland-Kaye was not in attendance and had declined all opportunities to debate with Stewart Wingate.

Emma Gilthorpe said that John Holland-Kaye had been unable to attend due to prior engagement. She said that she was the Executive Director responsible for expansion at Heathrow.

Stewart Wingate said that the geography and location of Heathrow at the west of the city was the problem. "Overheating" an area by its airport having more than two runways would naturally lead to air quality and transport issues. He said that Gatwick considered Heathrow an important asset and did not want to see it close.

William Lowe said that one business was 7 to 8 times bigger than the other. He said getting to Gatwick meant a drive round the M25 to get to Gatwick. Heathrow had half the UK's population within two hours of it. If these passengers started going to Gatwick instead, journey times would be longer.

Emma Gilthorpe said any new infrastructure was contentious, but Heathrow had decades of experience of constructing schemes and they had local support.

Dr Tania Mathias MP for Twickenham said she had met Heathrow colleagues a few weeks previously and they had talked about five hours per night of respite. At present there was supposed to be two nights a week of respite. She expressed concern that there were only 25 noise monitors around Heathrow, and that local people in Teddington had paid for 50 noise monitors to be installed. She said her own experience was that flights were getting lower and noisier. She asked whether there would be any respite with a third runway at Heathrow and also what Gatwick's policy on night flights and respite was.

Emma Gilthorpe said they acknowledged the disruption caused by night flights, and the airport had been working on reducing the number of night flights. Technology improvements would help this. Heathrow was guaranteeing respite in every community between the hours of 11 PM and 5:30 AM every night. This was a 6.5 hours flight ban.

William Lowe said that with extra capacity there was no reason why it would not be possible to ban flights between 11 PM and 6 AM. It was only the Hong Kong flights that would be affected. At present the flights couldn't be rescheduled to any other time.

Stewart Wingate said Gatwick had tried to minimise the numbers of people affected, put mitigation in place, and then provide compensation. There was a different magnitude in terms of numbers of people affected by noise at Gatwick compared to Heathrow. At Gatwick there was already an 11,500 flights night quota from the DfT, which the airport was not looking to increase whether it had one or two runways. Gatwick affected 3% of the numbers of people affected by noise at Heathrow.

Bob Neill MP closed the debate by thanking parliamentarians for attending and said that the speakers had made their points robustly.