

# NEWSLETTER

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## Political turmoil delays runway - again

On 30 June the Secretary of State for Transport announced that: *'Clearly any announcement on airports capacity would have to be made with the House in session and, being realistic given recent events, I cannot now foresee an announcement until at least October.'*

Obviously before any decision is made, there will need to be a new Prime Minister, a new Cabinet, and a new Cabinet Airports Subcommittee; and time for the new Ministers to study the papers.

There is great pressure from business, from the aviation industry and from the press for an early decision. It therefore seems certain that the decision will be announced this autumn, probably soon after the House of Commons recess ends on 10 October.

Neither of the candidates for leader of the Conservative party have shown any enthusiasm for a second Gatwick runway. Nor for that matter, any strong support or opposition to a new runway at Heathrow. Theresa May has said that a Heathrow runway would provide employment opportunities for her constituency, Maidenhead, but also extra noise.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant that two important politicians who had opposed a Heathrow runway are likely to have less influence on the decision: David Cameron with his 2010 promise 'no ifs, no buts, no third runway'; and Boris Johnson with his threat to lie down in front of the bulldozers. But perhaps one, or both, may be members of the new Cabinet.

Eight MPs whose constituencies surround Gatwick have called on Theresa May and Andrea Leadsom to act swiftly to approve a third Heathrow runway, and claimed that blocking expansion would be "a betrayal of the Conservative vision for Britain".<sup>2</sup> They argue that expanding Gatwick would undermine the Tory party's hard-earned reputation for competent governance in the national interest.

## Crucial air quality analysis

It was not generally noticed that the Secretary of State also stated that: 'We aim to publish the further analysis on air quality soon.' This analysis will be crucial in the choice between Heathrow and Gatwick. If it shows – perhaps as a result of restricting diesel vehicles in the Heathrow area - that either of the two Heathrow runway options can be built without infringing the EU legal pollution limit it would remove the main obstacle to implementing the recommendation of the Airports Commission. If it shows that they cannot, then the odds on Gatwick will shorten.

The analysis may find, as did the Airports Commission, that Heathrow cannot comply but other places in London have worse pollution, and that therefore a new runway would not delay national compliance. A decision based on that argument would probably be challenged in courts by Gatwick.

Some may argue that Brexit means that we will no longer be subject to EU law on air quality, and that therefore the Heathrow runway could go ahead. But it is hard to imagine a British Government repealing the UK legislation that gives effect to the EU Directive if that meant more people dying from pollution.

The debate on air quality around Heathrow has obscured the fact that at one, perhaps two, sites near Gatwick pollution has also been above the EU limit. While it is true that this has been almost entirely due to road traffic (as is also the case at Heathrow), the effect of a second runway would be greatly to increase the traffic, especially if the forecast for a substantial increase in airport freight proved correct.

Gatwick's mendacious advertisements claiming that 'Only Gatwick can provide clear (sic) air' ignore the Airports Commission prediction that a second runway would subject over 50,000 people to worse air quality.

## **Gatwick publicity fails to convince**

Gatwick rushed in to claim that the postponement meant that the likelihood of a Gatwick runway had improved. But their well-oiled publicity campaign failed to convince.

Willie Walsh, Chief Executive of the British Airways holding company, has said: 'We struggle to see any business case for the expansion of Gatwick and will consider our position at the airport if the Government backs expansion there, principally because the cost of that expansion when translated into airport charges would likely wipe out the profit we make.'<sup>3</sup>

easyJet, who have always made clear their opposition to a new Gatwick runway, have expressed concern that the fall in the exchange rate may affect the growth in air travel.

The International Air Transport Association predict that as a result of Brexit the number of UK air passengers could be 3-5% lower by 2020, driven by the expected downturn in economic activity and the fall in the exchange rate. Hardly an indication of a need for an urgent runway decision.

The Times - the only paper which actively supports a Gatwick runway – has argued that modern aircraft have lessened the need for a hub airport (Heathrow) and have made possible point-to-point services which could be provided by Gatwick. But, as was pointed out in a letter, once the hub argument is abandoned, the need for a new runway becomes much less urgent. Point-to-point services could equally be based at Stansted which is not forecast to be full until 2045.<sup>4</sup>

## **GACC Research Studies**

With the aim of influencing the debate in Westminster and Whitehall, GACC has published a number of research studies, each by a different independent and expert author. Each study has been sent to the team of civil servants who will be briefing the new Ministers.

1. Ambient Noise. More people are affected by aircraft noise in areas where background noise levels are low. Now widely quoted in Parliament.
2. Paying for a new Gatwick Runway. A new runway would mean 100% increase in airport charges. That may cause airlines to move to Stansted or Luton.
3. Gatwick Airport and Tax. How Gatwick earns large profits but pays no corporation tax.
4. Climate Change and a New Runway. Why the all-nation Paris Agreement (December 2015) rules out any new runway.

5. Crawley Urbanisation. How Crawley has grown to a population of 110,000, the problems facing the town now, and how they would be made worse by a new runway.
6. Gatwick Landscape. The ecological value of the land that would be bulldozed to construct a second runway.
7. Rail Infrastructure. The massive engineering works that would be necessary to enable the line from Gatwick to London to cope with the increase in rail passengers when a two-runway Gatwick reached full capacity.
8. Road infrastructure. To cope with a two-runway Gatwick at full capacity could mean widening the M23 and M25, extending the M23 into central London, and building an outer orbital new motorway. Shows that rail and road together could well mean a total infrastructure cost of £6 billion, compared to under £1 billion suggested by Gatwick Airport.
9. Heritage and countryside. A joint study with CPRE (Surrey, Sussex and Kent), the Woodland Trust and CAGNE describing the 17 listed buildings that would be demolished by a second Gatwick runway and the impact on national heritage sites and areas of outstanding beauty.

All on [www.gacc.org.uk/research-studies](http://www.gacc.org.uk/research-studies)

## New Government policies

There are indications that the Department for Transport is working towards announcing (or consulting on) a number of new policies. These include - with GACC comments in green:

- A change in the policy of supporting concentration of routes in favour of dispersal or respite where local circumstances make it desirable - **welcome;**
- An Aviation Noise Commission - **likely to be toothless;**
- A community engagement forum – **talking shop;**
- New metrics to measure aircraft noise – **useful but would not reduce noise.**

Originally these were envisaged as palliatives to soften the blow of the announcement of a new runway, and it looked as if they would be included in the new Aviation Policy Statement which is a necessary part of the runway planning process. But now the runway delay has meant that the timing is uncertain.

## Night flights

The number of night flights at Gatwick between 11.30 pm and 6.00 am is controlled by a quota. This has remained unchanged since 2006 at an average of 22 per night in winter and 53 per night in summer. The quota is fully used in summer but not in winter.

The amount of noise is also limited by a quota, with noisy aircraft using more points than less noisy ones. This quota was being gradually reduced until 2012 but has remained unchanged since then.

New quotas are due to be announced by April 2017 to come into effect in October 2017. The Department for Transport will be issuing a consultation paper soon but as a preliminary step invited GACC to take part in a focus group. This is what we told them –

- We object to all night flights, but until abolition possible, then;
- A priority should be the gradual reduction in number quota and in noise quota, especially removal of any unused 'head-room';
- Any attempt to continue the present numbers would result in a great outcry – a new feature is that there are now a large number of vocal local protest groups;
- No compulsory quiet period in centre of night as it would cause bunching at start and end of night, where the health impacts are worst;
- We would support a levy on night flights. This could be part of the general noise levy proposed by the Airports Commission but at a substantially higher rate. It would deal with the problem of Gatwick imposing nil landing fees on night flights in winter.

We also told the DfT that there is now general recognition that aircraft noise creates more annoyance, and therefore almost certainly more sleep disturbance and more people disturbed, in areas where background noise is low. This is reinforced both by the GACC study of Ambient Noise and new research at Frankfurt airport.<sup>5</sup>

The use of satellite navigation to create concentrated flight paths is even more important at night than during the day. We would support maximum dispersal (within NPRs for departures) of night flights.

If the new runway is to be at Heathrow, and night flights are banned there, we would strongly oppose any attempt to transfer them to Gatwick. We also believe that such a move would be impracticable for the relevant airlines.

## Route 4

In 2013 aircraft departure Route 4 – take-off to the west then turn 180° right – was moved further north over Holmwood and the southern side of Reigate. This caused a huge outcry and the formation of the protest group 'Plane Wrong'. The route has now been moved back to roughly where it was before, but with the difference that satellite navigation now means that all aircraft are following exactly the same track, causing great distress to those underneath.<sup>6</sup> A new local protest group, 'Fair Playnes', is being formed. The CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) has promised to keep this new route under review and Gatwick have opened an email address for complaints all of which they promise to pass on to the CAA.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout 2014 and 2015 GACC argued strongly, supported by the airport consultative committee, that if the route was moved back it should also revert – as had been promised by Gatwick – to conventional navigation to ensure dispersed tracks. Gatwick have broken that promise but there is some hope that the new Government policy on dispersal may enable the CAA to compel NATS (air traffic control) and Gatwick to introduce dispersal - or respite (different tracks on different days).

Meanwhile, in easterly winds, aircraft which take off towards the east and turn left (Route 3), still fly over the south side of Reigate and Redhill.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tmay.co.uk/news/268/theresa-discusses-future-of-heathrow-with-airports-commission-chairman>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.blunt4reigate.com/news/conservative-mps-call-leadership-contenders-support-heathrow>

<sup>3</sup> The Independent. 23 June. <http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/brexit-eu-referendum-david-cameron-legacy-heathrow-airport-third-runway-holidays-what-it-means-a7104371.html>

<sup>4</sup> The official forecast that Stansted will be full by 2040 is based on the planning condition imposed by Uttlesford District Council limiting the number of passengers to 35 million a year. This was recently raised from 25 million and would obviously be raised again if necessary. Which means there is no need for any new runway until around 2045.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.laermstudie.de/fileadmin/files/Laermstudie/NORAH\\_Knowledge-10.pdf](http://www.laermstudie.de/fileadmin/files/Laermstudie/NORAH_Knowledge-10.pdf) page 6

<sup>6</sup> For map of the new route see <http://www.gatwickairport.com/business-community/aircraft-noise/our-blog/26-may-2016>

<sup>7</sup> [Route4@gatwickairport.com](mailto:Route4@gatwickairport.com)