

Let's fly

but it's time to
check the cost



Aviation Policy for the UK

SASIG

The Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group
of the Local Government Association

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Airport options – demanding the facts

SASIG is seeking to ensure that the UK has a realistic and well justified aviation policy that:

- gives air passengers better opportunities to travel from their nearest airport;
- captures, not stifles, the economic benefits of aviation;
- minimises the environmental impacts;
- ensures travellers, not residents, pay the environmental costs;
- challenges the aviation industry to improve its environmental performance;
- ensures good quality surface access for passengers and employees;
- promotes better regional air services to more destinations;
- promotes a new London airport.

SASIG, which represents nearly 70 local authorities, accepts controlled growth of all or most existing **regional airports** to meet long term demand of about 200 million passengers per annum (mppa) by 2030. The regional airports should have an increased range of international services but SASIG accepts that some destinations will have to be reached via London (or a European airport).

New runways will be needed in the London area so that forecast demand of around 300 mppa, including some passengers from the regions, can be met over the next 25 to 35 years.

There are two strategic options for **London and the South East**:

OPTION 1. Cap Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton at their existing capacity of 175 mppa and build a new airport for around 125 mppa. The chosen site must be demonstrably better than the Government's option at Cliffe in Kent.

OPTION 2. Add new runways to Heathrow, Gatwick and/or Stansted to give the existing airports a capacity of around 275 mppa but with the risk of even more expansion later.

Counting the costs

This leaflet seeks to compare the true costs and benefits of these two strategic options.

It shows that the Government's consultation option at Cliffe can be improved to minimise impact and increase benefits. Currently proposers are showing that Thames Reach Airport on the Hoo Peninsula and a new airport on the Isle of Sheppey are superior. They are both visionary solutions that will support the success of the aviation industry over the next 30 years.

A new airport along the Thames Estuary would ensure:

- 24 hour operation, freeing Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton from night flights;
- a new hub airport with plenty of runway capacity to give better access to regional airports;
- low environmental impacts on people;
- minimal property demolition;
- fast and efficient surface access;
- streamlined airport operational facilities;
- high quality freight facilities, with all night operation;
- a plentiful labour and housing supply, adding essential benefits to the Thames Gateway Growth Area.

Above all a new airport will enable the UK aviation industry to have facilities that match the French and Dutch airports that our industry currently fear will take over the UK's present leading role.

The cost of the wrong decision

The time has come for the Government to acknowledge that Heathrow cannot meet all demand and that London needs a second hub airport to work in parallel with Heathrow, maintaining the UK's role in world aviation for the next 30 to 50 years.

It is now critically important that the UK Government gives the leadership and shows the vision necessary to secure a long term future for aviation.

Any evaluation of options needs to be able to compare many topics, some of which cannot be translated into monetary values. On almost all criteria, capping the existing airports and building a new hub airport – Option 1 – is easily better than the continued expansion of the existing airports – Option 2.

The suggested new Thames Reach Airport has much less impact and even greater benefits than Cliffe and is far superior to adding more runways to the existing airports.

For instance, the number of extra people that would be affected by noise at Thames Reach is some 12,000, compared with 77,000 if new runways were added at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. Similarly, 22,100 extra people would suffer unacceptable levels of air pollution with 3 new runways, but none with Thames Reach. In addition, a new airport offers far greater capacity than expanding the three existing sites (an additional 130 mppa at Thames Reach, compared with 101 mppa at the three current airports).

No heritage buildings would be lost at Thames Reach, whereas 55 listed buildings and two Ancient Monuments would be lost by expanding the three existing airports. However, Thames Reach would impact on an important nature conservation area for which alternative locations are available and funding would be provided.

A comparison of the main options, including the maximum use of the existing airports, indicates the following net benefits:

- One new runway at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted – £37.43bn
- Gatwick: one new runway and Stansted: two new runways – £31.07bn
- Cliffe: four new runways – £24.22bn
- Thames Reach: four new runways – between £31.13bn and £48.80bn


SASIG believes that some of the economic benefits for Heathrow have been exaggerated and some of the costs minimised. Any recalculation will clearly show that Thames Reach out performs all other options.

Looking to the future

SASIG have identified the following key parameters for the Aviation White Paper:

- a robust 30-50 year strategy for the UK, providing for around 500 mppa (or more) by 2030;
- net economic benefits to be given no greater importance than social and environmental costs;
- regions of the UK to be able to claw back passengers from London;
- national airport policies to be implemented through Regional Spatial Strategies;
- airport growth in priority investment areas should capture economic benefits;
- aviation to be better integrated with other transport modes;
- those living near airports should be protected ahead of the convenience of those flying;
- residents near airports should be given greater priority than wildlife and ecology;
- irreplaceable ancient woodland and listed buildings should be treated as more important than features that can be moved or substituted;
- night landings and take-offs should be phased out unless over the sea or of minimal impact;
- no noise sensitive development should be allowed near airports;
- new mitigation measures, agreed with local authorities, should cover noise, pollution, transport access and population reductions in affected areas;
- a clearer programme and process for implementation should be devised.

If the White Paper can “tick every box” it will be a success.



SASIG, and its predecessor organisations have been campaigning for a national airport strategy for many years. Over the last few years SASIG has sought to work with many organisations, including the Department for Transport, to ensure that the future Aviation White Paper provides for a sustainable aviation strategy that is based on a fair comparison of all the options.

The local authority members of SASIG have a responsibility to balance the economic, social and environmental issues within their areas. They are thus able to take an unbiased and knowledgeable view of aviation. They can evaluate the issues within the wider development context of their areas and are not influenced by the commercial interest of a single industry or a particular environmental cause.

Published by:

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