

Speech Given by The Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport at the British Air Transport Association annual dinner 2016

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Aviation Capacity Vital Priority for UK

Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin reaffirms commitment to new capacity in south east.

Introduction

Thank you Sir Michael.

I'm delighted to join you this evening.

And I'm grateful to BATA for giving me this opportunity to say a few words.

A lot has happened since I last spoke at this dinner in 2014.

UK airlines have enjoyed sustained growth.

Passenger numbers at our airports have reached record levels.

And Britain itself is in a much stronger position.

A much reduced deficit.

A flourishing economy.

A majority government - with infrastructure investment at the top of our manifesto.

Infrastructure investment

If anyone doubted our commitment, in November (2015), the Chancellor confirmed that [we'll spend 50% more on transport this Parliament than in the previous 5 years.](#)

Wherever we can, we're improving transport as fast as possible.

But we're also doing something that this country hasn't seen for many decades.

Planning and delivering a long-term transport infrastructure programme.

Building the capacity to fulfil the needs of future generations.

And when you consider investments that will help Britain thrive, airport capacity in the south east is about as important as it gets.

Aviation growth

Our prosperity today is intimately linked with the global ties we built in the past.

We still have the third largest aviation network in the world.

We also have fantastic, innovative, world-leading airlines, investing in new aircraft and routes.

More people fly with British airlines each year than carriers from any other country outside the US and China.

That's thanks to you.

The success of UK aviation is also reflected in our airports.

Last week I was at Luton.

Which is investing £110 million developing facilities and celebrating record passenger numbers in 2015.

But that sort of investment and growth is being replicated at airports around the country.

A billion pound programme at Manchester.

Edinburgh.

Bristol.

New [routes from regional airports to fast growing global destinations](#).

I could go on.

But growth at these airports will be in addition to growth in the south east, not instead of it.

Nothing will change the fact that without action, London's aviation network will be full by 2040.

But constrained capacity is already costing us business and jobs.

With every new air route to the Far East or South America, Paris, Frankfurt and Dubai are making themselves more attractive to investors.

The advantage we've enjoyed for so long, through the strong global connections provided by Heathrow and Gatwick, is becoming less of an advantage as time goes on.

So sorting out the capacity issue is critical.

Delayed decision

That is why I asked Sir Howard Davies to lead the Airports Commission review.

And that is why, before Christmas, the [government accepted his case for expansion](#).

That in itself was a big step forward.

It showed that the debate's moved on, from whether a new runway should be built, to where.

We also agreed to choose 1 of the 3 short-listed schemes.

And we intend to meet the Commission's requirement for an additional runway by 2030.

Of course I know that many in the industry were disappointed that we delayed the final decision.

It wasn't something we took lightly.

But when opponents of expansion hailed the delay as some sort of victory, they could not have been more wrong.

The decision was delayed because it was the right thing to do.

The responsible thing to do.

To make sure we're fully prepared.

So we know from the outset that we will get the job finished.

You understand more than most that Britain's deep-seated, infrastructure-averse culture has a history of de-railing vital transport schemes.

And although we are slowly changing that culture, to risk any chance of failure at this stage would be unacceptable.

It's why we've been so thorough with HS2.

Six years of intense planning.

The biggest consultation in government history.

Perfecting the design.

Building the case, town by town, region by region.

Getting the widest possible public and political support.

Making sure the HS2 project is the very best it can be.

With minimum impact on the countryside and people's lives.

And that's what we're doing with aviation capacity.

Does the delay mean we lack the evidence today to make a convincing decision?

Absolutely not.

We're using this time to make the case for new capacity even more watertight.

It means we can test the Commission's work further against the government's new air quality plan.

This is additional work to test compliance, and build confidence that expansion can take place within legal limits.

We're also doing more work on carbon, to address concerns on sustainability, particularly during construction.

We're dealing with concerns about noise, to get absolutely the best outcome for residents.

We want to make sure that communities get the best possible mitigation deal.

Finally, we're carrying out extra economic analysis.

To assess the runway's potential locally and nationally, so it can deliver more jobs, more growth and more apprenticeships.

Local UK growth

And this is crucial.

We don't just need new runway capacity so Heathrow or Gatwick can better compete with Paris, Frankfurt or Dubai.

We also need it for the benefits it will bring to the wider UK economy.

One of the most persuasive arguments for new capacity is the links it will provide to the north, the south west, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Opponents have tried to suggest that a new runway would somehow undermine our domestic network.

In fact the reverse is true.

Wherever we decide to build new runway capacity, you can be sure that local economies throughout the UK will benefit, with more flights, more routes, and more connections.

So as we complete our work this year, let's make sure these localised benefits are articulated, from the airports and airlines that serve the regions.

Your voice is a powerful one.

And BATA members understand better than most the importance of domestic flights to every part of the UK.

So let's keep beating the drum for the regions in this debate.

Before I finish, I'd like to offer my congratulations to Jane Middleton, BATA's new chairman.

Jane, I look forward to working with you.

Conclusion

So, as you can imagine, there is a huge amount going on in the department at the moment.

But there's also a real sense of purpose.

To do the job as thoroughly and effectively as we can.

And to maximise the opportunities that new capacity will bring.

Opportunities for passengers.

For the aviation industry.

And for every part of Britain which relies on air links to the south east.

Of course I understand the concern and impatience within the industry.

But getting this decision right - so the benefits are widely appreciated; so environmental impacts are clearly mitigated; and so it's supported by a majority of cross-party MPs and Peers - is absolutely paramount.

So let me assure you.

We will make a decision once this work is finished.

It will be the right decision for Britain.

And it will ensure that the Commission's timetable for delivering the capacity can be met.

Thank you.