

Adding Capacity at Heathrow

~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is opposed to further expansion at Heathrow. It is within this context that this response should be read.

Surface Level Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's particular expertise lies in the field of surface level transport. That is therefore what we will concentrate on in this response.

Rail as a substitute for air travel

We believe that passengers would be attracted off short-haul flights and on to rail if rail provided a viable alternative. After all, 45% of all flights within Europe (technically, the countries covered by Euro Control) are for distances of 500 kilometres or less. Many of these journeys could be potentially done by rail. The evidence is clear: where rail does provide a viable alternative for journeys of no more than about 3 1/2 to 4 hours, passengers will switch to rail, particularly for city-centre to city-centre journeys.

The following measures would be required to persuade a significant switch from air to rail:

- A rise in Air Passenger Duty (APD) or a similar tax to ensure that air passengers pay their fair share of taxation. At present, air travel is being artificially stimulated through the tax breaks it receives as a result of tax-free fuel and its exemption from VAT as well as its failure to fully cover the costs of the noise, air pollution, community destruction and climate change it causes
- Rail fares in the UK brought into line with those paid in most European countries
- Investment to create extra capacity on the UK rail network. This would include high-speed rail links north of London
- A reduction in the number of landing slots available to short-haul flights at Heathrow

Rail as complementary to air travel

Heathrow should become a national transport hub. That would require good rail links to the airport from its local and regional catchment area, but also good rail links, where appropriate, to other areas of the country so that long-distance passengers arriving at Heathrow travelling to other destinations in the UK could complete their journey by rail.

There are, though, two important caveats to this:

- One, although rail links to Heathrow are important, they should not be given priority over other rail links which may be required for more pressing social, environmental, equity or economic development reasons

- Two, our support for improved rail links to Heathrow should not be taken as an endorsement of the view expressed by many within the aviation industry and some within government that air travel should be treated like a form of public transport. As an organisation campaigning for a sustainable approach to transport, we emphatically disagree with that view. There is an environmental and social case for subsidising rail, bus, cycling and walking which does not apply to air

Rail as means of cutting traffic levels around Heathrow

Improved rail (bus and light rail) services can reduce traffic levels around Heathrow. But these improved rail services should be planned to serve the existing Heathrow, not dependent upon the expansion of the airport.

Conclusion

The current consultation document fails to address the issues above. It a document rooted in the past. If it were looking to the future, it would abandon its expansionist proposals for Heathrow and come up with serious proposals for reducing short-haul flights, promoting rail and, indeed, promoting the role of teleconferencing.

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is the national transport campaigning organisation. We work to secure transport policies and programmes that improve people's quality of life whilst reducing environmental impact. Since 1973 we have been helping to create transport policies and programmes that give people better lives. Working nationally and locally, collectively and as individuals, through high-level lobbying and strong public campaigning, we make good transport ideas a reality and stop bad ones from happening.

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