

MEDIA RELEASE GREENHALGH: THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR THE NEXT MAYOR MUST BE TO INCREASE LONDON'S AIRPORT CAPACITY AND TO ENSURE THAT LONDON REMAINS A LIVEABLE CITY

The biggest challenge for the next Mayor must be to increase London's airport capacity and to ensure that London remains a liveable city. As Mayor I will campaign for a new hub airport as the most realistic long-term solution for London but I will not push for the closure of Heathrow. Heathrow is too big to close and too important to London's economy. However London does need a new flourishing hub airport but this has to be in the right location which must be the Thames estuary. Our capital city needs a bold vision tempered by an incremental approach to achieve this end. Instead the Davies Commission is a £20 million report that has taken three years to recommend political suicide to deliver a sticking plaster solution.

Origins of Heathrow

The history of Heathrow is intriguing. Heathrow's origin as a civil airport was based on sheer fraud. The airport was conceived at the end of World War 2 when the Air Ministry pulled a fast one in making out that it was required by Bomber Command for the war effort. In this way grade 1 agricultural land was used to build an airport and the Air Ministry with the complicity of Lord Beaverbrook, a member of the cabinet committee dealing with the matter, trumped both the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Housing.

Heathrow has always been environmentally terrible

Davies makes much of the economic benefits of long haul connectivity and its importance for the future of the economy. He is right in stating that Gatwick has focused on short haul intra European flights whereas there is a need for a centre for air freight and the need for a world class 24 hour airport. But Heathrow is in the wrong place. From the very beginning Heathrow was environmentally unpleasant yet it has always expanded as the only airport near the centre of London. Heathrow may be wonderful for jobs but it has ruined many people's lives.

Heathrow expansion has been remorseless

Every proposal is presented as the last expansion of Heathrow. In the late 70s Terminal 4 was allowed on the basis that it was to be the last terminal and that, when the new terminal was opened, air transport movements would be limited to 275,000 a year. The Inspector, Glidewell, had recommended that permission should only be granted if a ban was imposed on night flights. The inspector, who in 2000 recommended the grant of planning permission for a fifth terminal, said that no further major development should take place at Heathrow after T5 and that a third runway would be totally acceptable. No limit on the number of aircraft movements and no ban on night flights was ever imposed. The number of aircraft movements at Heathrow in 2014 was nearly 500,000. Now the Davies Commission is recommending a third runway. The last time that Britain built a new full length runway was in the 1940s.

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History of the Estuary Airport

The Roskill Inquiry saw 1 or 2 members dissenting and recommending a Thames estuary airport as a better option and they persuaded Ted Heath to support this. Between April 1971 and July 1974 it was government policy to build a new airport in Maplin in Essex. However, Tony Crosland, a Minister in the Wilson government, blew the scheme out of the water on the basis that it would cost £1 billion before the first aircraft would be able to take off which with the benefit of hindsight seems peanuts. Howard Davies has also dismissed the Estuary airport idea for cost reasons.

The way forward

There are only two compelling long-term solutions on the table and neither is being debated. Sir Terry Farrell, the great master planner who designed the most passenger-friendly airport in the world in Seoul, advances the idea of “integrated connectivity” where London is the hub but no single airport predominates. He would expand Gatwick with a second runway, then Stansted followed by Luton and finally Birmingham airport would only be 30 minutes away with the arrival of HS2.

I agree with Sir Terry that we should not expand Heathrow further but I would follow the thinking of Patrick Ground who as a planning QC represented the GLC at the Terminal 5 phase of the Stansted Inquiry. Patrick was also the Conservative MP for Feltham & Heston from 1983-1992. The livelihood of many of his constituents depended on Heathrow. Heathrow should not be closed but must not get any bigger. Heathrow should start to behave in an environmentally friendly way in the best tradition of airports globally. All night flights should be banned as Davies recommends and there should be a cap on the number of movements. Heathrow should start to behave as the best airport environmentally to the people living around it. Hounslow's campaign is spot on. Heathrow should become better not bigger. We do not want mixed mode solutions but strict maintenance of the Cranford Agreement which limits take offs over Cranford. This avoids noisy take offs on the northern runway when the wind is blowing from an easterly direction. As Mayor I will push to build up an estuary airport bit by bit which will boost the huge regeneration potential along the Thames Estuary so London continues to have a Heathrow in the West and another hub airport in the East.

***Stephen Greenhalgh is seeking the Conservative Mayoral nomination in 2016
and is currently Deputy Mayor of London for Policing and
former Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council***