

All Party Parliamentary Group on Heathrow and the Wider Economy

Heathrow Airport Surface Access

Questions raised by the APPG on the Airports Commission's Consultation

Introduction

Consultation Documents were published by the Airports Commission (the Commission) on 11th November 2014 with a deadline for responses by 3rd February 2015. The APPG has undertaken an initial review of the Commission's Consultation and prepared comments and questions to better understand the direction the Commission is taking on Heathrow Surface Access, the analysis undertaken to date and the analysis to be undertaken.

Publication/website

Heathrow Surface Access can be found online at the Group's website www.heathrowappg.com.

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Background

1. The following set of issues is limited to the main issues determined to date. The issues apply to both the HAL proposal for a northwest third runway (NWR) and to Hub Limited's proposal for an extended runway (ENR). There are differences because of spatial arrangements and implications for the M25 and local roads. Also, Hub Ltd proposes a transport hub north of the airport. In its appraisal the Commission excludes the transport hub from the ENR proposal and treats it as a separate project potentially applicable to either of the Heathrow proposals.
2. We understand that the Commission's assessment was undertaken in reference to a Core Transport Baseline and an extended Transport Baseline, which together listed transport infrastructure and services expected or likely to be in place by 2030 regardless of any airport expansion. We understand that:-
 - a. the Core Baseline includes the following public services and various upgrades: Heathrow Express, LU Piccadilly line, Crossrail, and HS2 with Heathrow passengers using a connection at Old Oak Common. In regard to roads it includes "smart motorway" upgrades to certain junctions on the M23, M25 and M3.
 - b. the extended Baseline includes the Western Rail Access (WRA) to Heathrow which does not yet have a fully secured funding package.
 - c. two additional schemes not included in the extended Baseline are a Southern Rail Access (SRA) and increased Crossrail frequency. The SRA and certain road enhancements are allocated to the Heathrow project on the basis they are required to service the expansion of Heathrow as opposed to background non-airport demand.
3. Just as we do not believe it is reasonable or responsible for any Government to make a decision on airport expansion without first identifying and then consulting those who will be affected by new flight paths, equally, we do not believe a decision should be taken until the full costs are known in relation to West London's surface transport.

Issues and questions

4. Although the Airports Commission has produced a figure - in the region of £5.7bn - for improvements to surface access, last May TfL produced a range of performance based estimates ranging from £2.1bn to £17.6bn for Heathrow's surface access. We have examined the service levels contained in the Commission's consultation and query whether the levels for Heathrow's passengers are adequate. In particular we note that demand for seating capacity on segments of the Piccadilly line and Crossrail far exceed the available seating capacity. While this might be a lesser problem for non-airport users, Heathrow's passengers may have luggage, whole families in tow, and long flights ahead or behind them.

We would be interested to learn whether the service levels projected for Heathrow passengers on public transport in terms of comfort, journey times and frequency, interchanges, ease of use, and reliability etc. are appropriate, and if not, what might be realistic target service levels? We would be interested to learn of similar issues relating to access by road?

5. We note that the Commission's study period for surface access ends in 2030 but elsewhere in the Consultation, Heathrow demand is forecast to grow subsequently by another 50%. Inevitably non-airport background demand will continue to grow, not least because of population growth and propensity to travel. A 15 year study period seems wholly inadequate. There is no proposal on how the substantial growth in demand after 2030 will be served or the necessary capacity financed.

We would be interested to learn what might be the estimate of surface access demand for both Heathrow and relevant non-airport users up to 2030 and beyond to the point when Heathrow reaches capacity, say in 2040, assuming an appropriate level of service?

6. We have not been able to draw firm conclusions on the changing shares of Heathrow access demand for car, bus and rail in the Consultation because we have not found detailed comment on behavioural change of existing users and the choice made by new users who contribute to the growth from Heathrow's enlarged catchment area. There is little evidence or analysis of people's choice in deciding to use car, bus or rail either in relation to background non-airport or airport demand. Significant shifts in modal share are predicted but there is no sense check on whether or not the significant switch to public transport is achievable in the 15 year assessment period used. For example, by 2030 with or without a third runway, overall journey times for rail (incl. crossrail, underground and HEX) from 33 London boroughs do not improve. In fact, times increase for 15 boroughs, reduce marginally for 10 boroughs and stay the same for 8 boroughs.

We would be interested to learn what might regard as realistic shares going forward for each mode of transport and indeed the sub-categories such as various individual rail services, e.g. underground, Crossrail etc.?

7. We are concerned that taking into account the points on demand in paragraphs 1 to 3 above, the result might be that there will be insufficient appropriate capacity for Heathrow passengers even after the planned capacity for both Heathrow and non-airport demand detailed in the Consultation.

We would be interested to learn whether there might be a gap in the provision of capacity in aggregate and in respect of any particular access channel up to the time when Heathrow reaches full capacity?

8. We are concerned that the remedying of a capacity shortfall as might arise under paragraph 4, particularly after 2030, has not been adequately addressed – both as to how the mitigation might be achieved and at what cost. Also, it is not clear what might be the costs associated with a shortfall in capacity – for example, road congestion, longer journey times, wasted time etc. if the target service levels are not achieved.

We would be interested what might be the mitigation of insufficient capacity as currently forecast and the consequences and costs of not satisfying passenger and employee access needs?

9. We have noted a number of gaps in the Consultation so far. We gather the Commission regard this missing information to be at a level of detail that will not impact the choice between the airport options. However, we are concerned that, although the incremental evaluation is important, the viability and value for money of each scheme depends on the absolute values apparently missing at this stage. The Commission says there are a number of studies still underway, for example concerning local roads, local pollution and freight. These are important issues and it cannot be said the detail will not impact the choice of airport proposal. It is unclear when results of these studies will be published and consulted on including their impact on the material consulted on to date. It is possible where we say below that the information is missing, it is somewhere in the large number of documents which we have not had time to fully examine.
- a. Base case is missing. There is no coherent statement of the current or recent situation (e.g. demand, capacity and service level).
 - b. Population data is missing. There appear to be no estimates of population growth and population distribution or evidence of how these factors convert into travel demand and no reconciliation with the Mayor's recent London Infrastructure Plan (July 2014). Specifically, expansion of Heathrow with or without additional flights is said to add to local economic activity but the impact on the non-airport background surface access demand is unclear and appears not to have been included.
 - c. Background non-airport demand is missing. The assumptions on background surface access demand appear either missing or unclear and often only partly available by doing reverse engineering of the figures. Such information is essential in appraising congestion, overcrowding etc.
 - d. Freight Assessment is missing. The Commission says a freight assessment is required.
 - e. Local Road assumptions and analysis are missing. Local roads have been explicitly excluded from the proposals. Not only is this omission unjustified in terms of the failure to address congestion and service levels on local roads but results in no basis for properly examining local air quality which is critical and already in exceedance of statutory limits in the vicinity of the airport.
 - f. Cost-benefit analysis is missing. The Government's Webtag transport appraisal requires a proper cost-benefit analysis. This is not provided.
 - g. Analysis of downtime at level crossings in the southern rail access proposal and a cost-benefit analysis is missing.
 - h. Who finances the surface access. The Consultation avoids this critical issue. There is considerable doubt as to whether private finance is available to fund additional funds of over £30bn required in the NWR case and over £24bn required in the ENR case, plus surface access costs of £5.7bn for the former and £6.3bn for the latter. HAL have

floated the possibility of road charging. Availability of Government funding is in doubt given the UK deficit, the funding required for non-airport background surface access capacity, the additional capacity required after 2030, the private ownership of the airports, the need for funding surface access for competing airports and the fact that a high percentage of the incremental surface access demand at Heathrow will be from UK resident passengers going on long haul holidays. Heathrow is already going to benefit from capacity being created for background non-airport demand possibly without contributing its share of costs (e.g. WRA).

10. There are other issues that we wish to raise as follows:

- a. Inconsistencies and lack of coherence in the consultation report. It has proved difficult and sometimes impossible within a reasonable period of time to reconcile the figures provided in the Commission's detailed technical papers with both gaps and inconsistencies present. It has proved impossible to trace key demand and capacity assumptions through to the impact on service levels with the degree of confidence required for rational decisions. The focus on incremental analysis (e.g. comparing the two and three runway cases) omits key absolute data and over-uses percentages without absolute figures which prevents there being a proper trail or audit of the figures.
- b. Questionable reliance on Peak Hour assessment. The choice of the same peak hour (0700-0800) for people arriving and departing the airport and reliance on a morning peak hour alone is not explained and quite arguably inadequate for a £5bn plus investment. It is not clear whether the peak is an annual average or otherwise.
- c. Viability of southwest rail access (SRA) – Staines/ Richmond/Waterloo. This project is projected to provide 17% of Heathrow's rail access by 2030. But in its previous form as 'Airtrack' there were a number of unresolved issues including the number of closures of level crossing for local traffic.
- d. Increased catchment area adverse impact on the regions. A significant output of the surface access appraisal is the large increase in catchment area for Heathrow on account of HS2 and western rail access (WRA) via Reading. Other Commission papers show an additional Heathrow runway substituting a large part of the growth in regional aviation that would occur if there were no additional runway and presumably this is facilitated by HS2 which raises a question of economic balance between the regions and the southeast and value for money. It is not clear whether the response from regional airports to this challenge is factored into the demand.
- e. Independent appraisal. The Commission has taken on the role of both proposing and appraising its own surface access proposals and this raises the question of who will be undertaking an independent appraisal and who will lead on the proposals after the Commission makes its recommendation in mid-2015.

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