

Airports Commission verdict on shortlist

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Although the Airports Commission found no insurmountable obstacles to the development of a new four-runway, 24 hour hub airport in the Thames Estuary, it has not shortlisted the proposals put forward by Foster + Partners. These proposals are supported by a large number of companies and individuals, including the Mayor of London.

Lord Foster said:

"I predict that Londoners will be scathing in their condemnation of today's announcement, when confronted with the inevitability of the blighting influence of Heathrow - the risks, noise and environmental impact of overflying London - and its inability to cope with predicted growth. They will ask why there was not even the courage to further explore – to study – to research - a strategic long term alternative to the instant gratification of a sadly predictable compromise. Adding a third runway at Heathrow is merely a short term fix - it will inevitably lead to a fourth runway in order to maintain international hub status.

By contrast, a new national airport in the Thames Estuary is a true design for the future, especially when linked into existing and new high speed train networks. It can be achieved more quickly and, based on independent analysis, there would not be a substantial cost difference between a fresh start at Thames Hub compared to a stop-gap solution at Heathrow.

Elsewhere in the world, relocating an airport that no longer serves its purpose is considered normal practice. France did it twice in a matter of decades. In Hong Kong we created a man-made island the size of Heathrow and built what was then the largest airport in the world – all in the space of six years. The pattern of the most competitive emerging economies is to replace the old and obsolescent and go boldly forward with the new, an opportunity today's decision denies this country. The outcome of this process calls into question the validity of the Commission."

Notes to editors:

- In July, the Airports Commission issued a series of feasibility studies investigating the potential of an Inner Estuary airport. In their response to these studies, the Thames Hub team highlighted inaccuracies in the data cited and costs.
- The costs were significantly overestimated – independent estimates show that the new hub would cost about £5 billion more when compared to expansion at Heathrow and would be faster to build, with a planning process that is identical. Despite this, the Commission has chosen to eliminate the Thames Hub proposals, ignoring the major long-term social, environmental and economic benefits that a brand new airport would deliver.

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- The Commission is due to make its final recommendations in summer 2015.
Support for a new airport is expected to continue to strengthen, as a third runway at Heathrow will not provide the spare capacity needed for an international hub airport, and a fourth runway would be socially undeliverable.
- The Secretary of State set the terms of reference for the Airports Commission:
'The Airports Commission will examine the scale and timing of any requirement for additional capacity to maintain the UK's position as Europe's most important aviation hub, and it will identify and evaluate how any need for additional capacity should be met in the short, medium and long term.' 7 September 2012

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