

## Open letter to the media from Cllr Hodgins and other Council Leaders / MPs and Peers

Dear Editor

### **RE: The hidden costs of airport expansion**

Lots of promises have been made to lots of people in different parts of the country about the extra domestic routes they can expect if a third Heathrow runway is built.

It's all part of a divide and rule strategy which glosses over the health impacts of worsening noise and air pollution in south and west London while cheerily talking up the prospects of improved internal connections from an expanded hub airport.

Wherever we live in the UK we all have a stake in ensuring Parliament makes the right decision on Heathrow expansion. We know from the Government's own forecasts that an additional runway can be delivered more quickly and at less cost at Gatwick.

There will be a price to pay for Heathrow expansion – and not just in the South East. The Transport Secretary has a duty to spell out the true costs for taxpayers – and to be realistic about the benefits.

But it's the airlines that decide where aircraft fly – not the airport and not the Government.

You only have to look at BA's recent decision to halve the number of flights between Heathrow and Leeds Bradford to see how fragile domestic services are. Which minister can guarantee in perpetuity the taxpayer subsidies that would be needed to keep 'unprofitable' routes open?

It is far more likely that the eight domestic routes we have today will shrink. The Airports Commission saw these dropping to four by 2030. The only way existing routes can survive – and new routes can be made viable - is if they are subsidised by the Government. They cannot be guaranteed.

Of course Heathrow will tell you that a hub airport is the key to better connections. But the official forecasts now say that Heathrow will be full within two years of a third runway opening. At this point the airlines can be expected to switch to more profitable point-to-point operations – squeezing out the remaining domestic routes.

None of today's 'promises' or assurances can be relied on. What is certain is that taxpayers everywhere – including those living hundreds of miles away from the South East - will all be paying for the expansion.

The airport's shareholders are not expecting to stump up for currently unbudgeted costs of around £10bn for the new rail schemes that will be needed in south and west London if the additional road traffic generated by a third runway is to be contained.

These costs will be met by the UK taxpayer. So not only will people in the North of England and Scotland be saddled with their share of the bill for yet another piece of transport infrastructure in the South East, they risk seeing their own road and rail projects deferred once the public money for these schemes begins to run out.

There is an alternative. The Secretary of State may have made up his mind about Heathrow but the Government's own evidence shows that with or without expansion Gatwick will provide more domestic connections – while with expansion it will produce greater economic benefits. Gatwick is also likely to prove much more attractive to the low cost operators who ultimately will be the most likely to make domestic services work.

We should also look to provincial airports to meet some of the increased demand. Birmingham, Manchester and other airports in Scotland and the North are already doubling direct flights, including some to rapidly expanding emerging countries in Asia.

We do not understand how in the face of these facts the Transport Secretary continues to back Heathrow – nor how he can maintain that somehow future domestic routes can be safeguarded. The fact is that no one can say with any certainty what the rules will be when an expanded Heathrow is finally up and running.

Yours Sincerely,



**Cllr Paul Hodgins**  
**Leader of Richmond Council**

On behalf of:

- Cllr Ravi Govindia – Leader of Wandsworth Council
- Cllr Ray Puddifoot – Leader of Hillingdon Council
- Cllr Simon Dudley – Leader of Windsor and Maidenhead Council
- Zac Goldsmith MP – Richmond Park and Kingston
- Dr Vince Cable MP - Twickenham
- Andy Slaughter MP - Hammersmith
- Ruth Cadbury MP - Brentford
- Marsha de Cordova MP – Battersea
- Justine Greening MP – Putney
- Baroness Kramer
- Lord True