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Department for
Transport

From the Secretary of State

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Dear Tessa,

13 FEB 2009

Thank you for your letter of 30 January 2009 regarding the concerns of your constituents on the expansion of Heathrow Airport.

Necessity

On the issue the necessity of a third runway, Heathrow is already operating at over 99% capacity. So small events can have a disproportionate impact on delays to passengers - either weather-related (fog, strong winds) or technical/operational incidents. Schiphol and other European airports with more runways operate at around 75% capacity and are more resilient against disruption. To stay competitive we need additional runway capacity at Heathrow.

We cannot escape the fact there continues to be strong demand for air travel in the UK. Our long term forecasts support this and demand for travel from the South East is especially strong. If we don't get more airport capacity, many world-wide destinations won't be available from UK airports, and the UK economy will suffer.

In 2005, there were 228m passengers and 465m passengers are expected by 2030. There has been no new full-length runway built in the South East since the extension at Gatwick in the 1950s. In contrast, other European airports have expanded. Schiphol and Paris CDG now operate five and four runways respectively, and a fourth runway is planned at Frankfurt.

Environment

In order to reinforce our commitments on noise and air quality, additional flights above the current 480,000 a year limit will only be allowed once the independent Civil Aviation Authority is satisfied that noise and air quality conditions are being met and that any additional capacity would not compromise those limits. The air quality limit is already statutory, and the noise limit will now also have legal force.

The support for expansion at Heathrow is subject to a limit on the increase in the number of flights. The Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport consultation considered an increase in capacity to 702,000 flights a year. However I announced support for an increase to 605,000 flights a year, around half the increase initially proposed. Any increases in capacity above the 605,000 limit will be subject to a review in 2020, which will take into account the current three tests on air quality, noise and surface access, as well as the UK's progress against its emissions reduction targets. It would also require an additional planning application from the airport operator.

Any additional capacity created by the expansion of Heathrow will, after consultation, be subject to a new 'green slot' principle, which will help to incentivise the use at Heathrow of the most modern aircraft and bring further benefits in terms of noise and air quality.

I also announced the establishment of a new target to ensure that aviation emissions in 2050 are below 2005 levels. The Committee on Climate Change has been asked to provide advice on the best basis for this development.

Having taken the lead in successfully promoting the inclusion of aviation in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, the Government will be pressing hard for international aviation to be part of the global deal on climate change at Copenhagen later this year, to further ensure that the costs of aviation are taken account of and addressed.

Taken together this gives the toughest climate change regime for aviation of any country in the world, and gives Ministers the confidence that we will achieve our 80% emissions reduction target. In addition it will be one of our highest priorities to secure international agreement on measures to reduce aviation emissions.

Noise

The impacts of increased capacity on the noise contour limit have been considered and the results are given in the *'Adding Capacity at Heathrow*

Airport consultation document, which is available online, alongside the 2003 'Future of Air Transport' White Paper, at www.dft.gov.uk.

Our modelling suggests the size of the 57dba noise contour with a fully utilised third runway in 2030 would be no larger than in 2002, though clearly the shape of the contour will change. Even with a third runway and around 605,000 movements a year by 2020, there would be fewer people within the 57dBA noise contour than in 2002.

L_{eq} is the equivalent continuous sound level. The Air Transport White Paper confirmed the continuing use of the L_{eq} metric and the 57dBA threshold in consideration of future airport development.

It is also important to note that the proposal to introduce mixed mode operations was not supported. This means that residents around Heathrow will continue to benefit from at least eight hours of noise respite per day.

The recently published Attitudes to Noise from Aviation Sources in England (ANASE) study reported back two key findings:

Firstly, that it is highly probable that annoyance with a particular level of aircraft noise is higher than found when the Aircraft Noise Index Study (ANIS) was carried out in the 1980s although it is still open to question by how much, and why.

Secondly, that there is no threshold noise level at which there is an 'onset of significant community annoyance.' This means that there is no point at which there is a sudden, 'step change' in people's attitudes to noise, which would be evidenced by a sharp increase in the disturbance caused by a relatively minor increase in the amount of noise. In other words, the relationship between noise and annoyance is linear.

In summary we recognise that noise is a very important consideration to residents. This is why we made a commitment that expansion of Heathrow would have to involve no increase in the size of the 57 decibel noise contour compared with 2002 levels (the last year for which information was available before the Air Transport White Paper); and it is one reason why we proposed such an extensive and inclusive consultation so people could let us have their views.

Like any responsible Government we also undertake research to help ensure our policy is kept up to date. The ANASE into attitudes towards aircraft noise study was undertaken with that in mind. But the fact is that it did not lead to clear conclusions and so we see no basis for changing our policy on noise. Contrary to some claims, the report did not suggest that the 57

decibel level for onset of community annoyance should move to 54 or 50 or any other number. May I suggest that you refer to the Chief Economist's statement on the ANASE study for further clarification. This can be found on our website at:

www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/aviation/environmentalissues/Anase/anasechiefeconomist

You state that in your opinion the unit of measurement used for assessing aircraft noise in the Adding Capacity at Heathrow airport Consultation and in the Air Transport White Paper is erroneous.

The Equivalent Continuous Sound Level, expressed as dBA Leq or dB LAeq (as defined by the European Commission) is the most widely accepted noise index for assessing the effects of long term aircraft noise exposure. A form of Leq is the European Commission preferred noise index for assessing aircraft noise and is defined in EC Directive 2002/49/EC for the assessment of all transportation noise in EU member states, including road, rail and aircraft noise. Secondly the World Health Organisation (WHO) also recommends the use of Leq in relation to transportation noise, including aircraft noise and provides information on the potential health risks of transportation noise in relation to Leq.

I do not dispute that aircraft noise is intermittent, but rail noise is equally so and in many instances so is road traffic noise. You mention the 1960's Wilson report that defined the Noise and Number Index (NNI). NNI makes no better attempt at representing intermittent noise than Leq, and due to a number of other deficiencies, NNI was replaced by the Leq index in 1990 for aircraft noise assessment, bringing the UK into line with a number of other countries. Virtually all countries with major airports use Leq for their assessment of aircraft noise, with a number that did not use Leq having recently changed to either the Leq index or a form of Leq.

Decision

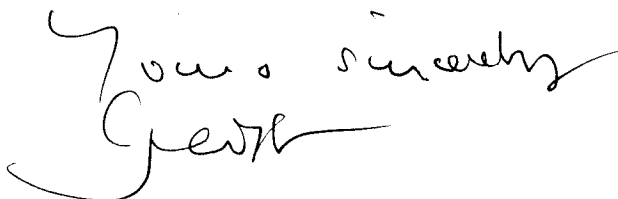
Last year the Department for Transport completed a major consultation on Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport which received almost 70,000 responses. The consultation sought views on proposals for delivering new capacity at the airport, as well as on a number of current operational procedures on the existing runways. After careful and thorough consideration of the consultation responses and all other relevant evidence I announced to Parliament on 15 January 2009 my decisions on these important issues.

In summary, the decisions on Heathrow are to:

- confirm support for a third runway at Heathrow with a slightly longer runway (2,200m operational length) and additional passenger terminal facilities, subject to an aggregate limit of 605,000 annual movements which would be subject to review in 2020;
- reject the introduction of mixed mode (taking off and landing on both runways) on the existing runways as an interim measure before a third runway, which will maintain the benefits for residents of the present alternation, which gives them a respite from aircraft noise for at least 8 hours per day;
- end the 'Cranford agreement' (which currently limits easterly departures off the northern runway), so redistributing noise more fairly around the airport;
- retain 'westerly preference' operations (the preferred direction of operation of the runways except in strong contrary winds);
- confirm that the benefits of night-time rotation (the practice of alternating the use of the existing runways at night between westerly and easterly preference, subject to weather conditions) will continue; and,
- confirm that the benefits of 'early morning alternation' (the practice of alternating arriving aircraft between the two runways in the 0600 to 0700 period, subject to operational requirements) will also continue.

The airport operator at Heathrow has been invited to consider the decisions carefully. If it decides to pursue a new runway then it will need to prepare relevant plans and obtain planning permissions and other necessary consents. This will involve further consultation in due course.

I hope that you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yours sincerely Geoff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

GEOFF HOON