

MPs urged to put public health first and reject 'unbuildable' Heathrow plan



Transport secretary Chris Grayling is pressing ahead with support for a third Heathrow runway without providing full details of the real impact of increased noise or of worsening air quality on people's lives say council leaders.

The government has today tabled its updated Airports National Policy Statement (NPS). It fails to address the key recommendations of the Transport Select Committee on noise and air quality.

The TSC report had criticised the way the Department for Transport had understated the numbers of people likely to be affected by noise. According to documents previously withheld by the government, at least 2.2m people could be affected by noise from an expanded airport with 973,000 people experiencing increased day time noise.

Chris Grayling previously claimed in October 2016 that an expanded Heathrow would be quieter in 2030 than today.

Today's updated NPS provides no additional information about which communities could be affected. The government is still unable to provide details of flightpaths for a new runway. MPs had said that without actual flightpaths it was 'impossible' to know what the exact noise outcomes would be.

The Leader of Wandsworth Council, Cllr Ravi Govindia said: "You wouldn't buy a house without checking if it was going to be overflowed or affected by toxic fumes. Now ministers expect parliament to give a blank cheque to Heathrow for a third runway affecting more than 2.2m people without knowing where the planes will fly."

The TSC in its final report had said that a third runway could have a 'seriously damaging effect on communities living under and adjacent to flightpaths.'

They had called on the government to define what it meant by 'significant adverse impacts' and to spell out what it considered to be an 'acceptable' number of people newly exposed to noise due to the scheme.



None of these concerns have been dealt with in today's updated NPS.

The NPS also offers no further protection for residents from worsening air pollution. The government's own air quality plan has been found unlawful on three occasions. The TSC report had said the proposed runway was at high risk of breaching legal levels between 2026 and 2029. The government's current Air Quality plan does not even provide for an expanded Heathrow.

The committee had recommended an additional condition to ensure that a future Heathrow would be within legal limits to preserve the lives and health of London's population. The recommendation has not been accepted, which makes the NPS illegal as well as unworkable.

Richmond Council leader Cllr Gareth Roberts said: "We are no further forward on air quality. Ministers have a duty to protect people living and working in the area around Heathrow from the ill—health consequences of poor air quality.

"The NPS provides no protections which can ensure how air quality obligations can be achieved. Yet ministers still seem set on backing a new runway which would damage the health of 121,000 people in the area and in some cases cause premature death."

The NPS also provides no new measures to protect airports outside London from the effects of a third runway - with specifically no detail on how assurances about maintaining domestic connections to Heathrow could be honoured.

Data produced by the Department for Transport shows an expanded Heathrow would draw traffic away from other UK airports. So while the additional runway would serve 43m passengers annually some 17m would be drawn from growth at other airports.

In this scenario Manchester would lose growth of 5m passengers per annum and Birmingham 2m. Smaller regional airports would lose 10m.

Cllr Simon Dudley, Leader of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead said: "The government appears not to have listened to the concerns of the Transport Select Committee about the effects of expansion on noise and air quality.

"The third runway proposals don't seem to show how Heathrow can build this runway without breaching air quality limits and exposing people to significant adverse impacts from noise. Ministers should be given the full health consequences for people affected before making this decision."

Cllr Ray Puddifoot, Leader of Hillingdon Council, said: "We find it deplorable that the government has decided to support the expansion of Heathrow Airport, which will break the law on pollution and have a disastrous impact on people's health and wellbeing.

"A new runway will breach the legal air quality limits, causing damage to the environment and contributing to thousands of premature deaths in London up to 2030 and beyond. It will also see around 2.2 million residents' lives blighted by intolerable noise.

"The government has repeatedly ignored the facts for the past seven years, and it is unthinkable that any government could allow such a terrible decision to go ahead. We will continue to fight the expansion of Heathrow in the courts, on behalf of our residents and the wider population, with other councils."