

HACAN

Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise

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Opening Statement to the Public Inquiry into a Fifth Terminal at Heathrow by the Chairman of HACAN, Dermot Cox, Tuesday 16th May 1995

Introduction

Firstly, I would like to say what a privilege it is to be able to present a short summary of HACAN's case to this Public Inquiry. Those, like myself, who have not been involved in this type of inquiry before, have been very impressed by the thoroughness and fairness with which the proceedings have been organised. The various members of the Secretariat have always been extremely helpful, while the Inspector has applied a wise mix of encouragement and the threat of sanctions should we be in danger of holding the process up. We have every confidence that the Inquiry will make a full and balanced assessment of the important issues before it.

Noise

I will say a few words about our association. The Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise has over 7,000 direct members. They, like me, joined because they consider the level of noise caused by aircraft using Heathrow to be quite unacceptable today, with a four terminal airport. Approximately half a million people are affected. I will briefly describe how Heathrow airport as it is now diminishes the quality of my life. I live and work in Kew, about seven miles from Heathrow. Typically the day starts some time between 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning when the legally permitted night flights start thundering overhead.

During the period between six and seven o'clock there is also very intense overflying. Then three hours into the typical day, at 7 am either the noise continues until 3 pm or there is a relatively quiet period until 3 pm after which the noise

resumes until midnight. This is because of the runway alternation system which currently allows some hours of relative quiet each day, to which I will return later. During the eight hour period when planes are flying overhead, they pass every 90 seconds so that the noise is continuous. This noise intrudes into all aspects of work and leisure. What makes me most angry about the impact of Heathrow, apart from being prevented from having a decent night's sleep, is the way it destroys my opportunity to have times of peace to relax and recuperate. For at least half of each day it is impossible to sit in my garden in quietness or to enjoy a walk along the Thames towpath or to experience any tranquillity in nearby Kew Gardens.

You are, Sir, I know going to hear variations of this personal experience of Heathrow airport many times in the course of the Inquiry. You will hear from people who suffer take-off noise rather than approach noise, from people living on the west side of the airport, or north or south. You will hear from mothers who are most concerned about impact of air pollution from the Heathrow traffic and aircraft on their children. Between two and three thousand individuals have registered to speak in person. To put that statistic in some context, every single day of the year, there are one thousand one hundred flights at Heathrow. Many of us hear the noise from over half of those flights.

I hope this explains why HACAN exists and is present in some force at this Inquiry. I can assure you that most of us are busy people, who have better things to do with our time than fight single-issue campaigns. Most of us have long-established ties to the areas where we live. We believe in fighting to preserve them as environments fit to live in now and for future generations, rather than run away from the undoubted might of powerful business interests. There is a long and honourable tradition in Britain of civic pride and a concern to ensure a balance between the undoubted importance of industry and the preservation of civilised environments, not least in the nation's capital city. Unfortunately the traditions which gave us London's many parks, commons and open spaces in the past two hundred years, have not yet caught up with the sudden and explosive growth of air transport which has happened since the 1960s. We hope this Inquiry will mark a turning point in public policy, recognising that the citizens of London and the Thames Valley have a right to be protected from further destruction of their quality of life.

BAA's proposals

I would now like to comment on the specific proposals put forward by BAA plc for a fifth terminal. The necessarily short time allowed for opening statements prevents me from going into the arguments in too much detail. In many ways this is an advantage. Most of the issues which need to be evaluated in relation to this application can be seen most clearly through the application of well-informed common sense, or to use more modern jargon, reality testing. Over-concentration on technical issues and alternative future models can distract from some fairly obvious but powerful comparisons and conclusions.

Scale

When assessing the Terminal 5 proposals, it is vital to appreciate the size and scale of the development. Terminal 5 would be over three times the size of the last development at Heathrow, Terminal 4. To call it a terminal is misleading, it would really be a whole new airport. Terminal 5's capacity would be 30 million passengers a year. If it existed today, Terminal 5 *on its own* would be Europe's third largest airport, after Heathrow Terminals 1-4 and Frankfurt. Terminal 5's 30 million passenger per year capacity makes it larger *on its own* than Paris Charles de Gaulle airport, which had 26 million passengers in 1993 or Amsterdam Schipol which had 21 million.

You will hear many claims about the expected doubling of passenger numbers in the South East over the next 20 years and how the extra 30 million passengers handled by Terminal 5 would not even be enough to meet demand. But the question this Inquiry must address is whether Heathrow is a viable and acceptable site for a 30 million passenger terminal complex. The answer will depend on assessments of the consequences of adding such capacity for flight numbers, traffic and public transport, noise, air pollution and safety. BAA claim that Terminal 5 will have limited impacts in these areas, and therefore should be approved on balance, because it will generate only a small increase in flight numbers. This issue is so central to HACAN's case against Terminal 5 that I will quote the relevant section from BAA's statement of case:

"The forecast annual number of passenger air transport movements at 80 million passengers per annum with Terminal 5 is 453,000, exceeding the forecast annual number of patms at 50 mppa without Terminal 5 by 36,000, or 8.6%. Greater numbers of larger aircraft with Terminal 5 allow a significantly larger number of passengers to be carried on a larger number of movements without any extension of the operating day or pressure otherwise to increase movements in the night hours or to abandon the present operating regime."

The key figures are that BAA claims that an additional 30 million passengers per year can be handled with Terminal 5 with an increase of only 36,000 flights compared to the case without Terminal 5. The total of 453,000 flights with Terminal 5 is in fact 41,000 higher than the current annual moving total which reached 412,000 in March this year.

You have told us, Sir, that during the Inquiry, you will be visiting three of the largest airports in Europe after Heathrow. When you visit Charles de Gaulle, we ask you to observe the volume of flights using its two runways, the numbers of people streaming in and out of the different terminal buildings, the volume of traffic coming off the motorway to the airport. The 26 million passengers at Charles de Gaulle in 1993 needed 310,000 flights. Then we ask you to remind yourself that Terminal 5 *on its own* will be larger than Charles de Gaulle airport in terms of passenger numbers. The question will naturally arise whether it is feasible or desirable to add capacity on this scale to the existing Heathrow site.

When you visit Schipol, please consider the fact that Schipol is significantly smaller in capacity terms than Terminal 5. It had only 21 million passengers in 1993. Yet they needed 288,000 flights. Again, Schipol generates large volumes of traffic and noise - and for understandable reasons the local population is very concerned about safety at the airport. Schipol is described by the applicants as a threat to Heathrow. Yet Terminal 5 *on its own* would be almost 50% larger than Schipol. When the comparison is made, is it credible that with Terminal 5 there would be only 40,000 more flights at Heathrow?

Let us stay with reality and look at the available runway capacity at Heathrow and the spare capacity in the road system around Heathrow. As anyone who uses the airport is painfully aware, both are congested to the point of severe inefficiency already. Flights are delayed on take-off more often than not, while on arrival most Heathrow passengers are familiar with the routine of flying round in circles waiting for a slot to land. Congestion is so great that the CAA has just announced a reduction in the separation time for many departing aircraft from 2 minutes to 60 seconds. British Airways and British Midland pilots of smaller planes may for an experimental period at their discretion take off after 60 seconds and fly up and over the wake vortices of larger preceding planes. It sounds alarming - and according to Mr Joe McGee of the Air Traffic Controllers Union, the IPMS, on BBC radio last week, air traffic controllers do not consider this to be a safe experiment. Air traffic controllers are already under intense pressure to maximise the throughput on Heathrow's runways.

The conclusion is obvious. It was stated in the Financial Times on 8th May by Steve Garner the deputy general manager at West Drayton Air Traffic Control. He said Heathrow's runways are:

“as close to capacity as you can get”.

Last week, there was also an important announcement concerning road traffic around Heathrow. The levels of air pollution on the section of the M25 adjacent to Heathrow have reached such a dangerous level that the Department of Transport is to enforce lower speed limits in an attempt to cut the impact of the cocktail of poisonous gases being created.

The conclusion is clear, the road system around Heathrow to use Mr Garner's phrase again is:

“as close to capacity as you can get”.

Widening the M25 to 12 lanes between the two junctions adjacent to Heathrow will hardly deal with the impact of 20 million more passengers trying to get in and out of London on the four lane M4 or the Piccadilly line, or even on the 6 million passenger per year capacity Heathrow Express.

We are constantly told that Heathrow is the airport of choice for travellers from London and helps keep London a world city. But those who work in the City of London find Heathrow an extremely inconvenient location. The Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, summed it up in the following quotation included in the Daily Telegraph's Business quotes of the year:

“I have nothing against Heathrow and Gatwick - except the location.”

Or, as the influential Lex column in the Financial Times put it on March 13th this year in a piece entitled 'The City of London':

“The gruelling journey from Heathrow airport to central London is in itself enough to drive business to Frankfurt.”

And the centre of gravity of London is moving inexorably eastwards. Leading law firms move from the West End to the City. Leading banks are now moving from the City to Canary Wharf. For these locations the airport of choice for international flights is in fact Stansted - a short rail journey from Liverpool street, conveniently situated within the Broadgate financial complex. There is only one problem, British Airways chooses not to operate from Stansted. It suits airlines to concentrate their

business at Heathrow. But they cannot claim they are meeting the requirements of their customers.

In fact a large part of Terminal 5's capacity has nothing to do with meeting the travel needs of people coming to or from London or the UK. Over a third of passengers at Heathrow are transfer passengers, flying in to Heathrow and then flying straight out again. They bring negligible benefit to London overall but substantial benefit to BAA, whose shops they visit and British Airways, whose flights they are likely to use. Transfer traffic at Heathrow is in fact crowding out flights from the UK regions, which cannot get slots. A simple mathematical calculation shows that almost the whole capacity of Terminal 5 could be accounted for by transfer passengers. The combined total capacity of Heathrow with Terminal 5 is forecast to be 80 million passengers. A third of 80 million is 26 million. 26 million passengers is close to the 30 million capacity of Terminal 5.

Transfer traffic causes environmental harm to the people whose lives are disrupted by noise or air pollution. But airlines pay no environmental levy. Government policy is that the polluter should pay. This applies to everyone, including the elderly paying VAT on their heating bills, apart from airlines. In fact, airlines do not even pay tax on the fuel that they use.

Given the unavoidable realities I have outlined, can it make sense to build Europe's third largest airport at Heathrow?

As this is a Planning Inquiry, it is also worth recalling that the Government has a strategic plan for development in the South East. This strategy is summarised in the Department of Transport's Runway Capacity in the South East report in the following four points :

- 1 create a new focus for development in the East Thames Corridor;
- 2 foster development opportunities in inner London, the northern and eastern fringes of the South East particularly in the outer parts of the A12 corridor in Essex and in Kent, and in the coastal towns;
- 3 recognise the growth associated with the planned expansion of Stansted airport and the role of Ashford in the light of the opening of the Channel tunnel
- 4 respect the infrastructural and environmental constraints on the capacity for major growth to the west and south of London, notably in Berkshire,

north Hampshire, South Oxfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, Surrey and around Crawley and Gatwick.

HACAN considers that a proposal to build Europe's third largest airport in west London cannot be described as being in accordance with this strategy. In fact, it is so diametrically opposed to the Government's planning strategy, that we find it interesting that it has reached the point that over a million pounds of public money and 18 months of many people's time will be devoted to discussing it at a planning Inquiry.

Forecasts

To be fair to BAA, an explanation is given for the riddle of how Terminal 5 would allow a 60% increase in passenger numbers at Heathrow, while requiring only a 10% increase in flights. This explanation is the projected introduction of larger aircraft, and in particular superjumbos taking 600 to 800 passengers. BAA projects that by 2013, the average number of passengers per aircraft will have risen from 126 today to 177, an increase of 40%.

HACAN believes there are overwhelming grounds for rejecting this forecast. Firstly, there is no sign that aircraft manufacturers have any plans to build the so-called superjumbos. The president of Airbus Industrie was quoted in the Financial Times on 3rd of April as saying that such aircraft were not commercially viable because there were only two potential customers, British Airways and Singapore Airlines, and that Singapore Airlines did not seem very keen.

Secondly, it is widely recognised within the air transport industry that the deregulation of airlines is creating a trend towards the use of smaller aircraft as airlines compete more intensely by operating more frequent services.

Thirdly, examination of the forecasts made by all air transport experts about passenger per aircraft trends at Heathrow in the past 20 years shows that without exception these forecasts have been dramatically wrong. They have consistently over-estimated increases in passengers per aircraft. The inverse is inevitably true: they have also consistently under-estimated the increases in flights. This is the variable which actually matters to people affected by Heathrow because more flights means more noise, more air pollution more traffic and more pressure on safety standards. I will illustrate some of the mistaken forecasts made in the past 20 years, not as an exercise in history, but because we believe similarly unlikely forecasts are being made by the supporters of the proposals for a fifth terminal.

This Inquiry would not be opening if the decision to build a new airport for London at Maplin had been proceeded with. One of the main reasons given for cancelling Maplin was that it had been discovered that there would be no need for additional runway capacity because the introduction of larger aircraft would accommodate increasing passenger numbers with the same number of flights. The Secretary of State explained that passengers per aircraft were expected to rise to 225 by 1990, conveniently removing the need for a new airport. The actual figure in 1994, as I have already mentioned was 126, a little over half that projected.

In 1979, an Inquiry under Mr Justice Glidewell, as he then was, considered the British Airports Authority application for a fourth terminal at Heathrow. Mr Glidewell accepted the BAA prediction that passengers per aircraft would rise to 146 by 1987. As I have indicated, in 1995 that level has not been reached and we do not know if it ever will.

Mr Justice Glidewell was convinced by those opposing a fourth terminal that Heathrow with three terminals was already harming the quality of life for its neighbours. He said:

“It is my view that the present levels of noise around Heathrow are unacceptable in a civilised country. I find that this effect of T4 in slowing down the improvement even to this limited extent should only be accepted, if at all, because of overriding national necessity.”

This was the first appearance of the argument about national interest. It won a fourth terminal, against the interest of the people of London and the Thames Valley. It is not surprising that this is one of the main arguments put forward by the applicants today. Mr Justice Glidewell considered that practical measures should be introduced to protect the interests of local people. He said:

“I am strongly of the opinion that all possible steps should be taken to satisfy those living around Heathrow that this is the last major expansion at the airport.”

Does the Inspector’s conclusion count for nothing fifteen years later? Was this a pious statement of hope designed to pacify objectors until the next major expansion came along?

In fact, Mr Justice Glidewell could see the dangers of giving only verbal reassurance and he sought to enforce his judgment by imposing a permanent ceiling on flight numbers at Heathrow. The applicants for a fourth terminal said that it would allow Heathrow to expand to 38 million passengers and would need only 260,000 flights.

The Government accepted the need for a limit and stated that, when the Fourth Terminal opened, in 1986, the limit would be a little higher, at 275,000 flights

The next chapter in the story tells the sorry tale of how this limit was abolished before it had even begun to operate. In 1981 to 1983 there was the first Inquiry into a Fifth Terminal at Heathrow under Mr Graham Eyre QC, as he then was, which also considered developing Stansted as London's third airport. It is quite surprising that this proposal came up so soon after the clear statement that Terminal 4 should be the end. In fact the proposal was supported by British Airways, but vigorously and successfully opposed by the then British Airports Authority, local councils and groups including HACAN.

It was accepted that a Fifth Terminal would allow Heathrow to increase its passenger capacity to 53 million a year by 1995. But since the limit of 275,000 flights was still pending, the applicants had to prove that they could build a fifth terminal, with a capacity of 15 million passengers in the 1983 version without increasing flight numbers. This is a similar position to that faced by the applicants today who have to prove that a 30 million passenger terminal can be accommodated at Heathrow when the runways are operating at 95% of capacity already. As the proposal was contentious, a range of different projections was made of passengers per aircraft. British Airways was most bullish, saying that larger aircraft would mean that by 1995 there would be 211 passengers per aircraft. This would allow the new terminal to come into being with no additional flights. In fact, the true figure in 1994 was 126 passengers per aircraft - British Airways over-estimated by 67%. British Airports Authority and Inspector Eyre were very cautious and predicted 177. They were only 40% out, looking ahead a full fourteen years. The only people who were right in their prediction of passenger numbers per aircraft were local councils and groups opposed to Heathrow expansion who said in 1979 and again in 1981-83 that the air transport industry forecasts were over-optimistic.

Rightly, Graham Eyre QC rejected the fifth terminal proposals, but reading his report, you can see he felt the need to offer the air transport industry some compensation. He did this by choosing to attack the limit on flight numbers recommended four years previously by his predecessor, Inspector Glidewell. He said:

“The decision to impose the limit was ill-considered and ill-advised.”

He went on:

“The imposition of the proposed atm limit would have no perceptible effect upon the noise climate in the Heathrow area but such a limit would squander a valuable resource for no environmental or social gain whatsoever.”

Inspector Eyre was very categorical that the noise climate at Heathrow would improve:

“The truth of the matter is that, provided the Government’s present intentions are implemented, and it is of critical importance that they should be, the improvement in the noise climate will be considerable. Notwithstanding the understandable scepticism that I encountered, that prognostication is irrefutable and, if viewed objectively, should provide some comfort.”

Reading the report, it is clear that Inspector Eyre, expected that the abolition of the limit would allow a 10% increase in flights to 300,000 a year. The Government readily accepted his recommendation and abolished Inspector Glidewell’s limit in 1985 before the first plane landed at Terminal 4 in 1986.

Now, Sir, you will hear evidence from hundreds, possibly thousands of people living around Heathrow that far from the noise climate improving, there has been a very perceptible and irrefutable worsening in aircraft noise. The reason is that flight numbers have increased far beyond those forecast with a fifth terminal. They have climbed from 273,000 in 1984 to 409,000 in 1994 - an increase of 50% in ten years and far beyond the 300,000 forecast in 1983. We have suffered a ‘virtual’ fifth terminal because passenger numbers rose to 51 million in 1994 and in 1995 will almost exactly match the 53 million predicted in 1983 if a fifth terminal had been built. We have suffered the noise, the air pollution and the traffic of the fifth terminal proposed in 1983. But still the air transport industry comes back for more. This uncontrolled increase explains the strength of feeling against Heathrow today.

The main impact of larger aircraft has already been played out. Given our movement from innocence to experience on the subject of larger aircraft, it would be foolish and irresponsible to accept claims for major increases over the next twenty years.

HACAN thoroughly disputes BAA’s claim that it will take until 2013 for the level of flights at Heathrow to rise by 40,000 from the current level of 412,000 to the maximum capacity under current operating procedures of 453,000 flights a year. Last year in one year the increase was 15,000 atms from 394,000 to 409,000. In the five years since 1989 the increase has been 64,000. That is why so many people are complaining, joining HACAN and registering for this Inquiry. Flights are going up by an average of a thousand a month. We will be watching the counter clicking

round over the next 18 months. At current rates we will be up to 430,000 flights a year by the end of the Inquiry. We say, conservatively, that Heathrow will have reached its capacity by the year 2000. We are sure that, as has happened since 1983, BAA will accommodate the associated increase in passengers within the existing terminals.

Our contention is that Heathrow is close to the natural capacity limit of its existing runways. This is obvious to anyone who uses the airport. Whatever figures may be quoted about demand to travel to the South East or change planes in London, if Heathrow's runways do not have the capacity to meet that demand, the demand will have to be met elsewhere - either in the South East, or in the UK regions or in Europe.

HACAN's fears

I hope I have made it clear that HACAN's greatest fear is that if this massive fifth terminal is built, it will add passenger capacity far in excess of what the airport's runways can handle under current operating procedures, despite BAA's claims to the contrary. We believe that if permission were to be given, the immediate consequence would be that BAA and the airlines would argue that the national interest required new means of increasing runway capacity at Heathrow. There are many ways by which this could be achieved and BAA may propose one, several or all of them. All of them involve further destruction of the environment for the half million citizens around the airport. BAA has made it clear in the Runway Capacity Enhancement Study that it is actively considering one method: the ending of Runway Alternation and Noise Preferential Routes. These are environmental measures designed to provide some protection for local people from the worst effects of continuous and intensive overflying. We consider that any objective assessment of the flight implications of allowing a fifth terminal shows that calls for the end of runway alternation and noise preferential routes would be inevitable. Other options for increasing runway capacity would be to increase night flights - and we know that the air transport industry successfully lobbied the Department of Transport to propose a quota system for night flights which would have ended any numerical limit. We and the local councils defeated those proposals and the legal battle continues, but the threat of more night flights remains. Thirdly, the option of a close parallel third runway within the airport's existing perimeter would also almost inevitably appear on the agenda.

We say the right solution for Heathrow is to let it naturally reach its capacity with the existing runways, existing operating procedures and existing terminals. As BAA's Statement of Case shows this would allow some real improvement in the noise climate and quality of life for people living around the airport. We feel the

conditions now are unacceptable and we are entitled to derive some of the benefit from the introduction of quieter aircraft over the next 20 years, rather than have the benefit taken back several times over, as has been our experience to date, through massive increases in the numbers of flights. Since we do not accept BAA's projections of only small increases in flight numbers with Terminal 5, it follows that we do not accept their projections of a reduction in the impact of noise if Terminal 5 is allowed. Rather we would expect the noise impact of building Europe's third largest airport at Heathrow to be devastating.

Conclusion

You will hear many arguments about the national interest requiring Heathrow to expand to maintain London's position as a world city. Those of us who live in London say that to remain a world city, we must ensure it remains a pleasant and civilised city in which to live and work. The time has come to say Heathrow has reached maturity. It will always be a leading world airport and is likely to remain the largest in Europe for decades. But to allow a fifth terminal at Heathrow would be to begin another cycle of expansion which the living city and its people could not and should not be asked to endure.