

## **At a Glance: Runway Alternation; Cranford Agreement; Westerly Preference**

### **Runway Alternation**

#### **What is Runway Alternation?**

**On the days planes land over London they switch runways at 3pm.** This allows residents under the final approach paths a half day's break from the noise. It is known as runway alternation. At 3pm planes also change the runway from which they take off as, at Heathrow, planes don't land take-off from the same runway at the same time. If runway alternation was abolished, they would do so. It would be known as **mixed-mode**

At present, for one week planes land on the southern runway from 7am before switching to the northern runway; the next week, they start on the northern runway at 7am before switching to the southern at 3pm.

#### **Does everybody benefit from it?**

**Not directly.** The people who benefit directly are those in London living under the final approach paths to Heathrow – generally people in the London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow. But people in areas such as Putney and Fulham - where the planes are about to join their final approach – also gain some benefit from alternation

**There is no alternation when planes land from the west** - over Windsor, Berkshire and parts of Oxfordshire. This is because the Cranford Agreement prevents any planes taking off from the northern runway over Cranford (see *What is the Cranford Agreement?*)

**There is no alternation for anybody between 6am and 7am when planes always land on both runways.**

### **What would the end of runway alternation mean?**

**1. Most obviously it would deprive the people who benefit from it of their half day's peace and quiet.**

But it would have much wider effects:

**2. It would result many more planes using Heathrow, bringing problems for all those affected by Heathrow.**

The cap of 480,000 on the number of flights permitted to use Heathrow each year, agreed by the Government when it gave permission for Terminal 5 to be built, would go. On the Government's own figures, the introduction of mixed-mode just during the 'busiest times' of the day would increase flight numbers to 515,000 per year. But it is now widely recognised that this would just be a start. Flight numbers could increase by as much as 100,000 a year.

**3. The extra noise would be widespread—and include take-off routes**

More planes would affect almost everybody under flight paths. The biggest losers of course would be the residents of Richmond and Hounslow and the people of Putney and Fulham. But more planes would mean more noise for just about everybody who lives under a flight path. Already parts of South London get nearly 500 planes at day. That would increase. Areas of North London get over 300. That would increase. Everybody living under the take-off routes from Heathrow could expect to get more planes. And, of course, people in and around Cranford would get take-offs for the first time.

#### **4. The picture for Windsor and Berkshire would be more mixed**

At present when an east wind is blowing planes land on the northern runway all day long. With mixed-mode in place, they would land on both the northern and southern runway. This would reduce the number of aircraft landing over areas like Windsor, but areas under the southern approach paths, such as Old Windsor and Wraybury, would experience a significant increase. There would also be many more take-offs over Berkshire as a whole due to the overall increase in flight numbers that mixed-mode would allow. If mixed-mode were to be introduced all day long, the number of planes landing over Windsor might once again approach current levels.

#### **5. It could affect night flights**

At night (between 11.30pm and 6am) flights come into land in a very different from during the day. That would not change if daytime mixed-mode were to be introduced. But the number of additional flights using the airport during the day could result in pressure for more night flights.

### **The Cranford Agreement**

#### **What is the Cranford Agreement?**

The Cranford Agreement prevents planes taking off over Cranford, which is at the eastern end (the London side) of the northern runway. It came into force in the early 1950s. It was argued that, because Cranford was so close to the runway, take-offs would be unbearably noisy for its inhabitants.

#### **What is the effect of the Cranford Agreement?**

Planes land and take off into the wind. It means that the Cranford Agreement is only relevant when planes are taking off to the east (i.e. on the days that the wind is blowing from the east, about 30% of the time in a typical year). On those days, all planes are required to take off from the southern runway. That, in turn, means all planes must land on the northern runway (as, at present, at Heathrow planes don't land and take-off from the same runway). This means that, on east wind days, places like Windsor under the flight path to the west of Heathrow get planes all day long. Clearly, they would benefit if the Cranford Agreement was to go.

#### **Why does the Government want to get rid of it?**

Simply, mixed-mode would not be possible if the Cranford Agreement remained in place because mixed-mode requires planes to land and take-off from both runways at the same time. The Government is not interested in weighing up any potential benefit to Windsor weighed against the increased noise levels in Cranford. It simply sees the Cranford Agreement as an obstacle to bringing in more planes.

### **Westerly Preference**

#### **What is Westerly Preference?**

Aircraft land and take off into the wind. In the UK the prevailing wind is westerly. At Heathrow it means that planes land over London about 70% of the time, taking off over Berkshire. Westerly preference means they also land over London (and take off over Berkshire) when there is an east wind blowing, up to the strength of 5 knots.

#### **Why may the Government get rid of it?**

Simply as a sweetener for those people in West London who would lose their half day's peace and quiet if runway alternation was abolished. They would be told that, although there would be more planes on the days when they get them, the total number of days they were overflown would be cut if westerly preference was replaced by easterly preference.

