

Pros and Cons of Heathrow Expansion

Many business leaders are strongly arguing that Britain urgently needs to expand its airport capacity in the south-east. The easiest and quickest method to increase airport expansion would be to expand Heathrow to include a third runway and sixth terminal. However, there is vocal opposition from local residents and green groups against expanding Heathrow.

Arguments for Expansion of Heathrow

- **Without increasing airport capacity, the UK will lose out on business competitiveness and tourism.** Lack of airport capacity is often cited as a constraint on expanding UK business. Heathrow is the quickest option to build a world-class hub airport. The alternative, such as building a hub on the Thames estuary would take several years longer (up to 20 years).
- **Economic Boost** – Local businesses are rejoicing at the decision to expand Heathrow, due to the predicted boon for the area. There will be around 250,000 flights a year and 150bn added to GDP.
- **Cost Effective.** Heathrow already had good transport links. A third runway would be the cheapest way to create additional capacity.
- **Existing Infrastructure.** Heathrow already has a well-developed transport infrastructure which increases the efficiency of adding an extra runway at Heathrow. High Speed II could be extended to Heathrow offering a fast connection from Birmingham.
- **Employment.** Heathrow is also a big employer in the area supporting 250,000 jobs. Relocating to another hub airport would lead to job losses in the Heathrow area.
- **In 2001, over 8.5 million passed through Heathrow,** representing almost 40% of all visitors from overseas.
- **Predicted air travel growth.** In 2000, the Department for Transport produced air passenger forecasts for the United Kingdom. These forecasts predicted a significant increase from 160 million passengers per annum (mppa) in 1998 to over 400 mppa by 2020. The 2003 Air Transport White Paper subsequently forecast traffic growing between 400 to 600 mppa by 2030. The majority of these new passengers are projected to pass through airports in the South East of England.
- **Commercial Property** – The decision to expand Heathrow has been welcomed with open arms by those in the commercial property industry. Miles Gibson, head of UK research at CBRE: “This announcement represents excellent news, with particular potential for retail, offices, logistics facilities and hotels to benefit.”

Richard Branson of Virgin said: “Virgin Atlantic has not been able to put on new routes for years. All those extra travellers are going to France, to Germany, to Italy, to Spain and the country is being held back. A new runway will be built at Heathrow. It’s obviously been stymied for political reasons. It’s just a matter of when it will be built and which politician will be brave enough to get on and do it.”

Arguments Against Heathrow Expansion

- **725,000 people already living under the flight path.** The high population density means it is not the ideal location for an airport. It makes sense to increase capacity in an area with lower population density
- **External Costs:** Noise and air pollution would increase through expansion. Pollution levels near Heathrow are already high. Increasing capacity would add to the problems of air and noise pollution.
- **John Stewart, of the Airport Watch campaign,** said Heathrow would become the biggest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the country.
- **Demolition of Homes** – 800 homes are planned to be demolished as part of the plans, with the [village of Harmondsworth](#) expected to be largely flattened to make way for the runway. Community leaders there are not happy, while the additional runway will mean over 700,000 homes will live under a flight path in the high density location surrounding the airport.
- **The business case for expanding Heathrow is exaggerated.** Only 12% of air travel is directly business related.
- **Even with two runways, Heathrow manages one of the highest numbers of international flights.** Heathrow has 990 departure flights each week to the world's key business centres – that is more than its two closest rivals, Charles de Gaulle (484) and Frankfurt (450), combined.
- **There are better long-term alternatives.** The mayor of London has supported a completely new scheme in the Thames Estuary, which could become a major dedicated hub airport.
- **With the growth of internet and teleconferencing,** it is possible that business will adapt and limit the growth of business trips rather than expensive travel.
- **Environmentalists argue that increasing airport capacity would lead to increased CO₂ emissions.** Rather than expanding short haul flights, the government should be keeping the cost of flying high to reflect the social cost of flying. Instead, there could be an encouragement of train travel to replace short haul flights.