

Would a new London runway be good for Scotland?

The Airports Commission and the promoters of a new runway – at either Heathrow or Gatwick – have presented airport expansion in the South East of England as a benefit not just for London but also for Scotland, Wales, and the English regions. But the Commission’s own evidence in fact suggests that these benefits may not materialise:

- While Scottish airports may be hoping for increased connectivity to London as a result of a new runway, the Commission predicts that **for both Gatwick and Heathrow new runway options, the total number of domestic connections would in fact fall compared with the number today if expansion takes place¹**. While the Commission suggests that domestic connectivity could be boosted through the introduction of new ‘Public Service Obligations’, it remains unclear whether this would be either legally permissible or financially desirable.
- The figure of a UK-wide benefit of ‘up to £147 billion’ as a result of a new runway (which forms the basis for recent claims about potential job creation and economic benefits for Scotland arising from South East airport expansion), was derived from analysis that the Airports Commission’s own economists said should be treated with caution. Using the traditional, Government-approved approach to cost benefit analysis, **the benefit of a new runway could fall to as little as £1.4 billion over 60 years**, the Commission’s analysis shows, equivalent to just £23 million annually for the UK as a whole². For a sense of scale, the Scottish Government is proposing to sacrifice ten times this amount of money to its own Treasury every year by scrapping Air Passenger Duty.
- UK-wide climate legislation requires that economy-wide emissions must fall by 80% by 2050, and the Committee on Climate Change recommends in this context that aviation emissions should take up no more than a quarter of total CO2 in 2050. But to avoid an overshoot of this limit, action will be required to constrain demand. **Under a ‘carbon cap’, passenger growth at Scottish airports would fall compared with a ‘no new runway’ scenario if expansion were to take place at either Heathrow or Gatwick**. Glasgow and Edinburgh could lose 2.1 million and 630,000 passengers respectively if a runway is built compared with a ‘no new runway’ scenario, Airports Commission forecasts show³.

Airportwatch and the Aviation Environment Federation represent communities, environmental organisations and individuals concerned about aviation’s impacts and opposed to unsustainable growth in the sector. During the conference season we have been asking ‘Does London really need a new runway?’ (See <http://goo.gl/ce4Dzf>)

For more information, see www.aef.org.uk or www.airportwatch.org.uk

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References

¹ Airports Commission: Strategic Fit: Forecasts, July 2015. ‘Assessment of need’, tables 5.9-5.12, 6.25-6.28 and 6.31-6.34 <https://goo.gl/s9afVY>

² AEF briefing: The Airports Commission’s economic fudge: How the economic case for expansion dissolves once climate change limits are accounted for <http://goo.gl/Jd6H9g>

³ AEF report: All set for take off? Aviation emissions to soar under Airports Commission proposals, page 10 <http://goo.gl/Uo9LRo>