



Department for
Transport

From the Minister of State
The Rt. Hon. Theresa Villiers MP

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Cllr Ray Puddifoot
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14 JUL 2011

Dear Cllr Puddifoot,

Following the Coalition Government's decision to cancel a third runway at Heathrow airport and to make it clear that we would refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted airports, the Secretary of State for Transport announced the establishment of the South East Airports Taskforce to look at how to make the best use of existing infrastructure to improve operations and the passenger experience at our three largest airports.

I chaired the Taskforce, which included senior representatives from:

- Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports,
- Airlines,
- the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA),
- the National Air Traffic Services (NATS),
- London First (representing business interests),
- Air Transport Users Council (representing passenger interests)
- Aviation Environment Federation.

The Taskforce has today published the report on its year long programme of work.

I would draw colleagues' attention particularly to the chapter on Punctuality, Delay and Resilience. Unsurprisingly, the focus is on Heathrow, which is the UK's busiest and most capacity constrained airport. The main recommendation is that the scope for establishing a set of operational freedoms at Heathrow should be explored. These would enable the greater

use of tactical measures in defined and limited circumstances to prevent or mitigate disruption and to facilitate recovery. These measures are consistent with our commitment to runway alternation at the airport and there would be no increase in the number of flights at Heathrow which would remain capped at current levels.

Tactical measures, such as operating twin arrivals streams for limited periods to tackle inbound delays, are already used at Heathrow: implementation of these proposals would mean greater use of such measures on days when the airport faced particular disruption. The Taskforce has concluded that such an approach would deliver benefits, particularly in improving reliability, but would also involve some limited redistribution of noise impact during the periods when the proposed measures are applied.

The work carried out so far indicates that the proposals could result in net environmental benefits, for example through reducing stacking and cutting the number of unscheduled flights during the night period. On the limited occasions where these freedoms would be used, some communities would be likely to experience aircraft noise during current respite periods; hence the need for safeguards to ensure they are deployed only to anticipate, prevent and mitigate disruption and to facilitate recovery.

I believe that these proposals should be taken forward but that before any commitment is made to implementing them, better evidence is needed of the potential benefits and impacts. I have therefore announced support for a trial of operational freedoms. A trial would provide firm evidence on the benefits and impacts as a basis for consultation with local communities before a decision was taken on whether the proposed additional operational freedoms should be adopted on a permanent basis and what safeguards should apply in relation to their use.

The trial would be in two phases to enable evidence to be gathered for both winter and summer operations. Following engagement with local communities, the first phase would run from November to February, followed by a four month period of initial assessment and further engagement on how the regime might be refined to mitigate any impacts of particular concern and deliver additional benefits.

The second phase would run from July to September, providing the added benefit of enabling greater resilience during the London Olympic and Paralympic Games when the UK's airports will be under even more pressure than normal. The trial would be undertaken by BAA, the airport operator, under the supervision of the Civil Aviation Authority, the independent aviation regulator.

BAA will be required to engage fully and transparently with relevant local authorities, communities and other stakeholders throughout the process, particularly on the monitoring of noise impacts. Once assessed, the results of the trial would form the basis for a consultation with local communities which would in due course inform Ministers in deciding whether an operational freedoms regime should be adopted at Heathrow.

I would like to invite you to a briefing which I am chairing from 15:00 to 16:30 on Tuesday 19 July in Grimond Room, Portcullis House, where I will be joined by representation from BAA and CAA, to provide you with further detail on these proposals and how they will be taken forward.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa', written in a cursive style.

THE RT. HON. THERESA VILLIERS

