

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

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Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

13 January 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

Surface transport access to Heathrow Airport

I am writing to express the serious concerns of the London Assembly Transport Committee about the lack of planning for improving surface access to Heathrow Airport. If the expansion of the airport goes ahead as the Government has proposed, there would need to be significant capacity upgrades on routes to the airport. However, the Government has given little if any commitment that the necessary transport schemes will go ahead. This risks creating severe overcrowding on London's transport network, and undermining efforts to encourage modal shift to sustainable transport modes. Before Parliament makes its final decision on the expansion of Heathrow it is imperative that decisions are made on precisely what surface access is required, how much it would cost and who would be expected to pay for it.

The Airports Commission projected a rise in the number of passengers using Heathrow from around 73 million per year currently, to 148 million per year by 2050 if a third runway is built. This doubling of passenger numbers will require a corresponding increase in the capacity of the surrounding transport network, as well as measures to make it easier for passengers and staff to cycle to the airport. Despite choosing Heathrow as its preferred option for airport expansion, the Government has no detailed plan for delivering the surface transport upgrades that would be required to support the forecast increase in passenger numbers.

As well as additional passengers, the expansion of Heathrow would also be likely to significantly increase freight traffic. We heard from Heathrow Airport that, without mitigation, the number of freight trips to the airport is projected to grow by 80 per cent from its current level of 10,000-15,000 per day. The additional business activity around the airport will also create more freight traffic, as the Airports Commission accepted. This increase will have a significant impact on air quality in an area already experiencing high levels of pollution. It also risks negatively affecting local communities as freight traffic increases on the road network.

Heathrow told the Committee it is looking to minimise the increase in freight traffic and is talking to freight operators, but unlike in other areas (such as staff travel) it does not have any specific targets. Clearly, shifting more freight to the rail network is unlikely to be feasible unless the Government acts decisively to relieve capacity constraints. Other measures such as using

consolidation centres to reduce the number of freight vehicles travelling to and from the airport may be effective, but there appears to be no detailed planning for this. The Government needs to take a lead in this area, working with TfL, boroughs, industry and the airport.

The Airports Commission has already set out the surface transport schemes that are necessary in order to facilitate an expanded Heathrow. The following schemes would represent a minimum requirement:

- Southern Rail Access connecting London Waterloo to Heathrow.
- Western Rail Access connecting Heathrow to the Great Western Main Line.
- Completing the planned upgrades of the Piccadilly line.
- Elizabeth line spur to Heathrow.
- Tunnel or ramp to separate the M25 and the third runway, south of junction 15.
- Widening of the M4 between Junctions 2 and 4b and on the airport link road.
- Other local road improvements, including on the A4 and A3044.

Prior to the Government's announcement we urged you to ensure that there is a clear plan in place to fund and deliver these schemes. Unfortunately this has not happened. The details of new surface transport schemes shared by the Department remain vague and unconfirmed. Only the Piccadilly line and the Elizabeth line, which TfL is responsible for, have confirmed plans in place.

The Southern Rail Access scheme linking London Waterloo to Heathrow was presented as an essential scheme by the Airports Commission. We have since seen the publication of a feasibility study from Network Rail. However the range of options for how this proposed scheme could be implemented are wide. To ensure this schemes provides additional public transport capacity, the Government would need to invest in new track and station infrastructure. If the service is delivered mainly using existing infrastructure, this would disadvantage passengers using existing services. In any case, we have not seen any commitment from the Government that it will deliver this scheme in any form.

We understand that you do not agree with the estimate from Transport for London that the cost of delivering the necessary surface transport upgrades for an expanded Heathrow would be around £15 billion. So far, however, we have not seen any alternative estimate from the Government. Highways England has already set out its assessment that road upgrades may be up to £700 million more expensive than the Airports Commission projected, for instance.

Furthermore, it is not yet clear exactly who will pay for the necessary transport infrastructure. We note the Government has said that Heathrow Airport will pay for some of the road improvements, and make a contribution to rail schemes. It is imperative that the Government sets out what these upgrades will cost and where the money will come from.

We recommend that the Government gives urgent consideration to the surface transport implications of its decision on Heathrow expansion. A costed plan to deliver the required capacity upgrades needs to be produced long before work on the third runway begins.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair, Transport Committee