

Sir Howard Davies

Chair, Airports Commission
c/o Department for Transport
6th Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London, SE1 2AA

25 November 2013

Dear Sir Howard,

London Assembly support for independent aviation noise regulator and improved surface public transport access at airports

We are writing, on behalf of the London Assembly Environment and Transport Committees, to express our support for the establishment of an independent aviation noise regulator and the improvement of surface public transport access at airports and to urge the Airports Commission to address both these issues in its forthcoming interim report.

The Assembly has many times highlighted the adverse impact of aviation noise in London, including in the Transport Committee's report on airport capacity in London in May¹, and the Environment Committee's response to the Government's consultation on night flight regulation in April². An estimated 700,000 Londoners suffer from noise pollution as result of Heathrow airport so it is vital that this issue is addressed urgently. Londoners need to have confidence that aviation noise levels are being monitored and reported transparently and action will be taken if noise levels are excessive. To this end the Assembly has frequently endorsed the establishment of an independent aircraft noise regulator. Most recently, the Environment Committee wrote to the Airports Commission in response to its aviation noise discussion paper to stress the need for a single point of reference to simplify the regulatory environment and for a trusted third party to reduce antagonism in the relationship between communities and airports.³

There has now been a report by London First which called for an independent noise ombudsman to help protect people living under flight paths, developing this proposal in some more detail.⁴ We welcome this development and agree that an independent regulator needs to have an appropriate remit and mandate, and sufficient powers and independence to command public trust and secure compliance with noise standards.

London First has further reported on the establishment of a government taskforce to oversee the development of better rail links to major airports.⁵ In our letter to you of 29 August 2013⁶, the Transport Committee highlighted the importance of improving surface public transport, especially rail access, at airports, as the Assembly has many times in the past (including the Environment

¹ <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/airport-capacity-in-london>

² <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/response-to-the-government-s-consultation-on-night-flights-at>

³ London Assembly Environment Committee letter to Airports Commission, 5 September 2013, <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/environment-climate-change/letter-to-airports-commission-in-response-to-their-discussion>

⁴ London First's report published on 6 November 2013

⁵ London First's report published on 21 October 2013

⁶ <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/surface-transport-access-at-airports-letter-to-howard-davies>

Committee's report on Heathrow in 2012⁷). We want to see the development of a national strategy to realise improvements at all airports especially better rail links. At present there is inadequate rail service provision at Gatwick, Stansted and Luton airports which may limit the extent to which people use these airports. Improving surface public transport access at these airports would have direct surface transport benefits including reduced carbon emissions, air pollution and congestion. It could also help ensure greater use of 'spare' runway capacity at these London airports – reducing the pressure on Heathrow, which the Assembly is on record as saying should not expand. There is massive road traffic congestion in the vicinity of Heathrow airport which needs to be addressed. As we have highlighted previously, many people continue to travel by private car to Heathrow. In 2010, more than half of Heathrow's passengers used either private car (31 per cent) or taxis (26 per cent) with just 10 per cent travelling by rail and 16 per cent by Tube. By contrast at London City airport only 13 per cent of passengers travelled by private car and more than half – 52 per cent – used the DLR.

We trust that the Airports Commission will take this letter into account as it finalises its interim report. We look forward to the publication of the interim report in December.

Yours sincerely,



Murad Qureshi AM
Chair of the Environment Committee



Valerie Shawcross CBE AM
Chair of the Transport Committee

⁷ *Plane speaking*, March 2012 <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/tackling-air-and-noise-pollution-around-heathrow>