

## THIRD RUNWAY DECISION TIME

On 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> October the Supreme Court will hear Heathrow's appeal against the ruling made in favour of third runway objectors by Court of Appeal in February, with the verdict expected by the end of the year. The Appeal Court found the Airports National Policy Statement (NPS) was unlawful because, in drawing it up, the Department for Transport failed to assess the climate impacts of a third runway in the light of the international Paris Agreement on climate change. The court did not rule out a third runway but its verdict meant that Heathrow had to stop its preparations for a new runway as the NPS which had given it permission to do so was ruled unlawful.

The Government said it will revise the NPS but has given no indication it will do so in such a way as to allow a third runway, nor any indication when it will do so. It is not appealing the ruling but made it clear it will abide by the ruling of the court.

### Will Heathrow win?

The airport is putting a lot of resources into its appeal and only has to overturn the one point of law on which the two lower courts disagreed. A ruling in its favour cannot be discounted. If it did win, it could restart its preparations for a third runway immediately or it could postpone them to see how the post-COVID market is picking up and perhaps also in the hope that in a few years Boris Johnson, a strong opponent of the third runway who would be likely to block it, may no longer be Prime Minister.

If and when Heathrow did proceed with its plans, the next step would be to submit a planning application which would be heard by a Public Inquiry (time-limited to six months). Whatever the recommendation of the Inquiry, the Government would have the final say.

Heathrow CEO John Holland-Kaye has said he now expects that a third runway could be 15 years away, which suggests Heathrow could delay any application. If Heathrow loses the court case, that might well be the end of the road for the runway, especially since all national party leaders are opposed to it.

## Heathrow after Lockdown

Passenger numbers at Heathrow fell by 97% in April 2020 compared with a year ago. Although there have been some additional freight flights bringing in medicines and other emergency supplies, the overall amount of freight is down. At the time of writing tough quarantine laws are expected to be brought in which will depress demand still further.

It will take some years for demand to recover. Willie Walsh, the CEO of IMG, the parent company of British Airways, told the Transport Select Committee last month, that he doesn't expect demand at the airport to have reached its 2019 levels until 2023/4, 'maybe even 2026'. A lot will depend on the severity of social distancing measures which are put in place and on how quickly the wider economy shows signs of recovery.

### Demand is not expected to reach its 2019 levels until at least 2023

Heathrow, though, is expected to recover more quickly than most other airports. The average income of its passengers is higher than any other UK airport bar London City. Both Virgin (if it survives) and BA have talked about moving their planes from Gatwick to Heathrow. BA has also indicated it might switch its London City routes, where it accounts for 55% of all flights, to Heathrow. That would leave City struggling but would be of concern to residents under the Heathrow flight paths.

### How was life for you in lockdown?

*'I can think again'. 'I wake up to bird-song in the morning'. 'It is like a big black cloud of sound has been lifted'. Just three typical comments we received during lockdown. Of course, there were planes and, because only one runway was in use at any one time, people had all-day flying. And didn't like. It showed once again just how valued the half day's respite is to people in West London. Perhaps the most interesting thing as we come out of lockdown and planes numbers increase is how many people will continue to tolerate a plane every 90 seconds? If enough people have valued the peace and quiet, the numbers actively opposing the noise may grow.*

# 2020

**Heathrow** has made thousands of its staff redundant. It has placed others, including senior staff, on furlough. Its focus has been on managing the COVID-19 situation and on preparing its case for a third runway. The next six months, until the end of the year, are unlikely to be markedly different. The Supreme Court case will continue to feature heavily in its work and the focus of the day-to-day operations is likely to be on building up demand again as restrictions are eased.

## HACAN will:

- Continue the campaign against a 3<sup>rd</sup> runway
- Campaign against any proposal to lift the 480,000 annual cap should Heathrow lose its court case
- Press for Heathrow to build on the level of engagement it has been developing with communities
- Argue for the Aviation White Paper to include a requirement for each airport to draw up a 'Community Contract' with its impacted residents
- Help shape the flight path changes to be introduced with or without a 3<sup>rd</sup> runway.
- Campaign for all people impacted; not just for those who are able to shout loudest.

**We need your help. Your support of the years has made our campaigning possible. Please continue to be as generous as you can at this critical time.**

# 2021

**This is the year which is likely to shape Heathrow's future. And ours!**

**Heathrow will start planning its future.** Even if it wins in the Supreme Court, a 3<sup>rd</sup> runway will be a distance prospect. It will concentrate on the current airport.

**There will be pressure to lift the annual current cap of 480,000 on flight numbers** to allow more planes, in order to make full use of its runways. This can be done by reducing the half day's break on the current runways enjoyed by people in West London and by bringing in what are known as Independent Parallel Approaches, new routes direct from the 'holding stacks' to the runways which would be used at busy times. To lift the cap, Heathrow would need to get planning permission as it was a planning condition imposed of Terminal 5. It is estimated that that the existing runways have a total capacity of about 550,000; that is about 75,000 more planes than used the airport last year. It is unlikely Heathrow would come up with proposals until mid-2021 at the earliest given market uncertainty post-COVID. HACAN would campaign strongly against them.

**Heathrow could bring in 75,000 more flights a year on the existing runways**

**Airspace change will continue.** All airports are changing their flight paths as air traffic control moves from a ground-based system to a satellite one to guide planes in and out of airports. It will mean narrower flight paths. Heathrow is committed to introducing multiple flight paths so as to be able to rotate them in order to provide people with respite (a predicable break from the noise). The new approach will not make much difference to people living under the final approach to the airport as planes will need to be lined up with the runways as they are now but it opens up the chance of respite for the first time ever for communities further from the airport and for those under departure routes. The new routes will not require holding stacks and, since there will be less conflict with routes from other airports, aircraft will not need to be 'held down' many miles after leaving the airport as so many are at present. HACAN will continue to be active in shaping these new routes.

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