



# Dods Monitoring

## Airport Expansion: What next after the Davies Commission?

*With exclusive Dods Polling of Members of Parliament*



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# Introduction and background

## Will additional airport capacity ever take off?



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**Airport expansion in South East England has been a contentious issue for almost as long as commercial flights have existed in the UK.**

The Airports Commission, established under the Coalition Government in 2012 and led by Sir Howard Davies was set up to consider additional airport capacity, and provide a definitive answer to the vexed question of where to allow airport expansion. The [final report](#), published in July 2015, following the election of a majority Conservative Government, came down decisively in favour of a third runway at Heathrow.

However, Sir Howard's Heathrow recommendation came with additional caveats which included a ban on night flights, a commitment from the Government not to build a fourth runway at Heathrow, alongside a legally binding noise limit, and an independent aviation noise authority.

With an additional £147bn in GDP predicted over 60 years, and 70,000 new jobs by 2050, Sir Howard called upon the Government to make an early decision on recommendations. The report is currently being considered by ministers , with a formal decision expected in September.

During July 2015, Dods Polling presented the options available to Sir Howard to a sample of MPs. This briefing outlines the result of the exclusive poll, and looks at the challenges ahead in delivering the Commission's recommendations.

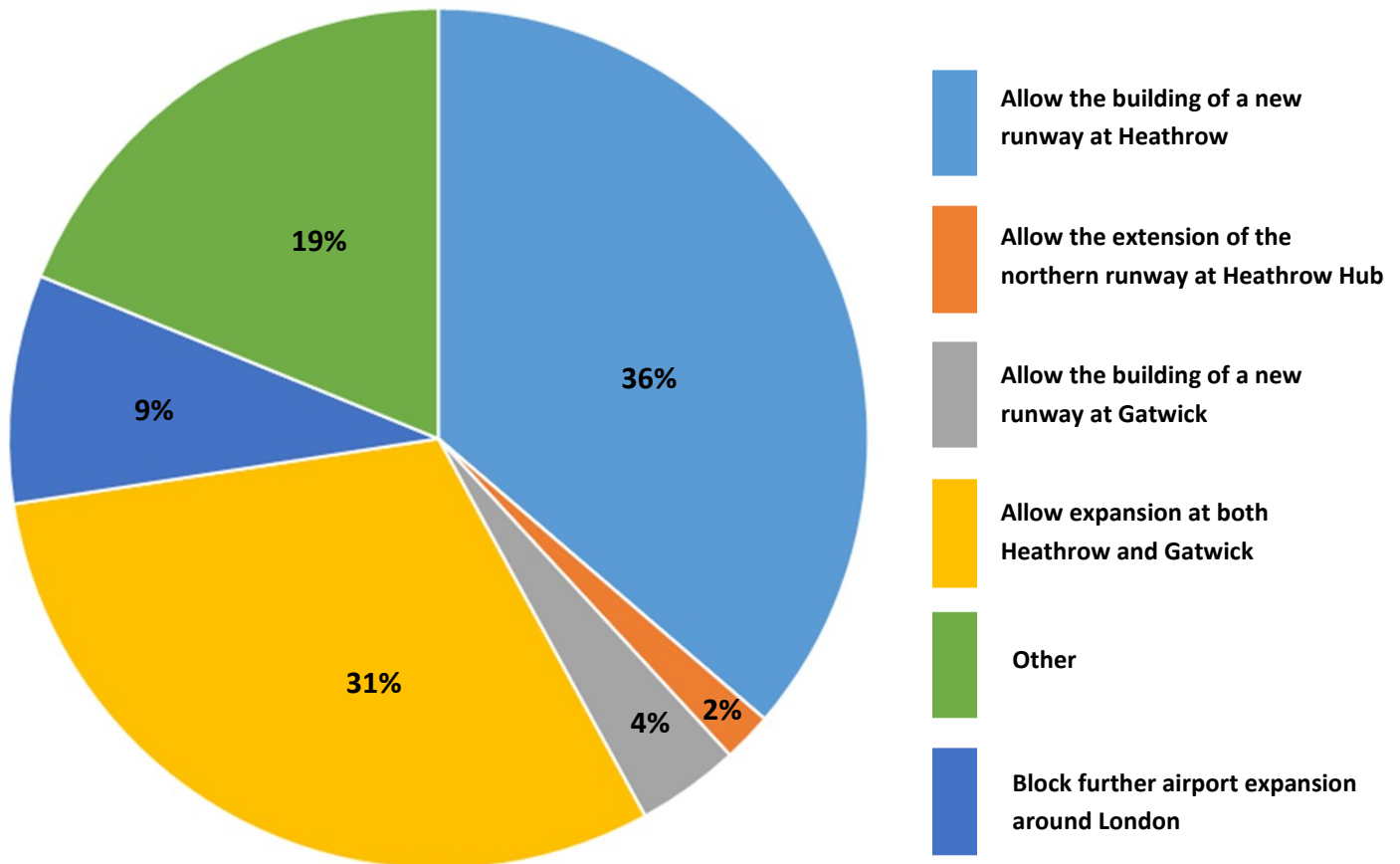
With resignations threatened, backbench rebellion inevitable, alongside divided opinions amongst industry, community and campaigning organisations, the challenge for the Government now is to provide a settled and definitive solution to this most contentious of issues.









## Polling Results

*“What is your preferred Government response to the findings of the Davies Commission?”*



## Key findings

-  73 per cent of MPs polled back some form of airport expansion
-  Heathrow remains the favoured single option of a third of MPs
-  31 per cent favour expansion at both Heathrow and Gatwick
-  Nine per cent of MPs polled would block any further expansion

Polling was carried out in July 2015. The results are based upon a sample of 99 MPs representative of the political and geographical make up of the House of Commons. Please credit Dods Polling if using any of the results.





# Polling Analysis

Carried out in July 2015, ninety nine MPs were presented with the same options for airport expansion that Sir Howard Davies' considered.

Presented with the option of Heathrow, Gatwick, Heathrow Hub, no expansion, or other, the poll also presented MPs with the option of expansion at both Heathrow and Gatwick.

Of the MPs who responded, **almost three quarters (73 per cent) showed a clear preference for some form of additional airport capacity**, with **Heathrow coming on top—the favoured option amongst a third of MPs (36 per cent)**.

Although only **four per cent indicated support for Gatwick expansion** on its own, **31 per cent of MPs polled supported additional capacity at both Heathrow and Gatwick**.

**Nine per cent of MPs polled did not want any additional capacity**, whilst **a fifth (19 per cent) opted for 'other' solutions**.



The Conservative Party has a strong strand of opposition to Heathrow expansion, with David Cameron himself ruling it out in 2009. However, of Conservative MPs polled, **four fifths (80 per cent) backed some form of airport expansion**, with **44 per cent favouring both Heathrow and Gatwick**, and a further **36 per cent backing Heathrow**.



The Labour MPs who took part in this poll **came out in favour of Heathrow expansion, backed by a third (34 per cent) of respondents**. **One fifth (20 per cent) supported both airports**, whilst the same number wanted to block any further expansion around London. Although Heathrow expansion is supported by the party, like the Conservatives, a number of MPs remain sceptical.



**Half of SNP MPs (50 per cent) who responded backed Heathrow**, with a **fifth (20 per cent) indicating that they would block any further expansion around London**.



A divisive issue for many of London's MPs, from the sample **three quarters of London MPs supported some form of airport expansion**.





# Challenges

Whilst the poll shows strong support for additional airport capacity amongst MPs, a number of hurdles remain. Additional capacity will not require legislation to pass through Parliament, but the Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin will have to approve any plans.

## **Environmental impact**

The dual concerns of noise and pollution caused by additional flights is one that is unlikely to recede.

John Holland-Kaye, chief executive of Heathrow has been critical of the potential imposition of a night time flights ban. The proposal by Sir Howard would ban commercial flights between 11.30pm and 6am. [The Guardian reported](#) Holland-Kaye as remarking:

*"We have a significant number of routes to Hong Kong and Singapore. That's getting key trading partners into the UK to start their business. It's very popular because it's an important route: we have to have some time to reflect on those and discuss them with government and airlines."*

The freight industry has expressed concerns over reduced or banned night flights, with fears that it may cause damage to the UK economy, preventing UK businesses from obtaining express delivery of products, whilst others in the industry have [called for a swift decision](#) on expanding Heathrow.

The [House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee](#) is set to examine the implications that a third runway at Heathrow would have upon the Government's commitments on carbon emissions, air quality and noise. Written submissions to the committee are welcomed until 3 September. Committee chair, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

*"Environmental concerns are a key part of the debate on airport expansion. Critics of airport expansion have raised concerns about whether it is possible to expand airport capacity in the South East while meeting the UK's binding commitments on air pollution and climate change..."*

## **Party politics**

Despite not requiring legislation, the issue of expansion could still cause trouble for the Government.

Prior to entering government, David Cameron [said in 2009](#) that a third runway at Heathrow would not happen.

*"What business needs to recognise is that the third runway is just not going to happen. There is such a coalition of forces against it. There's such an environmental case against."*

Conservative MPs, including the International Development Secretary, Justine Greening (Putney), Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park), Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) and Home Secretary Theresa May (Maidenhead) are viscerally opposed to any further expansion.

The question now is how much political capital Prime Minister David Cameron will want to use to push through this issue. With the impending EU referendum, Cameron will be at pains to placate his backbenchers lest the Government majority prove unstable.

## **Costs**

Building the new runway will be privately funded, but extra infrastructure costs will be partly met by taxpayers. The overall capital expenditure is predicted at £17.6m, with around £5bn earmarked for surface access costs.



# Industry reaction to the Commission

**CEO of IAG, Willie Walsh [said](#):**

*"Even with political consensus, Sir Howard believes naively that the costs associated with the scheme would be borne by airlines. While we believe it would be outrageous to burden passengers with the cost of such expensive infrastructure, we will not pay for it."*

**CEO of Flybe Saad Hammad [wrote to The Times](#):**

*"The new runway capacity must be made financially accessible to the whole of the country, with slots at reduced rates to regional operators to make this an asset for the whole of the UK, not just the southeast."*

**easyJet CEO Carolyn McCall [commented](#):**

*"Heathrow is in the best interests of passengers as it has the greatest demand. It is clear that long haul airlines want to expand at Heathrow and if they can't, they will do so not at Gatwick but at other airports such as Paris, Amsterdam and Frankfurt."*

**John Longworth, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce [said](#):**

*"Business long ago ran out of patience. The government cannot afford to delay airport expansion any further if it is serious about Britain punching above its weight on the global stage. That means delivering a new runway at Heathrow now, and leaving the door open to subsequent expansion at Gatwick, Stansted and key regional airports as well."*





# Conclusion

Large-scale infrastructure projects in the UK are rarely straight forward or free from opposition, with HS2 a case in point.

In 2009 the last Labour Government won a parliamentary vote in favour of Heathrow expansion, with David Cameron as the then opposition leader coming out against expansion.

Six years on, following Sir Howard's recommendation this summer, Heathrow expansion remains far from being a certainty.

As our polling shows, expansion is clearly favoured by a significant proportion of MPs, but those opposed to Heathrow form a powerful lobby.

Pollution and noise concerns would have to be mitigated, whilst there are conflicting views in the aviation industry, particularly amongst airlines.

Although Heathrow came out as the preference for expansion amongst the MPs we polled, the respectable support for expansion at both Heathrow and Gatwick shows that politicians understand there is a need to expand aviation capacity in the UK.

The issue is set to become a key battle for Londoners ahead of the May 2016 mayoral elections, but with the prime minister focused on EU renegotiation, the political will at the heart of Government to approve expansion may not materialise in a swift manner.

The danger is that airport expansion will yet again find itself delayed from taking off.







## **Dods Polling**

The fieldwork for the survey of MPs took place in July 2015 and the sample was 99 Members of Parliament from across the political parties. Caution about generalising from the findings is advised considering the low base sizes.

Dods Polling combines up-to-date methods with over a century of experience in surveying political opinions, allowing us to discover the information you need in the manner that suits you best.

We guarantee speedy response times and competitive rates. Our experts can help frame the questions to ensure that the responses are as useful as possible and will provide an analysis of the key findings.

**To find out more about Dods Polling and research services contact [Stephen.Lamb@dods.co.uk](mailto:Stephen.Lamb@dods.co.uk)**

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