

## **To Sir Howard Davies**

I accept the Airports Commission invitation to comment on its current thinking published on 7 October 2013 with the stated objective of “*making sure airports and airlines are safe, secure and competitive while reducing their impact on the environment and communities*”.

Sir Howard Davies has said (speech 7 October) that “we shall need some net additional runway capacity in the south east of England in the coming decades.” But how to obtain it with minimal net increase in such pollutants as noise?

In reviewing changes in aircraft design Sir Howard did not mention that the order book (including deliveries) for the Boeing 787 and Airbus A 350 with around three hundred seats and over 8,000 mile range have grown to 979 and 725 respectively, while those for the 600 seat A380 have recently declined. The order books for smaller shorter range airliners of kinds that crowd hub airports have also been disappointing.

The airlines purchasing so many long range aircraft are likely to increase the number of long-haul non-stops; passengers will demand them. Smaller aircraft will enable more frequent service to be offered, particularly, as Sir Howard observes, for trade with emerging markets. But the airlines will reduce expenditure by reducing the overall number of intermediate stops. On balance the notion of the massive hub airport may be approaching its decline.

I am not suggesting that Heathrow should be abandoned for environmental reasons; no country can afford to eliminate major infrastructure. But there is a strong ethical argument for not making things worse!

Suggestions for adding runways or moving existing ones further west overlook that aircraft are at their noisiest just after take-off and that, with the slope on the Instrument Landing System glide path set by international standard at three degrees above the horizontal, the height of aircraft on final approach above towns is not much increased. Taking off to the west, moving a runway west makes noise to the west much worse and noise to the east only a little better.

If that sounds pedantic the advantage of choosing the right location is best illustrated by the layout at Paris CDG where the two principal runways were set out of parallel by ten degrees in order that the glide paths should not over-fly such nearby towns as Goussainville and Gonesse. The inference is that a runway needs a ten-mile strip to accommodate an ILS installation at each end to avoid excessive noise over habited space. (I would add that this factor has been ignored in much of the public advice the Commission has been offered.)

With no major expansion at Heathrow, how about another runway at Gatwick, to the south of the present one? Such a development would be much too near to the northern outcrops of Crawley – a town of 100,000 people.

Then why not Stansted? Mainly because it is in the wrong place. The area thirty miles to the north-east of London is not a large generator of air traffic, has a poor rail connection to London and lacks a mainline to the Midlands. It has acquired a reputation for low cost leisure travel, but as Sir Howard observes, a new low cost business travel market is evolving. Stansted might benefit from it. Even though it would not serve as a major international airport, it would provide reserve capacity.

Be that as it may, and on the likely assumption that “Boris Island“ is too costly and inconvenient to gain support then where does that leave us? London needs a new airport with excellent connections, designed from the outset for a substantial increase in long-haul traffic, whether by major airline or cut-price. It may be an extension to one of the smaller airports which would continue operating while the extension is being built.

Luton has been largely overlooked during the passed ten months. Its traffic record has been hampered by its one short runway and inconvenient access. But its potential should not be overlooked. It is bordered by the four track Midland main line electrified as far as Bedford, with a planned extension to the East Midlands A branch to Northampton connecting it to the West Coast Main Line, removed to reduce expense in th 1960s, could be restored, connecting Luton to all Midland cities.

Thameslink would provide an airport shuttle to St.Pancras, to Crossrail at Farringdon and to Gatwick. In summary Luton would be by far the best connected airport in the UK and possibly in Europe.

Regarding the environment, the example of Paris CDG would be applied. The direction of the runways, the ILS glide-paths, and the assembly points (aka “stacks) would route aircraft approaching or leaving the airport on a path that minimized the nuisance of noise and fumes.

The recent re-furbishing of the airport terminal would increase the short term benefit of increased capacity, but there is no disguising the fact that a much larger terminal and integral train station would be required in the medium term.

The recent purchase of the airport by two Spanish companies has interrupted public support for Luton. Obviously there would be opposition, There always is! But the fact that Luton’s employment has been weak in recent years affords exogenous support.

So much for London’s airports. What about the rest of the UK? There is much argument for 200 mph trains at enormous cost connecting four cities. We overlook that many French TGV trains run on upgraded conventional track with a limit of 137 mph. I counted about fifty urban areas in the UK which would benefit from upgrading and electrifying track and the elimination of obsolescent sidings and unnecessary curvature.

Regional airports would become intermodal change points on the integral transport system the country so badly needs. The environment would also benefit from pollution free transportation. Manchester would clearly be of prime importance. The relative importance of the others would await the preparation of a coherent plan, after which the market process would suffice.

Summary of objectives.

1. Immediate. Plan an integrated transport system.
- 2 By 2020. Develop Luton Airport.
- 3 Long term. Upgrade the plan as national social, environmental, economic and technical factors change. Never assume consistency.

Sincerely