

Airport Commission; Response to Sir Howard Davies speech 7th October, 2013.

Following the speech given by Sir Howard Davies on 7th October, 2013, I have pleasure in submitting considerations that I believe warrant closer and serious examination by the Airports Commission. In pursuit of the Commission's intentions toward passengers' connectivity and the economy, my thoughts may appear focused toward a niche opportunity, but consideration will demonstrate that my suggestions provide significant business travel benefits for many within a geographically and commercially prime area.

The Government have demonstrated a resolve to help us travel more rapidly and consequently conduct business more efficiently, a resolve indicated by projects such as HS2. The need for speed so far as HS2 is concerned will be achieved at enormous cost, and is a need far from being satisfied in the near future. The following offers a cost effective and short term travel proposal.

Whilst not an alternative to enhancing our rail infrastructure, there is one relatively easy way toward improving a part of our travel infrastructure in the south, providing widespread benefit at minimal cost or environmental upset. This solution, **Blackbushe Airport**, conveniently located south-west of London, offers a remarkable opportunity to satisfy many aspects of the Airport Commission's remit. ***Until 1960 it was London's second airport***, today Blackbushe Airport offers a ready made starting block upon which to develop a medium size regional "city style" airport. Placed central to a massive business catchment area, and already an established general aviation airfield, its redevelopment costs would be minimal compared to a 'green field' new airport site.

Over the years Blackbushe has been consistently ignored, lacked recognition, or simply been unnoticed for the potential it affords as a 'city' airport. It is the most glaringly obvious site for an exciting new business airport.... "London City West", where it could transform the efficiency of travelling from within a highly congested, but valuable part of the UK. A new and easy gateway to/from the rest of the UK, and Europe.

The Airports Commission are clear that additional runway capacity will be required in the south-east of England, this additional capacity being achieved either in the form of new runways, or ideally, extensions to existing facilities.

Blackbushe Airport provides a base line for the development of an existing facility that would provide minimal environmental impact, and serve a highly populated and valuable business catchment area that is second to none in the commercial and technological structure it contains.

A facility similar to the highly successful London City Airport but located at Blackbushe would improve the air travel experience for many whilst reducing the surface congestion and runway demand on the major airports of Heathrow and Gatwick. London City Airport currently handles over 3 million passengers annually,

with a future 8 million anticipated on its single runway, a runway similar to that at Blackbushe. The prospects for a similar 'city' airport at Blackbushe are plain to see.

The time has come for Blackbushe to be recognised for what it could and should be, a highly accessible airport offering unbeatable convenience, while making true economic sense as we face the difficulties of meeting the future air traffic demands in the London area.

Yesterday, today, tomorrow...

Until May 1960, ***Blackbushe was London's second airport***, when its closure was brought about by government policy. It was considered necessary to encourage airlines to locate to London's new airport, Gatwick. Gatwick had been subject to major development, while Blackbushe remained home to the majority of our independent airlines. Blackbushe was the prime diversion when Heathrow was fog bound, and proved a great asset to BEA and BOAC who regularly used Blackbushe for crew training. The United States Navy established a major European base at Blackbushe during the fifties, and were obliged to abandon it in 1960.

Today, a smaller Blackbushe still operates as a licensed general aviation airfield, is owned by a leading car auctioneering organisation, and remains situated on an expansive natural gravel plateau. Worryingly, gravel extraction works are getting ever closer to the airfield. The protection of Blackbushe as a potential asset to the nation's transport infrastructure is paramount.

From its vital role during World War Two, thereafter becoming the home of Britain's post war independent airlines, and serving as London's second airport, Blackbushe Airport has a remarkable history in its service to the nation and British aviation. ***Today Blackbushe offers the necessary basis for a logically placed regional 'city' airport blending perfectly with economic, social, environmental and operational needs both locally, and nationally.***

My arguments supporting the role Blackbushe might play, and the benefits it would bring to our future air transport infrastructure are as follows:-

****Perfect Geographic and topographical location***

****Minimal environmental concern, unobstructed approaches over open land***

****Further the growth of new trade links to/from a key area of Britain's prosperity***

****Provides short term measures for use of its existing but under utilised capacity***

****Facilitates additional flexibility and capacity without the need to provide 'from new' airport capacity***

****Permit environmental limitations on other airports by spreading the traffic load***

THE Perfect Geographic Location

Located in north-east Hampshire, on the borders of Surrey and Berkshire, conveniently close to London, Blackbushe with its excellent runway is perfectly placed to serve as a new regional airport *located in the heart of what is arguably the south's key economic area outside of London.* The fact that Europe's prime business jet centre has been established at Farnborough, some seven miles distant, would substantiate that Blackbushe is indeed in a prime business area.

This perfect catchment area includes the Thames Valley, the dense business potential of south and west London, and the counties of Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. Blackbushe is central to the towns of Windsor, Slough, Reading, Newbury, Andover, Bracknell, Basingstoke, Farnborough, Aldershot, Guildford, Woking, Camberley, and Leatherhead, to name but some. It is within convenient reach of all.

Minimal Environment Concern, best runway approaches in the south-east

Considering the size of the population to the west of London, remarkably Blackbushe is primarily surrounded by forest and open spaces. Although it is not possible to please everybody where airport expansion programmes are concerned, a relatively small number of residents would be subject to the effect of increased aircraft movements resulting from a change of use at Blackbushe. *Given its strategic location, a more environmentally suitable location for a regional 'city' airport in the south-east would be hard to find.*

The high degree of open space on the approaches to Blackbushe's main runway should facilitate acceptance of mandatory Public Safety Zones.

Blackbushe has no flooding problems, having been built on a natural gravel base it has excellent drainage properties posing no threat to local environment or communities. The airfield still benefits from the drainage system that survives from when it was London's second airport, although considerable damage was sustained during the attempt to eliminate Blackbushe in preference to Gatwick.

The open space location, and minimal nearby residences, would ensure that aromas and any airport by-products produced by a developed Blackbushe would have the least possible impact on local populations.

...unobstructed approaches over open spaces

The approaches to the airfield's main all-weather runways are over open forestry and common land, a unique feature in the south-east of England. They provide the least possible noise impact. Being located upon a natural plateau, fog disruption is kept to a minimum, whilst from the pilots' perspective the approaches are completely free of buildings or any other obstruction. Visual contact can easily be established from a considerable distance.

Minimal cost, infrastructure, and expansion opportunities.

Cost is a major factor today. Blackbushe now has only a basic infrastructure, but is an established licensed airfield with excellent all-weather runways. Development of Blackbushe would avoid the costly acquisition of land to build a new 'city' airport, however, some use or acquisition of common land might be necessary. Building an 'airport on an airport' should prove highly economical. Additionally, Blackbushe occupies a large expanse of land that could be employed for its future expansion, or additional infrastructure, but I fear the site needs to be 'officially recognised' as a commercial aviation opportunity before it is lost to other purposes, possibly gravel extraction? The main runway could be extended subject to Common Land issues, enhancing safety and broadening the spectrum of airport usage.

The airfield is currently owned, and operated, by leading car auctioneers. If they were willing to sell/lease the site the available space would permit their business to

continue on site with perhaps a few changes to their infrastructure. Blackbushe's geographic suitability is illustrated by the success of its current use for business flights, as an easily accessed magnet for the motor trade, and its very popular Sunday Market.

Further the growth of new trade links to/from a key area of Britain's prosperity

One of Blackbushe's unique 'selling points' is the rich catchment area it affords. As a regional airport it would serve a vast swathe of prospective business travellers, providing greater convenience, ease of access, less 'hassle', and increased travel flexibility compared to current options. Blackbushe potentially offers this growing region exciting travel opportunities from its very heart, stimulating the growth of new trade links, and opportunities. As a regional gateway, Blackbushe stands to provide an excellent point of entry/exit for European business travellers who wish to avoid the time consuming congestion that Heathrow and Gatwick currently present.

Permit environmental limitations on other airports by spreading the load, and enhance long-haul slot availability at Heathrow

If additional runway capacity in the form of a new regional 'city' airport became available, there might be justification for the distribution of a degree of Heathrow's short haul/domestic services to that new airport. The preservation of Heathrow's integrity as an intercontinental hub capable of tackling the competitive challenges from Europe might well demand redistribution of some traffic categories warranting additional runway capacity within reach of the capital, providing this did not seriously degrade Heathrow's connectivity value. The result would be fewer runway movements at Heathrow, permitting additional slots for vital long-haul services, supporting the Airports Commission's prime remit of protecting our country's 'global status'. Were Blackbushe to handle aircraft any larger than those seen at London City, the section of main runway destroyed by local authorities in the sixties would need to be reinstated.

With valuable Far Eastern markets opening new long-haul opportunities, and the three major airline alliances backing Heathrow, this is no time to consider building a major new London hub airport, be it in the Thames Estuary, or elsewhere.

A reduction in cargo flights would further clear Heathrow's available capacity, Manston or Stansted probably being the most expedient alternatives.

Additional runway capacity at Heathrow would be further obtained by "encouraging" business jet operators to use Europe's finest FBO at Farnborough which shares similar geographic benefits to those of Blackbushe.

Provides Short Term measures for use of existing capacity

One answer to the travel needs in the south-east would be the availability of increased choice of travel options. A highly desirable option would come from increased regional airline availability...speeding up the way we do business, and where we do it! It should not be forgotten that Blackbushe, as a new regional "city" airport, would have the additional benefit of serving Europe as well as the UK markets... Quiet, fuel efficient aircraft from a Blackbushe redeveloped at competitive cost would help to connect a high productivity business area with the UK and Europe, fully in line with the government's resolve to help us travel more rapidly, to do

business more efficiently. Blackbushe fits the air transport 'short term measures' question as it is currently seriously under used for an airport facility so near to London, whilst located in the UK's busiest commercial sector. For a relatively minimal outlay Blackbushe Airport could provide a seriously good answer to the question of improved business travel opportunities exactly where they are needed.

HS2..

With such cost, the rift of disruption across the country, and the HS2 effect of filtering business benefits towards only a small select number of cities - to the detriment of others that will have no HS2 link, the viability of this project looks increasingly hard to justify.

My argument toward a new regional 'city' airport south west of London located in the centre of one of our most productive areas is further supported by the fact that it would provide competitive links to widespread regions, not just those ear-marked to "benefit" from HS2, plus it would have the additional benefit of serving essential European markets. The lack of commercial rationale behind HS2 invites the thought that a fraction of the intended HS2 'investment' spent on a new regional 'London City West' airport would yield benefits and returns proportionally much in excess of what may be anticipated by this questionable rail development. Travelling from within what could be called the "Blackbushe catchment ring" to the north by rail, and connecting with the HS2 system would require laborious train connections, plus a passage on the London Underground before finally setting foot on the northbound HS train. Tiring, expensive on valuable time, this process lacks the stimulation to shrink the north-south divide. Given the above trip logistics, the HS2 component of such a journey would represent only a small saving in total journey time. The questionable and dubious cost:benefit ratio of HS2 is far from ideal.

The money dedicated to the HS2 project might be better spent on an overall upgrade of the railway infrastructure, longer trains, and rebuilding ancient railway stations. Surely a better way of 'vote' gathering? Meanwhile, domestic 'regional' air transport should receive greater government support and recognition so as we might have a balanced approach toward our rail and air infrastructure. The encouragement of "rail-air ticketing" would benefit travellers in the UK, the synergy of both travel mediums working together..

Facilitate additional flexibility and capacity without the need to provide 'new' runway capacity?

With its excellent 'all-weather' runway, Blackbushe has the potential to become a major benefit to the south-east's transport infrastructure. The runway is currently of a similar length to that of London City, but without the buildings and dense population that London City finds in its surroundings. With Blackbushe we have an airport almost ready to go, without any massive new acreage to find, and acquire. Costs would be mainly on renewed infrastructure, and possibly some runway extensions. New runway capacity offering new travel flexibility for so many...so easily!

Regional airlines are an essential part of Europe's travel infrastructure. Why develop Blackbushe as a 'regional city airport'?

Regional airlines in Europe now carry over 70 million passengers on almost 2 million flights to over 420 destinations in over 60 countries. They have become a vital and integral part of the European economy and its transport structure. The UK needs to

stay in line and maximise its efforts to serve and encourage regional airlines. Blackbushe is so well placed, it stands out as **THE** location of choice for developing a compact 'city gateway', an indication that Britain is open for business and ready to do it.

Plus.. its enviable Good Weather record

Blackbushe is well known for its excellent weather record, and as already discussed it used to serve as the diversion alternate when Heathrow was below limits. One of the benefits secured by the airfield's relatively high plateau location, 329 ft above mean sea level, is that surrounding mist and fog tends to lie below airfield height.

Plus....its superb ready access to surface transport

Direct access to the M3 Motorway at Junction 4a is just five minutes away, while Blackbushe is conveniently situated on the main A30 London-Southampton trunk road. Trains services are easily reached via either Farnborough Main, Camberley, Blackwater or Fleet stations. Motorway links to Heathrow and Gatwick are easily achieved with the M3/M25. A major benefit of Blackbushe's relatively remote location would be that any necessary road development/alterations would not impact on local communities during the work, or after.

Employment

Blackbushe as a new regional airport would create considerable employment opportunities, in an area where much expertise in air transport is ready to be tapped. Local suppliers would obviously reap the benefits too..

US Military plans

It should be noted that prior to its closure in 1960 there were serious discussions between the government and the US military over the future of Blackbushe. The US proposed a 10,000' runway with a 7,000' parallel runway, turning it into a base for strategic bombers, affording the country's longest runway. These plans were of interest to our government of the time, with a view to this becoming London's Number One airport for London. The opportunity for Blackbushe to serve still remains, albeit on a smaller scale!

Possible barriers, and objections

The current airfield ownership's reaction to the concept is currently unknown...

Residents. Hostile opposition originated from Yateley village when part of Blackbushe came into private ownership in 1960 with plans to develop the site as a general aviation centre. Some of this antipathy stemmed from when the land known as Hartford Bridge Flats, partly ancient common land, was requisitioned by the government early in the last war so as to build a military air base. During the war Blackbushe was named RAF Hartford Bridge, assuming the name Blackbushe Airport when it became a civil post war government concern. Today the local population have little problem with Blackbushe's air traffic.

Common Land. Concerns with regard to the use of Common Land occupied by the original airport layout were considered when the decision to close Blackbushe was taken in the late fifties. A few property owners hold rights of common on the airfield, they might be willing to sell these rights? Such ancient rights are anachronistic in the 21st Century, and it would be tragic for Blackbushe to finally be lost because of them...

Farnborough Airport. Farnborough, some eight road miles distant to the south, has become the leading European business jet centre, and maintains a very good relationship with Blackbushe and its air traffic. Another argument for closing Blackbushe in 1960 was the proposed intense military jet traffic flying from Farnborough, but this did not manifest itself. Since early in the Second World War the two airfields have maintained a harmonious relationship. Future changes in local air space with Farnborough gaining its own control zone will need to cater for Blackbushe traffic, hopefully considering future runway requirement predictions.

Current Blackbushe tenants. Currently small business jets operate from Blackbushe, plus flying clubs, and numerous privately owned light aeroplanes. As with Southampton, for example, it is possible for light aircraft to operate from a commercial airport of the kind envisaged.

Deliverable, affordable, and operationally feasible

In this submission I have basically put forward an overall concept that would provide a well placed compact regional 'city' airport in the perfect catchment location. Any such progress would initially depend on the owners' willingness to co-operate. Being a 'concept' I have discussed in this proposal the basis and advantages of a new 'city' style airport to serve the south-west of London area, the potential asset is there - I've identified it, and simply wish to make the prospects and opportunity as clear as possible. I have covered the primary aspects of the benefits Blackbushe could afford from the point of view of economics, safety, environment, weather, and natural surroundings, all of which are in favour of the airfield being recognised for its potential. ***The case for Blackbushe will only get stronger as the need for convenient air transport continues to grow.***

Summing up

Economically ideal catchment area

Minimal environmental impact

Blackbushe could be redeveloped in a relatively short time frame

Established airfield, development costs would be minimal vv new sites

Redevelopment would not blight any communities

Operationally and geographically perfect location

Potentially a new "London West" city airport, a new gateway for business in the south-east to the rest of the UK, Ireland, and Europe.

Possible future off-load for some of Heathrow's short-haul services thus providing additional long-haul slots protecting Heathrow's global hub prospects.

There is no more suitable candidate for this role than Blackbushe. It would provide London with a prestigious regional 'business' airport to its west while the current London City Airport serves the east. Its development would dovetail perfectly into the policy of the Airports Commission, *"making sure UK airports and airlines are safe, secure and competitive while reducing their impacts on the environment and communities"*.

Conclusion

I would ask that the Airport Commission give this submission their most serious consideration, hopefully ensuring that safeguards are applied toward the continued use of Blackbushe for aviation purposes, and in particular for the potential it holds for our commercial tomorrows.

The time has come for Blackbushe to be recognised for what it could be and should be



Once London's second airport.....

Blackbushe *the* perfect location for tomorrow's "London City West".

