Rehman Chishti MP
Member of Parliament for Gillingham and Rainham

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 7075
Email: rehman.chishti.mp@parliament.uk

Airports Commission
6th Floor
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

13 May 2014

Dear Sir or Madam

I am submitting the following as evidence to be considered by the Airport Commission on behalf of my constituents in Gillingham and Rainham in relation to the inner Thames Estuary proposal.

Many residents have raised concerns with me about the potential development of an airport in the Thames Estuary, which would have a detrimental impact on Kent and Medway.

The economic, social and environmental impact of such an airport means that it should not be considered a credible option.

Economic impact

1. Concerns have been expressed about the financing of a new airport, which has been estimated by the Airport Commission to cost up to £112 billion, five times that of the three short listed option. Given the current period of austerity, it is not clear where this commitment would come from.
2. A new airport would require supporting services and industries and Kent could only accommodate them through building vast new industrial estates. A new hub airport would require at least 70,000 employees, which is more than those who are unemployed in Kent and Medway. It would result in an influx of new arrivals, requiring new homes, schools and hospitals. To put the scale of this into some context, Medway's annual housing target is 815 dwellings per year up to 2028, far less than the thousands of homes that would be required to support a new airport.
3. The accessibility of a new airport in the Thames also needs to be addressed. There have been suggestions of an airport handling up to 150 million passengers a year. Such a vast airport, which would be twice as large as Heathrow, would require significant transport links to support it which could not be met by High Speed One, local rail or current road capacity.

Social impact

1. Residents have raised concerns about the local impact of such an airport. The development pressures from this would alter the character and community of the towns of Gillingham and Rainham.
2. Evidence suggests that for a Thames Estuary airport to work successfully, Heathrow would need to close. The consequences of not closing Heathrow have been seen in Montreal, Canada where the new airport was hugely underused. This means there would need to be a relocation of workers from Heathrow. The jobs created would not be new jobs, just a geographical change.

Environmental impact

1. 300,000 migrating birds flock to the estuary's environmentally and scientifically significant sites each year. The RSPB have commented on the difficulty in relocating the birds as they would naturally attempt to return. The European Union requires birds and their habitats to be protected which may block development.
2. There are also safety concerns. The estuary is an area where an aircraft would be 12 times more at risk of bird strike than at any other major UK airport. It would be close to Thamesport, where huge container ships unload one fifth of the UK's Liquid Natural Gas supplies, and the proposed London Array wind farm. The SS Richard Montgomery ship, packed full of explosives, would also need to be moved.
3. A new airport would also have an impact on meeting the UK's climate change targets. The target for the UK carbon emissions has been set at an 80% reduction by 2050.

Alternative

1. Evidence shows that an airport in the Thames estuary would be in the wrong place. As the Mayor of London's adviser Doug Oakervee has highlighted in his Thames Estuary Airport Feasibility Review 2009, Upper Heyford, in Oxfordshire, is the centre of passenger demand for the whole of the UK, he seems to suggests that if a new airport facility is needed it should be to the west of London rather than the east.

Please consider the points raised by my constituent's when considering the future of airports in the South of England.

Yours faithfully

Rehman Chishti MP