



Unites Response to Boris Johnsons Island Airport Plan

In Boris Johnsons election campaign he called for the creation of a new airport in the Thames. Now he has become Mayor he has attempted to put some meat on the bone by proposing the closure of Heathrow in favour of a four runway airport, operating 24 hours a day, on an island made of land fill waste, two miles north of the Isle of Sheppy.

Unite believes that his proposals were merely a way of avoiding the idea of expansion at Heathrow to bring on side the business community and campaigners from London boroughs that neighbour Heathrow. None the less like the Mayor of Amity Island from the movie Jaws he appears to want to continue this flight even if it belongs in the realm of science fiction without any idea of the consequences for London or the wider region.

Here we attempt to highlight just some of the reasons why the Mayors proposal is madness.

- The location and orientation of the airport that has been suggested would place the airport further from the centre of London than Stansted is today removing the ease and convenience that airports such as London City provide.
- Due to the proximity to London City airport and operations out of London Southend, air traffic control restraints would severely restrict and possibly even cause one or both of these airports to close if something of this magnitude were constructed.
- The mayor's proposals would turn the area west of London into a ghost town with very high levels of unemployment while areas East of London would require a major new building drive to enable the workforce and their families to live within a reasonable commuting distance of the airport. The scale of the disruption to the lives of the people in the areas affected will be astronomical.
- In the five neighbouring boroughs to Heathrow 1 in 15 of the residents are directly employed at the airport. In Spelthorne this figure rises to 1 in 8 residents are employed at the airport. The effect on these currently prosperous boroughs would be a hammer blow to the local economy causing even further loss of employment from the industries and shops in the area.

- The area East of London is already suffering from significant loss of green belt land as commuters move further and further out to obtain affordable housing. The East of England has been undergoing relatively rapid growth for at least twenty years: population growth 1981-2003 was 12.5% (England 6.5%), while projected growth 2003-2023 is 14% (England 9%)[\[1\]](#).
- Government figures suggest that by 2021 housing levels in Essex alone will need to increase by a minimum of 126,500 homes to meet current needs before any additional pressure is added from the development of a new airport[\[2\]](#)

Lord Soley of the Future Heathrow campaign has likened the potential loss of Heathrow to that of the London docks which took decades to recover.

Billions of pounds have been spent on Heathrow to improve its links to Central London and billions more are needed to bring Heathrow out of its current decline and bring it up to the standard make it a first class airport for a modern London.

The projected costs of building 'Boris island', including the airport, the transport links and the new homes and infrastructure would run to several times this amount and would cause significantly more social and environmental damage than building a third runway.

Heathrow is the country's principle air freight terminal responsible for over 55% of all air cargo. This cargo is carried in the belly holds of passenger aircraft and avoids the need to fly cargo in bulk in cargo only aircraft. Cargo only aircraft tend to be older more polluting ex-passenger aircraft which release far more emissions than the modern day equivalents.

Locating an airport to the East of London would cause the vast majority of this freight to face the additional problems of circumnavigating London in order to catch flights and hence create far more congestion on our road network.

Kit Malthouse, one of Johnson's deputies, has suggested that placing an airport in the Thames would enable it to operate 24 hours a day without any noise disruption as flights would approach from the North Sea.

Does Mr Malthouse not realise that in that direction are four major wind farms, all of which disrupt radar and aircraft landing systems.

Has Mr Malthouse not been to the seaside? If he had he would realise that noise travels a long way over water, especially at night creating a situation where the neighbouring seaside towns in Essex and Kent would lose a

considerable amount of holiday makers due to aircraft noise pollution putting whole communities out of a job.

Additionally:-

- Aircraft on approach and in holding patterns over the Channel may also be subject to French Air traffic control.
- The spot chosen is in the midst of a bird life reserve, raising safety concerns over bird strikes.
- If made out of land fill the new island would also create pockets of highly volatile methane gas adding to the issues associated with the settlement of man made islands and problems with flooding.
- The only other airport that has so far been constructed on a man made island is sinking faster than the billions it cost to construct it.
- There have been proposals to build a new airport in the Thames before and this has lead to millions being spent on three separate government enquiries. Every one of these has concluded that the idea is not a good one.

In short Unite believes that Boris Johnson has been painted into a corner by relying on very bad advice and cannot be seen politically to back down.

1 East of England Regional Assembly - A Regional Health Strategy for the East of England: Technical Supplement 2006

2 Source: Secretary of State's proposed changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy, policy H1 (Dec 2006)