



High speed rail instead of a third runway

The Conservatives have at the 2008 conference suggested that the need for a new runway at Heathrow would be avoided altogether by replacing short-haul flights with a high-speed rail link to Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham.

The potential for high speed rail is an exciting prospect and could be successfully integrated with the surface transport infrastructure to reduce the levels of road transport which is responsible for the vast majority of global warming emissions from all modes of transport. New strategic rail links to Heathrow could help ensure that the benefits of a third runway are felt nationwide, and it could help develop Heathrow as an integrated public transport hub in the manner of Amsterdam Schiphol, Paris Charles de Gaulle, and Frankfurt airports.

The argument that a high speed rail line could avoid the need for a third runway is a red herring, however, as clearly illustrated by the passenger numbers utilising airports in Europe which are connected.

High speed rail won't solve Heathrow's capacity constraints

A new high-speed rail link wouldn't solve Heathrow's chronic capacity constraints. Heathrow is operating its two runways at 99% of capacity and has does so for several years creating an environment where flights are delayed and cancelled due to even the most minor of incidents.

The Conservatives have proposed the Treasury spending £15.6 billion to build a new high speed rail link to replace a third runway. Their proposed scheme would link Heathrow to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. The total number of flights to Manchester and Leeds/Bradford is only 13,155 - less than 3% of Heathrow's total flights. Even if every flight from Manchester and Leeds/Bradford were replaced by a new high speed rail line then Heathrow would still be operating at 97% of capacity.

Building a high-speed rail link is not an alternative to building a third runway.

High speed rail can't serve the same destinations as a third runway

Because we are an island nation high speed rail can't provide the same sort of access to global destinations that a third runway can. China will soon replace the United States as Europe's largest trading partner and the Chinese Government announced plans in August 2008 to build 97 new airports by 2020. Rail is never going to be able to serve the long-haul destinations that

Heathrow can, and even for short-haul routes, rail will always be more limited than in continental Europe due to the physical speed limitations of surface travel. A flight between London and Nice for example would take 15 hours more by rail than the equivalent journey by air.

There are still flights between Heathrow and Paris

The high speed rail line between London and Paris and Brussels has reduced the growth in flights between those destinations and Heathrow, but it has not replaced them entirely. Generally speaking passenger numbers are half what they might have been without rail. Further substitution is hard to imagine as it is more convenient for some passengers to fly.

Many domestic flyers are transferring to other flights

One quarter of Heathrow's domestic passengers are transferring to other flights at Heathrow. On a journey from Manchester to Los Angeles, it is more convenient for passengers to check-in at Manchester and change at Heathrow than take a train to Euston and transfer with baggage across London. On many flights from UK airports to Heathrow the majority of passengers are transferring from or to another flight:

Aberdeen UK	46.3%
Belfast City(Harbour)	36.7%
Edinburgh	48.6%
Glasgow	40.9%
Leeds/Bradford	60.9%
Manchester	74.0%
Newcastle Uk	55.8%
Tees-Side	55.6%

The choice between rail or air is a false one

The choice that is presented by anti-Heathrow campaigners of rail or air is a false one and we should reject it.

Britain needs to give a higher priority to investment in all of our transport infrastructure, and use our existing infrastructure more efficiently. Within environmental constraints on noise, air quality and carbon dioxide emissions.

We should improve our railways and airports rather than pit one form of the transport against the other. The three countries with the best high-speed rail networks in the world – Japan, France, and Spain – are not choosing whether to invest in airports or rail, they are investing in both. Japan, inventors of the bullet train, has one of the world's busiest domestic flight networks. France, long-time leaders in European high-speed rail, has a hub airport at Paris Charles De Gaulle with twice as many runways as Heathrow. And Spain, which is about to open a new high-speed rail line between Barcelona and Madrid, has doubled the number of runways at Madrid airport from two to four.

Supporting rail doesn't mean we can avoid the difficult decisions about a third runway at Heathrow. High-speed rail would complement a third runway but it cannot replace it.