



NO MORE QUIET PERIODS

The Government is looking to end runway alternation at Heathrow. It will mean a big increase in aircraft noise over most of London and the Thames Valley.

What is Runway Alternation?

It is difficult to grasp what aircraft noise is like in West London unless you have experienced it. Visitors to the area stand in amazement as they hear the planes roaring overhead, one landing every 90 seconds. This means that the residents live with noise levels which are amongst the worst in the world. Runway alternation is what makes life bearable. It guarantees peace and quiet for half the day.

Runway alternation is what makes life bearable. It guarantees a half day's peace and quiet.

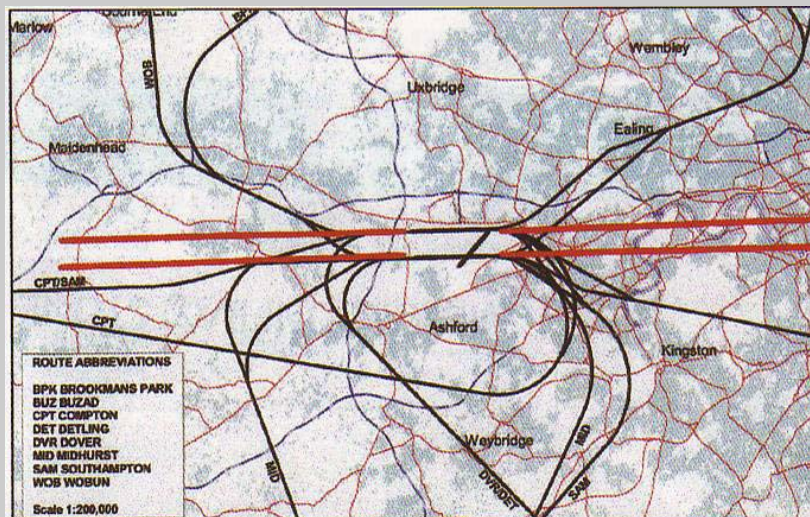
Without it, residents face the prospect of a plane coming over every 90 seconds from six in the morning until almost eleven at night.

Runway alternation was first introduced in the early 1970s, largely as a result of pressure from HACAN, in order to give residents some relief from the increasing number of planes. Since then, while the noise from individual aircraft has been reduced, the number of planes using Heathrow has soared. More than ever, it is the near-constant noise, rather than the problems caused by individual aircraft, that troubles residents. Yet this is the very time that the Government is threatening to do away with runway alternation.

Runway Alternation At a Glance

- on the days planes land over London they switch runways at 3pm
- this allows residents under the final approach paths a half day's break from the noise
- planes are on their final approach by the time they are flying over the London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow
- people in Putney and Fulham - the areas where the planes are about to join their final approach - also benefit from alternation
- there is no alternation when planes land from the west over Windsor, Berkshire and parts of Oxfordshire
- this is because the Cranford Agreement prevents any planes taking off from the northern runway over Cranford
- there is no alternation for anybody between 6am and 7am when planes always land on both runways
- a very different system applies at night
- In March 2006 the Government is expected to consult on proposals to end runway alternation

Current flight paths: landing approach paths in red; take-off routes in black



How does it work?

- ◆ Runway alternation only applies when planes land over London.
- ◆ Planes land over London when the west wind blows (aircraft land into the wind) - about 70% of the time in a typical year.
- ◆ Planes alternate weekly: one week they land on the southern runway from 7am before switching to the northern runway; the next week, they start on the northern runway at 7am before switching to the southern at 3pm.
- ◆ At Heathrow planes do not normally land and take off from the same runway at any one time.
- ◆ There is no alternation when the east wind is blowing and planes land over Berkshire and Oxfordshire.
- ◆ On those days all the planes land on the northern runway and take off from the southern runway because the Cranford Agreement prevents take-offs from the northern runway.

Isn't it unfair that Windsor and Berkshire don't get runway alternation?

It is. It means that when planes land from the east the residents under the flight path get a plane every 90 seconds all day long. As the number of planes has increased, this has made life increasingly difficult in these areas. There is a vocal campaign, centred on Windsor, for the Cranford Agreement to be re-examined. They argue that the Cranford Agreement was drawn up when take-off noise was much worse than it is now. They do recognise that, if the Cranford Agreement was rescinded and runway alternation was introduced for planes landing from the west, areas such as Old Windsor and Wraysbury, which lie under the approach path to the southern runway, would get landing aircraft for the first time.

What is the Cranford Agreement?

Fifty years ago, when noise from take-offs was much worse than landings, an agreement was drawn up which prevented planes taking off over the village of Cranford at the very eastern end of the northern runway because the noise would have been unbearable. Today planes land over Cranford, but none takes off. The London Borough of Hounslow argues passionately that the Cranford Agreement should remain in place. It argues that life in Cranford, a low-income community very close to the airport where many people have limited choices about moving away, would become unbearable. It also points to the fact that, while Windsor has planes all day when the east wind is blowing, this only occurs for 30% of the time in a typical year.

What is the Government likely to propose?

- ◆ The Department for Transport has indicated that it expects to consult on proposals to end runway alternation from March to June 2006 and introduce what it calls **mixed-mode operations**—that is where planes land and take off from the same runway at the same time.
- ◆ The Department is expected to argue that initially mixed-mode will only be introduced between 7am and 5pm, with alternation continuing in the evenings.
- ◆ It is likely to announce its final plans as part of the review of its Aviation White Paper, due at the end of 2006.
- ◆ It will also consult on plans to end the Cranford Agreement. With the Cranford Agreement in place, mixed-mode is impossible. The Department for Transport has little interest in the people of Windsor or Cranford. It simply sees the Cranford Agreement as an obstacle to its plans to end runway alternation for West London.

What would the end of runway alternation mean?

1. It would mean a broken promise.

The cap of 480,000 on flights at Heathrow would go.

On the Government's own figures, the introduction of mixed-mode just during the busiest times of the day would increase flight numbers to 515,000 per year. When the Government gave the go-ahead to Terminal 5, it agreed with the T5 Inspector that there should be an annual cap of 480,000 on the number of flights using the airport by the time the fifth terminal opened (in Spring 2008). If BAA wanted to go over the limit, it would be required to seek permission at a Planning Inquiry. Both the Government and BAA need to explain what they are proposing to do if mixed-mode sends flight numbers over the 480,000 limit. By rights, mixed-mode should not be able to be introduced before a Planning Inquiry hears the evidence.

2. It would be yet another broken promise.

The history of Heathrow is littered with broken promises.

When giving permission for Terminal 4 in 1980, the Government agreed with the Inspector that there should be no further major expansion at Heathrow:

"The Government concludes that the idea of a fifth terminal at Heathrow and a second runway at Gatwick should not be pursued. This effectively limits expansion at these airports." Aviation Minister Lord Trefargne in the House of Lords, 14th February 1980.

The Terminal 4 Inspector also recommended that, with T4 in place, the number of flights should be capped at 260,000 a year. The Government agreed to a cap of 275,000. No cap was ever enforced. By the time T4 was opened there were over 300,000 flights.

3. The extra noise would be widespread—and include take-off routes

More planes would affect almost everybody under flight paths

The biggest losers of course would be the residents of Richmond and Hounslow and the people of Putney and Fulham. But more planes would mean more noise for just about everybody who lives under a flight path. Already parts of South London get nearly 500 planes at day. That would increase. Areas of North London get over 300. That would increase. Everybody living under the take-off routes from Heathrow could expect to get more planes. And, of course, people in and around Cranford would get take-offs for the first time.

4. The picture for Windsor and Berkshire would be more mixed

At present when an east wind is blowing planes land on the northern runway all day long. With mixed-mode in place, they would land on both the northern and southern runway. This would reduce the number of aircraft landing over areas like Windsor, but areas under the southern approach paths, such as Old Windsor and Wraysbury, would experience a significant increase. There would also be many more take-offs over Berkshire as a whole due to the overall increase in flight numbers that mixed-mode would allow. If mixed-mode were to be introduced all day long, the number of planes landing over Windsor might once again reach current levels.



The case for extending runway alternation

The big story of the last decade has been the way in which aircraft noise has become a problem in areas many miles from Heathrow. The Department for Transport seems to underestimate just how serious the problem has become. But these new areas are getting hundreds of flights a day. In many of these places the total noise reaches levels where the World Health Organisation believes that communities would become 'seriously annoyed'.

- Clapham
- Stockwell
- Brixton
- Dulwich
- Lewisham
- Greenwich
- Blackheath
- Stoke Newington
- Finsbury Park
- Highgate
- Henley-on-Thames

"I am on the flight path to Heathrow and must endure a non-stop cacophony of groaning aircraft over the street. The confusion for me is that I live in Camberwell and that is a long way from Heathrow. And yet I have to endure landing aircraft at night and more irritatingly for the entire day at 90 second intervals." Camberwell resident

"Aircraft noise is a perpetual intrusion into our lives. Sometimes it drives me to a feeling of terrible despair. We moved into this area two years ago. I was aware of aircraft noise being a hazard living in areas like Richmond, Putney and Wandsworth. I thought Stockwell, being that much further east, would be OK. It is the unremitting noise that I find hardest to cope with." Stockwell resident

The list could go on. The basic reason for this is a big increase in the number of planes using Heathrow. It means that the four stacks where planes are held before being guided down to the airport are becoming overfull. As a result, planes are being released early and are guided down in ever-wider arcs over London and the Thames Valley, bringing aircraft noise to areas where it was not a problem previously. The long-term answer to this is to reduce the number of planes using the airport. But, in the short-term, extending alternation to these areas would give people some relief.

How it could work

- Even many miles from Heathrow aircraft tend to keep to an agreed flight path
- These flight paths could be alternated to guarantee these areas some peace and quiet
- It could apply to take-off paths as well – the idea is not to introduce noise to yet more areas, but to alternate existing flight paths
- There is also a strong case for introducing alternation to *all* areas between 6am and 7am

Time to Take A Stand

The expansion of Heathrow has been relentless. Residents have had to put up with decades of broken promises and a deteriorating environment as they have watched aircraft numbers soar.

It is time to bring a halt to the expansion of Heathrow

- In 1980, there were 287,000 flights using the airport
- By 1990, it was well over 300,000 flights
- In 2005, it had reached 480,000 flights
- The end of runway alternation would lead to at least 515,000 flights
- Add in a 3rd runway and the number soars above 700,000 flights

It is time for the Government to keep its promises

- In 2001, it agreed with the Terminal 5 Inspector that flight numbers should be capped at 480,000 a year. If BAA wanted to go over that limit, it would need to make its case before a Planning Inquiry.
- In 2006, the Government is set to consult on a scheme to end runway alternation that would break that limit.

It is time for a balanced policy

The Government and the aviation industry talks about developing a “balanced” approach to aviation policy. It is a blatant and brazen misuse of words. What they mean by a balanced approach is a policy of further development that will carry with it some mitigation for residents and the environment.

A truly balanced policy would:

- Halt any further growth at Heathrow
- Regard 480,000 flights as an absolute maximum
- Retain runway alternation
- Extend runway alternation, so more people can enjoy a period of peace and quiet

Residents, with the support of their local authorities and most of their MPs, intend to fight to retain their periods of peace and quiet; to stop any government plans to get rid of runway alternation.

If you want to join us, contact HACAN on 020 7737 6641, email info@hacan.org.uk, or write to PO Box 339, Twickenham, TW1 2XF

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