1. "108,000 jobs"

Counter-argument: Most of these jobs are moved, not created. The DfT itself expects the jobs at Heathrow to come mainly from displacement elsewhere in the UK, so the regions lose what London gains.

- **The government doesn't use 108,000.** The DfT's own figure is the *potential* for over 60,000 local jobs (CILT). Ask Heathrow to reconcile its number with the DfT's.
- **Displacement, not growth.** The DfT expects the scheme's local jobs to primarily represent jobs displaced from across the UK (NEF, July 2026).
- **Regional losses (NEF 2026, using DfT forecasts):** 15,200 aviation jobs lost in the wider UK regions by 2050, plus a further 6,400 displaced from other London and south-east airports.
- **Regional losses (NEF 2020, using DfT data from FOI):** up to 27,000 jobs relocate to London and the south-east, taking £43bn out of regional economies (NEF, Feb 2020).
- **Named losers:** Birmingham Airport alone is forecast to lose 7.5 million passengers a year by 2050, around 9,500 jobs at the airport and in its supply chain (CILT). North-west England is the worst hit in NEF's 2020 analysis, with up to 15,000 jobs lost.
- **Two-thirds displaced:** Friends of the Earth, citing NEF, says two-thirds of the jobs created at Heathrow in 2050 would displace jobs in other regions (Friends of the Earth).
- **Construction jobs are temporary,** and the build is now slipping: Heathrow has told ministers the runway may not open until 2039.

2. "£40–79bn of value; +0.43% GDP by 2050"

Counter-argument: The government's own June 2026 appraisal says expansion makes the UK worse off overall, and puts the GDP gain at roughly a tenth of earlier estimates.

- **Negative net present value.** The DfT's Green Book appraisal puts the scheme's NPV at **-£23.4bn to -£62.5bn** over 60 years, even when entirely privately financed (DfT appraisal, June 2026). *Edit note: your draft says "minus 62.5bn"; safest phrasing is "as much as minus £62.5bn" or quote the full range.*
- **Benefits outweighed by harms.** As reported by the Guardian, the appraisal counts £29bn–£42.4bn of passenger and wider economic benefits (mainly lower fares), but £58bn–£82bn of social and environmental costs. Heathrow's "£40–79bn of value" is the benefits side only.
- **GDP gain cut tenfold.** The DfT now estimates the GDP impact at 0.03–0.05% in 2056, down by a factor of 10, and concentrated in London and the south-east (NEF, July 2026). Friends of the Earth puts this at about £2bn a year in 2056 (Friends of the Earth). Heathrow's 0.43% figure predates this appraisal.

- **Reallocation, not growth.** The DfT expects the scheme's jobs mainly to be displaced from elsewhere in the UK rather than adding to total employment (NEF, July 2026).
- **Regional drain.** NEF's 2020 analysis of DfT data found £43bn could leave the regions' economies, 17 million fewer passengers would depart non-London airports by 2050, and north-west England could lose 5 million passengers and up to 15,000 jobs (NEF, Feb 2020). At least three-quarters of the GDP gain goes to London and the south-east (Friends of the Earth, citing NEF).
- **Uncertain even on the government's terms.** The Appraisal of Sustainability calls the national economic impacts uncertain and identifies major adverse impacts across 10 environmental domains (NEF, July 2026).

3. "Connectivity lifts UK productivity by 1.49%"

Counter-argument: Heathrow is already the world's best-connected airport, business flying is not growing, and the government's own appraisal (which includes connectivity benefits) finds only a 0.03–0.05% GDP gain. A 1.49% productivity uplift is not consistent with that.

- **Ask for the source.** The 1.49% figure is Heathrow's, not the DfT's. The DfT's June 2026 appraisal already counts connectivity and fare benefits, and still finds a negative NPV and a GDP effect of 0.03–0.05% in 2056 (NEF, July 2026).
- **Already the best connected.** Heathrow's international destinations have grown by nearly a quarter in a decade without a third runway (Friends of the Earth).
- **Business travel isn't the driver.** Business passenger numbers have been falling and aren't expected to rise significantly. Most growth comes from leisure trips, and two-thirds of past growth came from people already flying more than three times a year (Friends of the Earth).
- **Transfer passengers add little.** HACAN's research found that 19 million of the 22 million extra passengers between 1992 and 2004 were transfer or transit passengers who pay no Air Passenger Duty and barely leave the airport (HACAN). *Edit note: historic data; worth asking HACAN for an update.*
- **Regional connectivity falls.** 17 million fewer passengers departing non-London airports by 2050 means fewer direct routes from the regions, which cuts against productivity outside the south-east (NEF, Feb 2020).

4. "£33bn of private investment"

Counter-argument: "Private" money is borrowed against passengers' future fares. Under the regulated asset base, the more Heathrow spends the more it can charge, so passengers pay, and if it fails, taxpayers are left exposed, as with Thames Water.

- **Already heavily indebted.** Heathrow's 2025 accounts show £17.6bn of debt, up from £16.6bn in 2024 and nearly £14bn in 2019. The No 3rd Runway Coalition calls it the most

indebted piece of infrastructure in the UK and warns taxpayers could be left bailing out an unfinished project (The Independent via AOL).

- **Ratings agency warning.** S&P has cautioned that, without substantial new shareholder equity, the expansion could put Heathrow at financial risk, as its ratings leave little room for more large-scale borrowing (Airways).
- **The RAB rewards spending.** Under the regulated asset base, Heathrow's allowed revenue rises with its capital spend. IAG (BA's owner) says this gives little incentive to control costs and that charges could reach about £50 per passenger (Aviation A2Z, July 2026).
- **Passengers already paying.** In July 2026 the CAA allowed Heathrow to recover early expansion costs through higher charges (The National). Airlines estimate fares could rise £60–65 per person, about £250 for a family of four (Friends of the Earth).
- **Taxpayers pick up surface access.** Heathrow has historically offered only £1.1bn towards road and rail links; TfL has estimated the full cost at up to £18bn (HACAN briefing). Heathrow's £49bn excludes public transport upgrades for 80% more passengers (Friends of the Earth).
- **Government isn't checking.** Asked in April 2026 to assess the impact of Heathrow's debt, the DfT replied that financing decisions are a matter for the airport (Westminster Brief, PQ 126685).
- **Profits go overseas.** Heathrow's owners include a French private equity firm, an Australian pension fund and sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Singapore and China (Friends of the Earth).
- **Your figures to keep:** value of Heathrow £8.7bn; current debt £17.6bn; capital investment required £25bn. *Edit note: add the source for the £8.7bn valuation and £25bn figure before publishing.*

Thames Water comparison: A Coalition submission to the CAA compared Heathrow's gearing with Thames Water's (CAA, 2019). Like Thames Water, Heathrow is a highly indebted, privately owned monopoly whose shareholders earn a regulated return on the asset base; if costs overrun, the pressure falls on users, and ultimately on government to step in.

5. "£150bn in trade"

Counter-argument: Trade flows through Heathrow are not the same as extra trade created by a third runway. Any genuine trade gain is already inside the DfT's appraisal, which still finds a net loss and a GDP effect of 0.05% at most.

- **Gross, not additional.** Heathrow already handled cargo worth £215.6bn in 2024 with two runways (Heathrow figures via STAT Times). Ask Heathrow: is £150bn new trade, or trade that would happen anyway via other routes and airports? Over what period?
- **Counted and still negative.** The DfT appraisal, which includes trade and wider economic effects, gives a negative NPV and a GDP gain of 0.03–0.05% by 2056 (NEF, July 2026).

- **Air freight is a small share of trade.** Less than 1% of UK exports and imports by weight go by air (Friends of the Earth).
- **Displacement applies to trade too.** As with jobs and passengers, cargo moving to Heathrow is partly diverted from regional airports (see claims 1–2).

6. "50% more export capacity at the UK's largest port by value"

Counter-argument: Extra cargo capacity is a by-product of 50% more passenger flights, with their noise and emissions, not a freight strategy. Capacity is not demand.

- **Freight rides on passenger jets.** 95% of Heathrow's cargo travels in the belly-hold of passenger aircraft (Heathrow figures via STAT Times, above). "50% more export capacity" really means up to 276,000 more flights a year, mostly passenger flights (TravelPulse).
- **Growth without a runway.** Heathrow handled a post-pandemic record of 1.59 million tonnes in 2025 on two runways (Air Logistics International).
- **Weight matters for the wider economy.** With under 1% of UK trade by weight going by air (Friends of the Earth), expanding sea, rail and regional freight capacity would support far more exporters.
- **No benefit of that capacity.** Office for National Statistics states that such movements have a neutral impact on GDP>

7. "£33bn runway; £49bn overall"

Counter-argument: The price has roughly doubled in a decade, airlines think it could double again, it excludes the public transport bill, and the timetable has already slipped four years. This has the hallmarks of HS2.

- **A moving target.** The Airports Commission costed the runway scheme at £17.6bn in 2015 (CMS); Heathrow claimed £14bn in 2018 (Travel Weekly). Heathrow now quotes £49bn overall.
- **Could reach £100bn.** Independent consultants have questioned the £49bn, and analysis for airlines says costs could double to £100bn (Friends of the Earth).
- **Public transport excluded.** The £49bn doesn't cover upgrading public transport for 80% more passengers (Friends of the Earth). TfL has previously put road and rail costs at up to £18bn, against £1.1bn Heathrow offered (HACAN).
- **Already late.** Heathrow has told ministers the runway may not open until 2039, not 2035 (Sky News via Classic FM). Delays raise financing costs, which flow into charges under the RAB (see claim 4).
- **Engineering risk.** The plan requires moving the M25 into a tunnel and demolishing over 700 homes (The Independent via AOL).

- **Human cost not in the price.** Longford village would disappear, Sipson lose half its homes, and another 5,500 homes could become unfit to live in from noise and pollution (Friends of the Earth).

Cross-cutting points (use against any claim)

The DfT's negative NPV is driven largely by social and environmental costs, so these points reinforce every economic rebuttal above.

- **Climate.** The government predicts aviation CO2 after expansion would be 81% above what its advisers say is compatible with net zero in 2050. Non-CO2 effects such as contrails, which more than double aviation's climate impact, are not counted in the climate tests (Friends of the Earth).
- **Carbon budgets already blown.** Tyndall Centre research finds every published government aviation scenario overshoots the legislated carbon budget before a third runway is even added (LBC).
- **Carbon squeeze on the regions.** In a carbon-capped economy, expansion effectively moves £3.3bn of emissions allowance from other regions and nations to London, 2030–2050 (NEF, Feb 2020).
- **Noise.** Around 900,000 more people would be exposed to health-harming aircraft noise, and flight paths have not been published (Friends of the Earth).
- **Air quality and nature.** Roughly a quarter of a million extra flights a year would raise key pollutants; harm to 8 designated nature sites, including Richmond Park and Windsor Great Park, cannot be ruled out (Friends of the Earth). The Appraisal of Sustainability finds major adverse impacts in 10 environmental domains (NEF, July 2026).

Sources

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