

# Third runway to climate crisis

## Why Heathrow expansion won't deliver for Scotland



Paul Beckford

There are many reasons to oppose a third runway at Heathrow; economic, environmental, social - and concerns about the impact on the climate. All of these issues were raised in conversations held with delegates and members during three days at the SNP conference.

The No Third Runway Coalition had over 150 such conversations, with 98% of those we spoke to expressing opposition, and over 130 signing our petition calling on the Scottish Government to reverse its current policy. Elected representatives - Councillors, MSPs and MPs - though uniformly unwilling

to sign the petition, were nevertheless quite happy to express their disquiet at the party position of supporting expansion.

Notably, there was the recognition that policy priorities have changed significantly since the Airport Commission recommended the third runway in 2015, and since the UK Parliament voted on it last year. The First Minister has shown leadership in declaring a Climate Emergency, and made a commitment to 'review all policy areas through the lens of climate change'. Most members we spoke with consider that expansion at Heathrow quite simply seems entirely at odds with the climate change targets and net-zero objectives of both the Scottish and the UK Government.

Heathrow have tried to promote expansion as bringing increased connectivity to Scotland and the potential of jobs and growth. However, the UK Government estimates of jobs and growth figures have been

consistently revised down at every stage during the last three years, and the promise of a Scottish logistics hub to support construction remains just that...a promise.

There is also significant change within the aviation industry itself. The trend in aircraft orders appears to be shifting away from large hub-style planes like the A380 and towards those with greater capacity for direct point to point flights like the 787 Dreamliner. A 2016 report by the CBI 'Unlocking Growth' revealed that business prefer such direct flights to places that they trade with.

The UK Parliament's Transport Select Committee in their 2018 report into the Airports National Policy Statement showed that Heathrow expansion will mean 170,000 fewer flights from non-London airports compared to a no expansion scenario, including 2,700 fewer flights from Scottish Airports by 2050 - thereby reducing direct connectivity.

The Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) recent

advice, that a third runway at Heathrow then would require restrictions at all other airports in the UK, further demonstrates the negative impact that a third runway would have on the ability of regional airports to grow at all.

SNP members clearly understand that the Scottish Government has many interests and views to consider when forming its policy positions, and particularly ensuring that exporting businesses have freight connectivity to distant markets. However, they are far from convinced that a third runway at Heathrow is the only option, or is preferable to direct connectivity, or connectivity via other freight hubs. There is also concern over the long-term sustainability of such freight movements in the context of the need for a greener global economy. In this regard it is also interesting to note that the UK is actually a net importer of seafood through Heathrow. On an average

day at Heathrow there were £4.4million of exports of seafood, and £5.6million of imports.

The policy of supporting the third runway seems not only at odds with climate objectives, but even in economic terms seemed to many members somewhat short-termist. The question many delegates and members were posing was: "How does supporting a third runway at Heathrow fit with the

*connectivity needs of an independent Scotland?"*

There was recognition that additional carbon emissions resulting from a third runway would place severe limitations on Scotland's own economic, transport and environmental policy options which not only makes little sense whilst Scotland remains a part of the UK, but is also far from an optimal starting point for an independent Scotland.

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