

Howard Davies - Airports Commission Update

The commission was setup in September 2012 with a policy of “Making sure UK airports and airlines are safe, secure and competitive while reducing their impacts on the environment and communities”. The remit on the airport consultation given to it by government is “Its overarching objective is to identify and recommend to Government options for maintaining the UK’s status as an international hub for aviation”.

After investigations, receiving evidence and submissions, it will produce an interim report by the end of 2013 and a final report in the summer 2015 (after the General Election). The interim report will document the assessment of evidence on the nature scale and timing of the steps needed to maintain the UK’s global hub status. Including its recommendation(s) for immediate actions to improve the use of existing runway capacity in the next five years – consistent with credible long term options. (Short and medium term actions).

So by the end of this year we will have an assessment of the aviation industry’s growth requirements (if any) and actions to make more efficient use of what we have already. There will also be an assessment of the Long Term options presented recently and a shortlist of “the most credible long term options”. It will not be until after the General Election in 2015 that we will know the decision on large scale development if needed, for additional runways or airports.

There have been a number of submissions in regard to making better use of what we have :

Short Term – those that can be delivered without the provision of additional runways or terminals, with 5 years of the publication of the interim report

Medium Term – options that do not require additional runways or terminals, but may need more than 5 years to deliver (planning approvals or improvement to surface access infrastructure serving an existing airport – road/rail primarily)

(Airport) Submissions from: Aberdeen International, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Farnborough, Gatwick, Heathrow, Biggin Hill, London City, London Stansted, London Luton, Manston, Newcastle, Pembrey, Southampton International, Southend.

Other submissions from regions, county councils, business and industry groups, supporting or opposing, individual or combined airport solutions).

There will be more local interest in what is proposed for the longer term options (if the interim report indicates a significant increase in aviation capacity is required). Consultation on these options will not be until Autumn 2014. Before the consultation, the commission will work with sponsors to draw up the costs and timescales for individual and/or combined schemes to test their viability. In most cases the estimate for airport construction is 2030+.

Summary of Long Term Proposals (existing airports)

Heathrow, Birmingham, Stansted (TfL and others), Gatwick, Manston, Manchester, Gatwick+Lydd, RAF Croughton & Steventon, Cardiff, Luton, Fair Oaks combined Hub solutions

Summary Long Term Proposals (new airports)

Goodwin Sands, Foulness, Isle of Grain (Fosters), Isle of Grain (Thames Reach + Metro Tunnel), Cliffe (London Medway), Cliffe (IAAG), Severn Estuary, Oxfordshire, Thurrock (PI) , Twyford (PI), Outer Thames Estuary (TfL - Island + one other), Inner Thames Estuary (TfL- Grain)) , Walland Marsh (PI), Maplin Sands (PI)

PI = Private Individual

As expected at this time there is a wide range of detail with some worked up to include major rail and road infrastructure (in one case a major road/rail bridge/tunnel across the Thames, combined with a tidal barrier, in other options road/rail Thames crossings are required to access the airport). But there are no schemes which have included their full implications – most concentrating on the runways, terminals and direct airport facilities (freight etc.) with some indicating surface connections (road and rail) but not fully worked up (and all estimated much lower than current rail schemes would indicate). There are some interesting rail networks suggested by Fosters (Grain) HS1/HS2/Crossrail and connection to Waterloo from the existing Swanley/Bromley South Line (previously part of Eurostar) and Metro Tidal with connections to Essex (including Stansted). In fact most proposals recognise the need for good rail connections to London and other airports.

Almost all proposals avoid any mention of a Sheerness/Sheppey/Isle of Grain connection (Metrotidal mentions it as a phase 3). Airports on the Hoo peninsula would be just a few miles from Sheerness which would suffer from noise from flight arrivals but would remain over 30 miles away by road (with a journey time of c.50 minutes currently) and no rail connection (not that a peninsula airport is practical, but another example of potential additional cost which is ignored).

Implications for North Kent, Thames Estuary and South Essex

A number of schemes have been proposed for the Kent and Thames Estuary area, on land, on land/Thames and in the Thames Estuary itself.

Estuary Airports (Thames Estuary Research & Development + TfL)

<http://testrad.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TESTRAD-Outline-Proposal-19-July-2013.pdf>

London Britannia Airport with up to 6 runways would be located on a man-made island in the Thames Estuary between Sheerness/Leysdown/Sheppey and Whitstable/Herne Bay. The terminal/check-in would be at Ebbsfleet!

Rail connection via HS1 to St Pancras and/or Waterloo, Crossrail and onward connections to HS2. Direct highspeed links would connect Ebbsfleet to the airport.

Road connections to Ebbsfleet are “good” according to the submission, although yet another lane will be required on the M25 between the A13 and M11!

Cost £47.3bn

Isle of Grain (Fosters + TfL) –

<http://www.fosterandpartners.com/ThamesHub/Foster-Partners Thames Hub Report July 2013.pdf>

This is probably the most worked up example and has had the most publicity, in principle it is supported by the Mayor of London. The site part on land and in the Thames on the north side of the

peninsula. The LNG storage at Grain and SS Richard Montgomery are indicated as local issues but relatively easily overcome!.

Road connections are to A2/M2 and Lower Thames Crossing with local road improvements. Parkway stations (Car Parking) at Iver, Rainham(Essex) and Swanley.

High Speed Rail connections to St Pancras (and HS1 connections for West Coast Mainline (Milton Keynes) and the Western Mainline (to Slough/Reading) and HS2. Regional connections to Waterloo via current Victoria Line. Connections to an extended Crossrail (current Crossrail terminates at Abbey Wood, but route safeguarded to Gravesend). The idea of a London Orbital Network seems to be missing after inclusion in earlier leaflets.

Claims environmental impacts can be overcome.

Cost now down to £20bn (removal of some significant external surface infrastructure – road and rail) still seems far too low.

This is by far the most comprehensive submission although many of its claims regarding the local environment and issues may not hold up to detailed investigation and the assumption that these are easily overcome may not be true.

Grain/Allhallows (Metro Tidal/Thames Reach Airport)

<http://www.thamesreachairport.com/2013/07/metrotidal-integration-july-2013/>

Combines the Thames Reach Airport on the Thames Coast (with hydro-electric power generation) and a road/rail crossing to Essex. Sheppey Tunnel follows in Phase 2.

Claims of minimum impact on environment and heritage with employment opportunities in areas of chronic high unemployment.

As with all submissions, no recognition of housing and community facilities that would need to be provided to support a major airport in this location. Grain LNG 20%+ of nations liquid natural gas storage not seen to be a problem and not even assessed.

Cost £28bn – totally unrealistic.

Cliffe (IAAG) (no separate WEB site, details included in 181mb ZIP file

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/237042/Long_Term_Options_published.zip

London Gateway Airport – relies on support from the SERAS 2002 document 10 years ago (which was soundly rejected, but claims in this submission that it was the best option for the South East!). This is a text only submission which suggests significant planting of trees on the Hoo peninsula (both East and West) to provide a national park. Museums and leisure facilities (Sea-quarium, East of Eden, Fisheries research, aviation history. As with other submissions it also relies on employment creation.

Terminals west of Cliffe/east of Gravesend and/or Essex

Rail connections to St Pancras (High Speed), Southeastern London termini + Waterloo (via Fawkham Junction to dedicated platforms), also Liverpool Street via Tilbury.

Road – assumes Lower Thames Crossing to M25/A13 (between Cliffe and East Tilbury forts). Land tunnel under Cliffe to M2/M20

River traffic from London/Canary Wharf.

Cost - £12-£13bn – Unrealistic, does not consider existing environment and planning context. Lots of glossy extras but not likely to be provided. As with all submissions, no recognition of housing and community facilities that would need to be provided to support a major airport in this location.

Cliffe (London Medway Airport)

<http://www.londonmedwayairport.com/Press/LMACommissionEvidence.pdf>

The submission claims minimal impact on the area. The airport would cover the Cliffe Pools and stretch south to the village of Cliffe –“ which would be the only area affected” and could be compensated to overcome problems. Road and Rail links to London are indicated. Nice layout for terminals and freight handling but total lack of understanding of the environment in which they are suggesting and no assessment of the impact on the wider area. Rail link to HS1 only. Relies on Lower Thames Crossing, but only additional roads (upgraded!) is to the A2/M2. Assume 60% arrive by public transport – would be nice, but totally unrealistic.

Claims support of local community (DRINK – Demand Regeneration in North Kent) and the only opposition is from the village of Cliffe!.

Cost – airport and infrastructure £30bn. Another un-thought out unrealistic scheme.

Thurrock Thames Global Airport and Cruise Liner Terminal (Private Individual) (no separate WEB site, details included in 181mb ZIP file

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/237042/Long_Term_Options_published.zip

The submission indicates :

Redevelop DP World deep water port (opposite Cliffe) to airport and ‘Smartcity’. Capacity in addition to Heathrow and does not replace. It is just one runway (which would limit air movements, although London City and Gatwick do show what can be done with just one)

The loss of the deep water DP World London Gateway Port can easily be absorbed locally with investment in infrastructure improvements at the traditional UK container ports of Harwich Port, Essex, Thamesport, Medway, Kent and Sheerness Port, Kent.

LTGlobal Airport and Cruise Liner Terminal, an excellent alternative investment opportunity for DP World.

‘Direct’(limited stop) rail link with Heathrow, rail connections to Stansted and Gatwick via ‘Thurrock Grand Central Railway). Direct dedicated rail from Ebbsfleet to the airport

Very unlikely to proceed – unrealistic. How practical is it to transform a new port location to an airport? The proposal is text only and does not give any detail on how road and rail links would be achieved. The Smartcity proposal could be looked on as a further extension of what is already proposed/indicative expansion alongside the dock already. Could this be successful?

Goodwin Sands, Foulness, Maplin Sands (PI), Manston, East London (PI)

(most have no separate WEB sites, details included in 181mb ZIP file)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/237042/Long_Term_Options_published.zip

Manston : <http://www.manstonairport.com/userfiles/files/planning/Airport-Commission/Manston-Airport-Response---Long-Term-Proposals-190713.pdf>

Options for these areas have been received but the locations are not suitable for large scale developments, although they might be combined with others to form a much larger solution. These are available on the Airport Commission WEB site, but not expanded on here.

What Next

A further round of consultation on these options is now underway (responses required by 27/9) on the initial views on these options. Then we need to wait for the Interim report (probably December 2013). Councils, business and communities will be eagerly awaiting the result although probably “with concern” might be a better summary. There is still time for the “Aviation Growth Agenda” to be rejected on environmental, economic and operational grounds.

Access the documents, submissions and more details on the Airports Commission on the Government WEB site www.gov.uk/government/organisations/airports-commission