UK PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE BACKS HEATHROW EXPANSION

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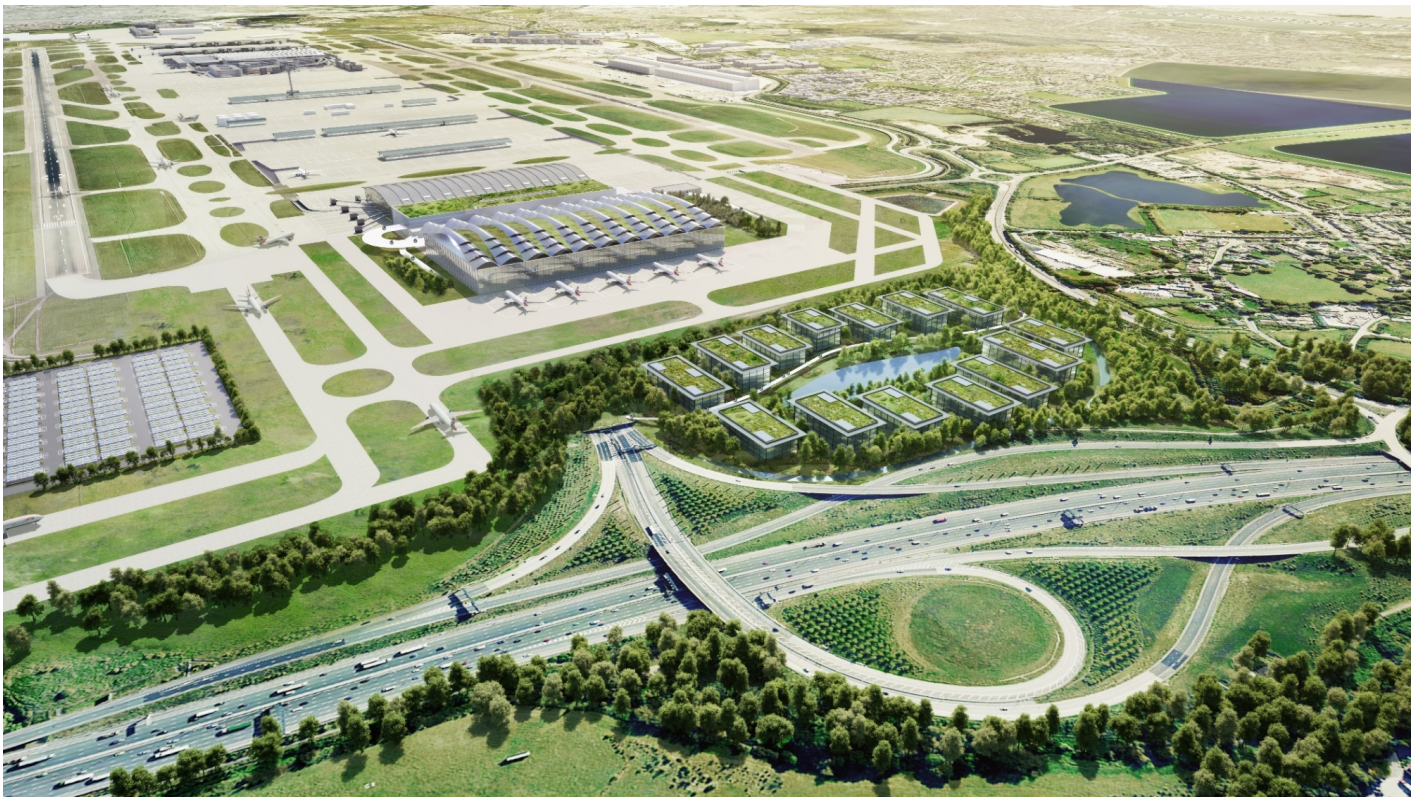

An influential UK parliamentary body has backed recommendations that London Heathrow Airport should be the site for much-needed extra runway capacity in South East England.

The UK government is once again delaying a decision on where to site the new runway. A two-year investigation by an independent body, the Davies Commission, recommended last year that a third runway at Heathrow was the best option.

However, its recommendation was non-binding on the government, which commissioned yet another study on the environmental impact of a third Heathrow runway. This was scheduled to be concluded this summer; however, recent media reports have suggested it may be the end of the year before the government makes a decision.

Successive UK governments have vacillated for the past four decades over the problem of where to find more airport capacity for the crowded South East England.

In its report, the Transport Select Committee's said, "Expansion at Heathrow offers the greatest economic benefit and would do more to improve connectivity internationally and within the UK.

"We recognize that local residents and environmental campaigners have raised legitimate concerns; these deserve serious consideration. We do not underestimate the scale of the

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challenge, but we believe that the noise and environmental effects can be managed as part of the pre-construction phase … as can the challenge of improving surface access and devising suitable schemes for compensation for residents in affected communities.

“It is vital that a decision is taken. We recommend that the government take a decision on location at the earliest possible opportunity. We would prefer that decision to be for the construction of a third runway at Heathrow.”

Welcoming the report, a Heathrow spokesman commented that both the transport committee and the Davies Commission had confirmed that an expanded Heathrow would be “an economic powerhouse driving jobs creation across the UK and fueling a boom in British exports.”

However, London Gatwick, which is continuing to fight to be the site for the new runway, immediately criticized the committee’s report.

It said that “the astonishing statement that the arguments ‘for and against airport expansion have changed little in a quarter of a century’ ignores the significant change within the aviation industry … and the worsening of air quality in the UK which has repeatedly halted Heathrow’s plans in the past.

“In one key respect, however, the committee is right to say that nothing has changed—Heathrow is still undeliverable. The opportunity to end decades of delay and false starts can only be achieved by giving the green light for Gatwick expansion. Gatwick is the only scheme which can actually deliver the economic benefits airport expansion would bring without the dramatic and unacceptable impacts on noise and air quality.”

08 MAY 2016

SOURCE: ATW
ARTICLE LINK:
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