Inside London's Airports Policy

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Indecision, decision and counter-decision

Paul Le Blond FCILT

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Preface

The story of London's airports goes back to the first days of flying early in the twentieth century, but significant expansion began only after World War 2 and, in particular, after the introduction of jet transport aircraft in the 1960s. I summarise some of the early history in this book, but the detailed study begins in the mid 1970s, when policy changed dramatically with the cancellation of the Maplin project. This was also the time when my own involvement became significant.

For 30 years I worked at the British Airports Authority, which became BAA plc. For a lot of this time I was involved with planning airports, including preparing and managing parts of the case for airport expansion during studies, consultations and public inquiries. I left BAA in 2001, but have continued this involvement as a consultant and as a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. In all this time, I have not seen any attempt to tell the entire story of how airports policy has developed, although there are a number of books and articles about particular episodes.

Since the cancellation of the Maplin project (see Chapters 3 and 6) there have been many studies, consultations, inquiries and decisions, with the pendulum swinging back and forth between various alternatives, including on a number of occasions the delay or deferment of a decision. Views are often polarised, but there is also an element of pragmatism and compromise apparent and this may have helped to move the story forward. I hope this book will be of interest to all those involved in this type of decision-making, and to those with a particular interest in aviation, by pointing to some lessons that could be learned.

The research for this book began as an academic study, but has evolved into a less constrained project. Although it makes no pretence at academic robustness, there are nevertheless some elements of the research methodology that are adopted from academia. In particular, a review of academic literature has helped to provide a background, while the process of examining files at The National Archives and interviewing key individuals has provided an element of triangulation (a process which enables the cross-checking of information so that it is not solely from one source). In addition, the research has looked thoroughly at the published documentation, such as White Papers, inquiry reports and studies, which are available either online or at the British Library. Parliamentary papers, in particular the Hansard record of statements, debates and questions, have also been examined. Each of these sources has its strengths and weaknesses, but overall they can provide a balanced picture.

I would like to thank in particular the people whom I interviewed. They were civil servants, politicians, planners and managers in the aviation industry and community representatives. Some of them have agreed to be quoted, but I take full responsibility for all of the words in this book. I am very grateful to all of them:

Stan Abrahams, Geoff Ambrose, Chris Cain, Tom Carter, Roy Griffins, Alan Haselhurst, Stan Maiden, Michael Maine, Alastair McDermid, John Mulkern, Steve Norris, John Phillips, Laurie Price, Brian Ross, Peter Sanders, John Stewart, Russell Sunderland and Iryna Terlecky. I would like to make special mention of Vernon Murphy, who encouraged me and was my first interviewee, but who sadly died in 2014. I would also like to thank Theo Steel and David Parish, who read through the manuscript.

Having been an employee of BAA, I am clearly open to a charge of bias. To counter this, in part, I suggest, firstly, that my 'inside' knowledge may help to increase understanding of how airports policy has developed and, secondly, that I have sought to present a range of views representative of supporters, opponents and independent commentators. However, I accept, and the reader should acknowledge, that my research is from a particular perspective. One part of that perspective is having direct experience of some of the people and events, and throughout the book I have included personal anecdotes and viewpoints. Where my personal view is expressed, I seek to identify it as such. While this book is published by ICE Publishing, the publisher of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the views and opinions expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the publishers, or indeed, the Institution of Civil Engineers.

I was born in 1949 and my father worked for British European Airways. This meant that our family flew on holiday, initially to the Channel Islands and Scotland and later to the Mediterranean. Staff discounts meant very cheap fares, but sometimes we were on standby and did not always get on the flight. I slept in the sick bay of the Queens Building at Heathrow waiting for the next day's flights, and the Channel Islands flights were (and still are) often delayed by fog. We lived in Harrow and the 140 bus took me to the Heathrow Roof Gardens for aircraft spotting (I was also a train spotter). This meant that I spent a lot of time at airports in the 1950s and 1960s, and saw their growth from the early days. At school I naturally joined the RAF section of the Cadet Force and learned the principles of flight as well as experiencing flying and learning to glide. My initial ambition to be a commercial airline pilot was dashed when I failed the eyesight test, but my Reading University degree in geography nicely led me to airport planning, and I should make special mention of Peter Hall, my professor, and David Starkie, one of my tutors, both of whom are quoted in this book.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the support of my family in writing this book, especially my wife, Chris.

Format and references

In this book, references are given using the Harvard referencing system, where in-text citations are given as (author, date). The full list of references is provided at the end of each chapter. Endnotes, which appear before the list of references, are provided where an explanation or definition is appropriate.

Abbreviations

ACAP	Advisory Committee on Airports Policy
ACARE	Advisory Council for Aviation Research in Europe
AdP	Aéroports de Paris
AENA	Aena SA, Spanish airport company, 51% state owned
ANIS	Aircraft Noise Index Study
AOA	Airport Operators Association
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
APD	Air Passenger Duty
APF	Aviation Policy Framework
ASA	Air Services Agreement
ATM	Air Transport Movement
BA	British Airways
BAA	From 1966 to 1987, the British Airports Authority, sometimes referred to as 'the BAA', subsequently BAA plc
BATA	British Air Transport Association
BCal	British Caledonian Airways
BEA	British European Airways
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation
BR	British Rail
BSAA	British South American Airways
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
CAAC	Civil Aviation Administration of China
CBA	Cost-benefit analysis
CDG	Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport
CGE	Computable General Equilibrium
Cmnd or Cm	Command document
CO	Carbon monoxide
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CTRL	Channel Tunnel Rail Link
dB	Decibel
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
DCO	Development Consent Order
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfT	Department for Transport
DFW	Dallas Fort Worth Airport
DoE	Department of the Environment
DoT	Department of Trade
DTp	Department of Transport
ETOPS	Extended-range Twin-engine Operational Performance Standards
ETS	Emissions Trading System (also known as Emissions Trading Scheme)
EU	European Union
G1	Stansted Generation 1 – the plan to make greater use of the existing runway
G2	Stansted Generation 2 – the plan for a second runway

GACC	Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIP	Global Infrastructure Partners
GLA	Greater London Authority
GLC	Greater London Council
GMBM	Global Market-Based Measure
GPDO	General Permitted Development Order
H ₂ O	Water
HACAN	Heathrow Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise
HC	Hydrocarbons
HS1	High Speed 1
HS2	High Speed 2
IAG	International Airlines Group
IATA	International Air Transport Association
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ILS	Instrument Landing System
JACOLA	Joint Airport Committee of Local Authorities
LCC	Low-cost carrier
L _{Aeq}	Equivalent Continuous A-weighted Level
L _{Aeq16h}	Equivalent Continuous A-weighted Level between 7am and 11pm for June, July and August
L _{Aeq8h}	Equivalent Continuous A-weighted Level between 11pm and 7am for June, July and August
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MAG	Manchester Airports Group
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MoD	Ministry of Defence
mppa	Millions of passengers per annum
MWAA	Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
NAPAM	National Air Passenger Allocation Model
NAPDM	National Air Passenger Demand Model
NATS	National Air Traffic Services
NFU	National Farmers' Union
Nimby	Not in my backyard
NNI	Noise and Number Index
NOERC	North of England Regional Consortium
NO _x	Nitrous oxides, the collective name for nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide
NPS	National Policy Statement
NPSE	Noise Policy Statement for England
NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
NWEEHPA	North West Essex and East Hertfordshire Preservation Association
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PANYNJ	Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
PM ₁₀ , PM _{2.5}	The fraction of particulate matter (dust) in the air with an average aerodynamic diameter of less than 10 µm and 2.5 µm, respectively
PNdB	Perceived Noise decibels

PPG 24	Planning Policy Guidance Note 24
PPS	Parliamentary private secretary
PSDH	Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow
RAF	Royal Air Force
RASCO	Regional Air Services Coordination
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RPA	New York Regional Plan Association
RPI	Retail Prices Index
RPK	Revenue Passenger Kilometres, a measure which includes the number of passengers and the distance travelled
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RUCATSE	Runway Capacity to Serve the South East
SARS	Severe acute respiratory syndrome
SCLSERP	Standing Conference on London and South East Regional Planning
SEATF	South East Airports Taskforce
SERAS	South East and East of England Regional Air Services
SERPLAN	South East Regional Planning Conference
SGSEA	Study Group on South East Airports
SO ₂	Sulfur dioxide
SPA	Special Protection Area, an EU designation for the conservation of wild birds
SSE	Stop Stansted Expansion
STOL	Short Take-Off and Landing
TEN-T	Trans European Network – Transport
TGV	Train à Grande Vitesse, French high-speed train
TNA	The National Archives
USAF	United States Air Force
VAT	Value Added Tax
VFR	Visiting Friends and Relatives
WSA	Western Sydney Airport
WSCC	West Sussex County Council
WW1	World War 1
WW2	World War 2