

NEW HUB WOULD MEAN MASS HEATHROW JOB LOSSES, WARNS BA

Building a new UK hub airport in the Thames Estuary would mean the closure of Heathrow and the axing of thousands of local jobs, Willie Walsh, British Airways chief executive, told a West London audience.

He said some critics of Heathrow appeared to believe that a brand new hub on reclaimed land in the river estuary between Essex and Kent could 'solve all the problems' of airport expansion.

Mr Walsh said: ' This idea has been around for nearly 40 years – and in all that time no-one has come up with a practical proposal for how it could be made to work.

'The Government took another look at the idea in 2003 – and rejected it mainly because of the enormous cost, which would have to include new high-speed rail and motorway links to London. Some estimates put the bill as high as £33 billion.

'You could not raise that kind of money without relying on the public purse, whereas a third runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow would cost only £7bn and be financed entirely by the aviation industry.

'It is also true that airlines, and passengers, would not move to another airport 50 miles to the east unless Heathrow was closed,' he warned in a speech to the West London Business group.

'If Heathrow was closed, all the new and past investment in Heathrow, including the brand new Terminal 5, and transport links such as the M4, M25, Heathrow Express and London Underground would be wasted.

'And what would be the fate of the 72,000 jobs based at Heathrow and the 100,000 additional jobs in support industries? Indeed, what would happen to local businesses themselves? It is fantasy to think that all could simply uproot themselves, relocate 50 miles away and carry on as normal.

'The notion of a new London hub airport in the Thames Estuary is a non-runner. The Government said so in 2003. Five years later, the case for the same verdict is even stronger.'

End

For further information, please contact the British Airways' Press office on 020 8738 5157.