

14th December 2006 – Aviation White Paper Progress Report

The Government today reported on the progress made since the publication of the 2003 Air Transport White Paper and it reiterated the economic importance of both the industry and Heathrow to the UK.

The Progress Report reaffirms Government support for the further growth of Heathrow including a third runway – as long as the strict environmental conditions around air quality and noise can be met. The report also gives details on the progress made regarding growth at Heathrow for both mixed mode operations and the proposed third runway.

The third runway would need to be supported by a new passenger terminal and changes to nearby roads to further improve surface access to the airport. The environmental tests for the third runway will not be finalised before spring 2007.

The environmental assessment for mixed mode operations suggests that noise level limits could be met with the retirement of older aircraft leading to the phasing in of extra movements. Mixed mode would require the ending of the Cranford Agreement (preventing easterly take-offs on the Northern runway) and some loss of runway alternation. The report also states that the Government is committed to reviewing the practice of “Westerly Preference” where in easterly winds of five knots or more aircraft take-off to the West.

Before now mixed mode has been seen as a way of increasing the amount of flights at Heathrow. However the Progress Report has made the suggestion that it could be introduced within the airport’s existing limits on flight numbers as a way of improving the operational resilience of the airport, reducing delays and improving schedules. It could also lead to improvements in air quality and carbon dioxide emissions benefiting the environment.

A full public consultation on the future development of Heathrow will take place during 2007. The consultation will detail the mixed mode and third runway proposals and report the predicted impacts of development – in particular noise and air quality limits. Views will also be sought on the Cranford Agreement, runway alternation and westerly preference. The final Government policy decisions will not be made before the end of 2007.