

**HOUSE OF COMMONS
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE'S
INQUIRY INTO SURFACE
ACCESS AT AIRPORTS**



RESPONSE FROM CAGNE

7th October 2015

CAGNE

Communities Against Gatwick Noise and Emissions (CAGNE), an association of West Sussex residents with over 600 members and is supported by 13 Parish councils, GACC (Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign), Airport Watch and CPRE Sussex. It acts as an information exchange, advisory source and pressure group (see www.cagne.org for more information).

Introduction

The House of Commons Transport Committee has launched an inquiry into surface transport at airports. The inquiry will examine whether strategic connections to airports fulfil current and future requirements in terms of range and capacity. The Committee is interested to assess the effectiveness of the Government's approach to planning surface access to airports, as well as understanding whether the Government is making full use of its powers to influence the selection of infrastructure and accompanying modes of transport to and from airports.

We use this submission to set out our very serious concerns about surface access to Gatwick Airport. These concerns not only affect the airport as things currently stand. They will also become more pronounced given the forecast growth in passenger numbers and, in the event that the airport is granted a second runway.

Lack of an integrated rapid transport system

Part of the Transport Committee's inquiry remit relates to whether strategic connections fulfil current and future requirements in terms of range and capacity. CAGNE is of the view that such strategic connections do not exist and that currently arrangements have evolved in an ad hoc manner, are not sufficient to be able to cope with near-term growth in in passenger numbers and lack fundamental resilience.

Rail Transport

In making the comments that follow we have drawn on the recent National Rail Sussex Route Study of 2015 (SRS) -

1. Overcrowding/under-capacity.

Enormous increases in passenger numbers on the Brighton Main Line (BML) are foreseen with passenger numbers increasing by 2043 by 115% for those travelling to London Bridge and 34% to Victoria(SRS Exec. sum p.9). This is on top of an increase of 65% in passenger numbers since 2003.

Even after completion of the Thameslink improvement, the SRS states there will be unacceptable standing from as far out as Haywards Heath and by 2024 serious capacity problems overall (SRS pp39-40). By 2018, with or without a new runway, the SRS states (p52) that Gatwick passengers will be subject to significant congestion and standing on trains. In fact even if awarded to the airport, the new runway would not be operational before 2025. Even if there were no second runway and the foreseeable improvements were undertaken by 2043:

- many people who board the BML to London at Brighton at peak hours will have to stand all the way;
- a high proportion who board the Gatwick Express at Gatwick would have to stand all the way, as would a higher proportion of those who boarded ordinary trains there;
- everybody who board at East Croydon would have to stand; and
- most people who board at Lewes would have to stand also.

The same would apply on their return journeys (see p104 and figure 96 of the SRS). With a second runway, supposing 70 million air passengers annually through LGW with about 50% using public transport, an average of about 2,750 passengers would be added to this picture each hour.

Together these figures at best paint a picture of a rail line at the edge of its tolerance. At worst they flag a very serious capacity issue and what will amount to an unacceptable level of passenger experience. We contend that this will in turn drive more passenger and airport worker journeys to the road network.

2. Playing with fire.

The picture painted above is the basis of the SRS presentation. However, the palliative measures proposed in the London and South East Market Study (2013) published by the Office of Rail Regulation to deliver an “improved” situation are in their very infancy as proposals. There is no guarantee that they are possible. They have not yet been subjected to scrutiny as to affordability, value for money or their feasibility from engineering point of view. Indeed, the interventions needed are described by SRS in the Executive summary p.12 as “very challenging technically”.

3. Lack of resilience.

Any breakdown or hitch on the BML has very serious and immediate knock-on effects. This is the biggest contributory factor to the falling performance index of the line. This is due to:

- The sheer density of trains;
- the lack of alternative routes to what will always be a single line (a further line is dismissed as a practical possibility in the SRS (see chapter 6.);
- that junctions are all flat, as opposed to Grade Separated so no “flyover” is possible; and
- that relevant loop lines (all to the south of East Croydon) are long and circuitous

In total there are likely to be more trains operating and interacting on the BML than on any line in the country (SRS fig 3) and there are many movements of trains between fast and slow lines. Consequently even minor incidents can and will have widespread effects (SRS p27).

Road transport

1. Motorway and trunk roads

As pointed out above in our comments on the rail infrastructure, it follows that millions of passengers and airport workers who might have chosen public transport will [^]be forced to use road transport due to the [^] situation on the railway. This makes Gatwick Airport Limited’s (GAL’s) and, even the more balanced assumptions of the Airport Commission, look extremely optimistic in relation to road journeys should a second runway be awarded.

As a preliminary comment, CAGNE notes that in relation to the new potential South East runway, the additional road requirements for the Heathrow proposal are small. (The modifications to the M25 are part of the airport project). The majority of road infrastructure for an expanded Heathrow is already in place unlike at Gatwick where additional ring roads would be required around places including Crawley, Gatwick and East Grinstead as well as many additional junction upgrades.

As things currently stand at Gatwick the principal roads used to access the airport are the M23, the M25, the A23 and the A217. Sections of the M23 close to LGW have a terrible record in relation to delays (with these being greater than for any section on the southern part of the M25!). Over and above this, two of the approach roads (the North-South section of the A23 up to the beginning of the M23, and, the journey in the opposite direction M23 northwards along the A23) both featured in the worst ten roads in the whole of Britain for ‘on-time’ journeys, during the summer of 2013 (Daily Telegraph, 12 August 2013). Further, Reigate and Redhill, the two principal towns between Gatwick Airport and the M25, are choke points for traffic, with three major trunk roads running through them (the A25 west-east, the A23 and the A217 north-south)*.

The above reflects the current state of affairs and does not take into account the forecast increase in passenger journeys with or without a second runway. If there were to be a second runway then even if there were to no leakage across to the road system as GAL hopes (something that we vehemently contend will not be the case), then we estimate as a minimum there will be an extra 20,000 car journeys a day added to this already overcrowded system. The conservative figure of 20,000 extra car journeys is based upon an estimate of 50% of our posited increase of an extra 35 million passengers a year by 2043 (less than GAL predicts in fact) coming to the airport by road

and assumes that cars bearing passengers contain an average of 2.5 persons each (a figure that may seem high but one that allows for Gatwick being a holiday airport).

But worse is to come. . .

The submission made by GAL to the Airports Commission on 14th May 2014 predicts 20,000 new jobs at the airport plus 100,000 “catalytic” jobs across London and the South East. West Sussex County Council also predicts 20,000 catalytic jobs in the immediate locality. *“Even if we stay with the West Sussex figure of 40,000 new jobs [in all], and if half of these travel by public transport (a figure which we contend is optimistic), it would still mean an extra 20,000 car journeys twice a day, adding a staggering 40,000 to the air passenger journeys...”**

And yet worse . . .

The Airports Commission has suggested that additional housing will be needed over 14 counties to accommodate additional airport workers and organic growth in demand for housing and yet makes no provision for additional road transport. For example one proposed development is Mayfield Market Town (MMT) between Henfield and Sayers Common in Mid Sussex which would have 10,000 Houses. The location of MMT has been determined for its proximity to the A23. (The nearest rail station is Burgess Hill, which does not have the parking capacity to handle the increase). This will result in much greater increase in road traffic than presently estimated.

*(This) on roads which are already not fit for purpose and which have little prospect of gaining dramatic growth in capacity even with junction 9 on the M25 being upgraded, and with parts of the M23 and part of the M25 due to utilise smart road sections, i.e. use of the hard shoulder as additional lane, becoming what is termed a smart motorway. “Arguably any proposal to use the hard shoulder of a motorway is itself an indication of desperation rather than of being smart”.** Even with the use of the hard shoulder the M23 will be at full capacity before a second runway is fully functional, this is illustrated by Gatwick’s disingenuous submission to the Commission which provides forecasts for growth up to 2050 when the new runway would be at full capacity but only provides access growth to the point the new runway would open.

Neither do the above predictions take any account of the deliveries by light van or similar means which will be triggered by the increase in small and medium size business activity, both in West Sussex and neighbouring areas and the airport itself, by the adoption of a second runway.

2. Freight

In the event of a second runway, GAL predicts a spectacular increase in airfreight of over 1000%! In no place does GAL’s submission document to the Commission specify quite how this is to be moved to its final destination. One thing is sure – it won’t go by rail from the airport. There are no freight facilities at Gatwick Airport Station (see the SRS p.93). The nearest freight rail link is in fact the West London line. No calculation appears to have been attempted, so far, of the burden this will place on a) trunk b) local roads.

3. Local Roads

In their consultation document regarding a second runway, GAL asserts; “ more than three quarters of our traffic uses the M23 to travel to and from the airport so does not use local roads” No details are given as to how drivers get onto the M23 if they do not use local roads.

Congested local roads - Many schools use buses/ coaches to collect children for school. These tend to be older diesel buses that cover a wide area as they pick up from village to village and town to town before reaching schools.

Much of the bus service in West Sussex is of old rolling stock due to lack of funding due to poor use as they provide limited services that take a very long time to get from A to B.

Finance

Schemes such as the M25 tunnel are explicitly costed as part of Heathrow expansion in their surface access report, but the same cannot be said of Gatwick;

TfL estimate that the Commission is underestimating the surface access cost of expansion at Gatwick by more than £10bn. Apart from this no infrastructure costs have been calculated nor have improvements in the current infrastructure system been budgeted for - West Sussex and Surrey Councils both face current deficits in highway budgets due to the natural growth of highway traffic.

Who will pay for the infrastructure to support an airport two and a half times bigger than the present LGW? The Government has not found funding yet for West Sussex ordinary expansion so why should they do so when Gatwick brings very little into the UK economy as it specialises in low cost flights and GAL appear to be in denial when it is suggested that it might have some responsibility? The management have stated, ‘onward surface access is not our problem.’ Yet it is difficult to see how acceptable Council Tax rises can possibly underwrite such an expense.

First, the cost of access infrastructure should be properly calculated, second the Government should come clean on where the burden should fall and then the Herculean task of coordinating not only the finance but the engineering works of the different participants must be confronted.

*wording taken from an essay by Jeremy Early: “Surface Access to London Gatwick Airport: present problems and future nightmares”

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