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Dear GACC member

As we all wait anxiously for the Government decision on the new runway, this is just a note to bring you up-to-date.

The decision is expected this month. It will be announced in the House of Commons, probably on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday.

Theresa May was reported as having said in 2009 that she was opposed to a Heathrow runway on account of noise for her Maidenhead constituency. But her latest remarks indicate that she has been careful to balance that with mentioning the benefit of extra jobs.

There have been press reports that Conservative MPs may be given a free vote. This would let adamant opponents of Heathrow - Boris Johnson, Phillip Hammond and Justine Greening - off the hook. And there have been reports that none of them would resign if the decision went against them: they all have important new jobs which they may be reluctant to give up.

The GACC annual general meeting will be held on Friday, 11 November, at 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm at the Copthorne Hotel, RH10 3PG.

The meeting, which will be open to the public, will be a good occasion to discuss the Government's runway decision, and flight path issues. Nominations for the GACC committee should be sent to the GACC office at least one week in advance.

Jeremy Corbyn has said that Labour MPs would have a free vote. Like GACC, he is not convinced that there is actually any need for a new runway. John McDonnell, Labour shadow chancellor, is passionately opposed to a Heathrow runway.

The SNP say they will vote for whichever airport offers them the best deal.

There have been some (rather small) polls of MPs suggesting that a majority favour Heathrow. GACC has this week posted a briefing note and an illustrated booklet to all 650 MPs to remind them of the disadvantages of Gatwick. We have also written to the Transport Secretary to say that we have been advised by a senior QC that there may well be good grounds for seeking judicial review if the decision is for Gatwick.

The runway plans

The runway proposal put forward by Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) for a new runway north-west of the airport involves demolishing over 900 houses but, it is claimed, would not mean any increase in noise above the present level. It would cost more than a Gatwick runway - but with twice as many passengers to share the cost. And HAL have recently put forward plans (not published in detail) which would avoid the need to put the M25 in a tunnel and would cut £3 billion off the cost.

The alternative plan to extend the existing northern Heathrow runway (the Heathrow Hub) would cost less and would mean demolishing about 250 houses (Gatwick 168). Its promoters also say they could cut £3 billion off the cost. They have not yet reached an agreement on how HAL would take over and implement their plans.

But both Heathrow proposals depend crucially on whether they are consistent with the legal limit on pollution and that, in turn, will depend on what proposals the Government announce for cutting down emissions from vehicles in the Heathrow area. A new independent academic study published on 6 October suggests that, with cleaner cars and commercial vehicles by the time the runway is completed, there would be no breach of the legal limit.¹

Gatwick Airport Ltd (GAL) continue to flog their runway plan with a brash American style advertising and lobbying campaign which it was recently revealed had cost nearly £40 million.² Even with your generous donations, GACC cannot match that! Instead our game plan has been to suggest to Ministers, MPs and senior civil servants that in the British political system decisions are taken calmly and rationally on the basis of the evidence - not on who spends the most on publicity. There are some signs that this strategy has had some success, and that the more GAL spend on advertising the more they annoy the decision takers.

Half-truths

Gatwick's latest ploy has been to send a glossy document to the members of the Cabinet Airports Subcommittee.³ But it is full of flawed arguments and half-truths:

- GAL draw attention to the number of passengers, not to the number of flights which is what determines the need for a new runway. The number of flights has gone up 4.5% in the past year, but is still only 10% above the level reached in 2000. That is a rate of well under 1% a year, hardly rapid expansion.
- GAL try to demolish the unanimous conclusion of the Airports Commission that a new runway at Heathrow would create the greatest economic benefit by showing that some of the benefit would go to foreigners. But that is the whole point of a hub airport - foreigners fly in to change planes thus making more routes profitable.
- GAL boast that Gatwick will have good rail connections but this has been debunked by the Gatwick MPs. <https://www.blunt4reigate.com/news/mps-warn-rail-minister-rail-chaos-if-gatwick-gets-expansion-go-ahead>

- GAL say that Gatwick has never exceeded the legal pollution limit but don't mention that a new Gatwick runway would mean worse air quality for over 50,000 people, and would affect more schools than a new runway at Heathrow. And they ignore the pollution that would be caused by road vehicles, especially with the tenfold increase in freight which GAL hope to achieve.
- GAL claim that there would be no taxpayer subsidy for surface access. But that is because - unbelievably - they are not proposing any widening of the M25 or any improvements on the already chaotic and overcrowded rail line. Transport for London estimate the extra cost would be £10 billion.⁴
- GAL point out that modern medium-size aircraft can fly long-haul routes thus making a hub such as Heathrow unnecessary. In which case it would make more sense to make full use of Stansted and Luton - both at present growing faster than Gatwick but both still nearly half empty.

Conditions compared

Both Heathrow and Gatwick have offered to accept certain conditions if their new runway is approved.

	Heathrow	Gatwick
Night flights	A ban on all night flights from 11.00 pm to 5.30 am	No pledge
Noise	No pledge but Airports Commission predicted no increase above current level	Noise cap - not more than 15,000 people to suffer noise of over 57 leq. (compared to 3,300 in 2014) !!
Respite	Predictable periods with no aircraft overhead	No pledge

Wingate over-confident?

It has been revealed that Gatwick CEO, Stuart Wingate, stands to receive a bonus of up to £5 million if the runway gets the go-ahead.⁵

His latest ploy is to tell the press that even if Heathrow gets Government approval, Gatwick will continue with their runway plans. But even Mr Wingate is not omnipotent: it would still be necessary for a Gatwick runway to get planning permission and to be approved by the House of Commons. Which is unlikely if a decision had been made for Heathrow.

A noisy summer

From all around the airport there are many complaints about excessive noise. Partly it is because it has been a fine summer when people naturally like to be out-of-doors and to have their windows open, partly because noise travels further in fine calm weather, but mostly because of the new concentrated flight paths, the increase in the number of aircraft and larger noisier aircraft. To support their runway bid GAL now boast that they have 50 long-haul destinations. Yet each new distant destination means larger aircraft taking off with a heavier load of fuel, or a large aircraft landing at some unsocial hour - and therefore more noise.

The new concentrated flight paths are a consequence of aircraft switching to satellite navigation (like satnavs for cars) and have been justified by the aviation industry as being in accordance with the Government policy in its 2013 White Paper *'to limit and, where possible, reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise, as part of a policy of sharing benefits of noise reduction with industry (sic).'*⁶

GACC has been pressing the Government to amend this policy to permit dispersal, and we are hopeful that a policy change (or consultation) will be announced at the same time as the runway decision.

For departures the biggest volume of complaint relates to the new route 4 (take off to the west and then a sharp 180° turn to the north and then east).⁷ A new protest group has been formed: <http://www.fairplaynes.org/>

For arriving aircraft, the swathe before they join the straight-in 'glide slope' has been widened but it is still unclear how much relief this will provide and how those people who have not been overflown for a few years will react.

But the present misery would be doubled if we get a second runway. GACC has published a research study by Charles Lloyd on the impact of new flight paths with a second runway.⁸

What next?

If, Heaven forbid, the Government decide to approve a new runway at Gatwick, there would probably be a House of Commons vote. After that we would face several years of consultations on details and a six month long public inquiry. GACC would fight all the way. We would be reassured by the fact that in 2003 the then Government announced that a new runway would be built at Stansted to be opened in 2011-12; but our sister group, Stop Stansted Expansion, fought all the way and in 2010 the plans were dropped.

As a contingency plan we have arranged a meeting of all the Gatwick environmental groups on 4 November to plan how we can best work together to defeat the runway.⁹ But let's hope we can cancel the meeting!

Please keep your fingers crossed.

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/06/a-third-runway-at-heathrow-airport-would-not-break-pollution-law/>

² Sunday Times 11 September 2016

³ <http://www.mediacentre.gatwickairport.com/press-releases/2016/gatwick-submits-new-evidence-to-all-members-of-cabinet-sub-committee.aspx>

⁴ <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/ac-consult-04-surface-access-road-rail.pdf>

⁵ Sunday Times 11 September 2016

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/153776/aviation-policy-framework.pdf

⁷ For details of the new route see <http://www.gatwickairport.com/business-community/aircraft-noise-airspace/airspace/our-blog/>

⁸ www.gacc.org.uk/research-studies

⁹ Those due to attend include APCAG, CAGNE, ESCCAN, FairPlaynes, GON, HWCAAG, One's Enough, PAGNE, Plane Wrong, and TWAANG. For acronym translation see GACC Guide at www.gacc.org.uk/flight-paths