



Aviation: Mayor of London's proposals for a Thames estuary airport, 2008-

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Section Business and Transport

This note deals **only** with the proposals put forward by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson for a new hub airport located on an artificial island in the Thames estuary. For information on the historical background to the idea of building a new airport at or in the Thames estuary, as well as the current proposals for the Isle of Grain site, see [SN4920](#).

For many years there has been an ongoing debate about the amount of capacity needed to meet future air travel demand in the UK – and in particular in the South East of England, near London. While many short term solutions have been proposed to increase capacity, in the longer term more runway space will be required if one accepts the economic case for aviation growth. A third runway at Heathrow and second runways at Stansted and Gatwick would increase capacity at existing airports, but proposals for all of these sites have met with fierce resistance from local communities and environmental campaigners.

In light of this, the idea of building a completely new airport at or in the Thames estuary gained some traction. The most notable proponent of such an idea is the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. Since 2008 he has proposed and promoted the idea of a new hub airport located on an artificial island in the Thames estuary. Dubbed 'Boris Island' by the press, the idea has been repeatedly rebuffed by governments in the past and was met with a cool response from the Coalition Government.

The Airports Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Howard Davies, was set up in September 2012 and tasked with making recommendations as to the timing and scale of any future airport capacity. It will not publish its final report and recommendations until after the 2015 General Election but in December 2013 it published an interim report dismissing a new outer Thames estuary airport but indicating that additional analysis would be undertaken into a new airport on the Isle of Grain. In September 2014 it announced that no Thames Estuary option would be included in the Commission's shortlist of options.

Information on the other airports in the South East and London can be found in HC Library Note [SN2893](#); and there are separate notes on London Heathrow, [SN1136](#) and airports in the UK outside of the South East and London, [SN323](#). These and other briefings on aviation

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Contents

1	Responsibilities for aviation strategy and planning decisions	2
2	Government views on a Thames estuary airport, 2003-	3
3	Work of the Airports Commission, 2012-	4
4	A Thames estuary airport: Mayor Johnson's proposals, 2008-	7
4.1	Initial ideas, 2008-09	7
4.2	Oakervee Report, October 2009	8
4.3	Thames Estuary Steering Group scoping report, 2011	10
4.4	Reports from Deputy Mayor Daniel Moylan, 2011	11
4.5	Subsequent developments, 2012-	13

1 Responsibilities for aviation strategy and planning decisions

The Department for Transport (DfT) is the lead government department on aviation matters, though environmental issues, particularly noise, are issues of concern for Defra and the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is the responsibility of DECC.

Although Heathrow and London City Airport are the only commercial passenger airports located within the Greater London Authority (GLA) boundary, London authorities have regularly contributed to discussions about airport capacity across the whole of the South East of England. For example, the Greater London Council (GLC) gave evidence to the 1968-71 Roskill Commission, favouring Foulness in Essex as the location for a Third London Airport.¹ Later, it supported the Maplin Sands proposal and recommended its revival in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

Under the [Greater London Authority Act 1999](#), as amended, the Mayor of London is responsible for developing the GLA's strategies for transport, planning and the environment in London and has a range of powers to implement them. The Mayor also approves strategies for economic development and culture. The Mayor is required to ensure that these strategies take each other into account.

Ultimately, it is likely to be the Secretary of State for Transport who would decide whether or not to grant planning permission for an airport in the Thames estuary. Although planning is managed by local authorities, in the case of major infrastructure projects, such as new airports, these are now decided via a process introduced by the Labour Government in 2008 and amended by the Coalition Government in 2011. This involves an examination in public, replacing what used to be the public inquiry stage. The whole process is designed to reduce the total time taken to reach a decision on this type of project.²

¹ GLC wants Foulness as airport", *The Times*, 6 August 1970

² further information on the process can be found on the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#) [accessed 6 February 2014]

2 Government views on a Thames estuary airport, 2003-

In 2003 the previous Labour Government published a White Paper on aviation, which stood as its main policy in this area until it left office in May 2010. This rejected the idea of constructing a second ‘hub’ airport in the south east (Heathrow being the first). The Government had sought views in the preceding consultation about the value to the UK of having one or more major hub airports in the South East.³ The consultation found very little support for the concept of a second or alternative hub to Heathrow, which most felt was “impractical and would carry high risks”. Indeed, many airlines stated that an alternative South East hub would work only if Heathrow were to close. In recognising the value to the UK of Heathrow’s status as an international hub airport, the Government rejected the case for attempting to create a second hub airport in the South East, “whether or not additional capacity is created at Heathrow”.⁴ It also rejected proposals for the development of Goodwin Sands; London Oxford; Marinair; Redhill; Sheppey; and Thames Reach.⁵

The idea of a new hub airport in the Thames estuary did not receive support from the leadership of any of the three main parties represented in the House of Commons before the 2010 General Election, although it was welcomed by the UK Independence Party.⁶

In January 2009 an All-Party Parliamentary Group was established to “promote consideration of a new airport in the Thames Estuary and its potential to meet airport capacity requirements for London and the South-East of England in the most environmentally acceptable way”. Press reports suggested that the Group would be re-convened after the 2010 General Election,⁷ but as at 17 January 2014 this APPG is not listed in the [Register of All-Party Groups](#).

The Coalition Government stated in its Coalition Agreement that it would “cancel the third runway at Heathrow [and] refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted”.⁸ Before the election, both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats made promises on future airport expansion in the South East. The Conservative Manifesto for the 2010 election contained the same commitment as in the Coalition Agreement to stop the third runway at Heathrow and to “block plans for second runways at Stansted and Gatwick”.⁹ The Liberal Democrat Manifesto gave a similar pledge that the Party would “cancel plans for a third runway at Heathrow and other airport expansion in the South East”.¹⁰

The Government has remained largely non-committal about the prospect of a Thames estuary airport, though there were rumours in 2011-12 that both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister had at least open minds about the idea.¹¹ The Government’s aviation

³ DfT, *The Future Development of Air Transport in the UK: South East, Second edition*, February 2003

⁴ DfT, *The Future of Air Transport*, Cm 6046, December 2003, paras 11.12-11.17

⁵ *ibid.*, paras 11.106-11.119; those schemes which proposed developing an airport in the Thames Estuary are considered in further detail in HC Library note [SN4920](#)

⁶ UKIP press notice, “UKIP backs ‘Boris Island’ over Cameron”, 29 January 2010

⁷ e.g. “MPs sign up to back Thames airport on ‘Boris Island’”, *London Evening Standard*, 1 July 2010

⁸ HMG, *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, May 2010

⁹ Conservative Party, *Invitation to join the Government of Britain: the Conservative manifesto 2010*, April 2010, p23

¹⁰ Liberal Democrats, *Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010*, April 2010, p42

¹¹ [HC Deb 19 July 2010, c17W](#); [HL Deb 16 March 2011, c233](#); “Government won’t rule out plans for Boris Island airport in Thames Estuary”, *Kent Messenger*, 31 October 2011; “Thames estuary airport plan wins Downing St and Treasury support”, *Financial Times*, 19 November 2011; “Ministers refuse to back plan for airport”, *The Times*, 21 November 2011; and: “Cameron paves the way for a new London airport”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 January 2012

policy framework, published in March 2013, is the statement of the Government's policy on aviation, in lieu of the long-awaited and much-delayed National Policy Statement on Aviation. It replaces to a large extent the policy set out ten years previously by the Labour Government. However, it does not deal with airport expansion, after the Government formed the Airports Commission to look into this question (see below).¹²

The Government set up an independent Airports Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Howard Davies in September 2012, charging it to report on long term capacity options by summer 2015 (see below). The Commission's December 2013 interim report announced that it would undertake further study on two options for expansion at Heathrow. The Government 'welcomed' the report and in a statement to Parliament the Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, said:

Now that the commission's report has been published, we will be working closely with promoters to consider the form and scale of any appropriate relief [for those living around the sites of the three options to be further considered by the Commission] that might be put in place, and we will set out our thinking on this important issue in our response to the interim report.¹³

The Government's full response to the interim report has yet to be published.

In terms of the Labour Party's position on a Thames estuary airport, indications in 2012 were that it was against it. The then Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle wrote to the Labour Leader of Medway Council in July 2012 stating that it is "the Labour Party's clear position of opposing any proposed Thames estuary airport" and that she would "ensure that I use my ... speaking engagements at [the Labour] conference to clearly restate our opposition to a Thames estuary airport".¹⁴ However, Labour does not appear to have said anything substantive on the matter since.

3 Work of the Airports Commission, 2012-

All of the reports, consultations and working papers published by the Airports Commission are available on its [website](#).

On 7 September 2012 the Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, announced that he had asked Sir Howard Davies, the former chairman of the Financial Services Authority, to chair an independent commission tasked with identifying and recommending to Government options for maintaining this country's status as an international hub for aviation.¹⁵ The Commission's terms of reference are available in full on the Gov.uk website, but in summary it was tasked with examining the scale and timing of any requirement for additional hub capacity and identifying and evaluating how any need for additional capacity should be met in the short, medium and long term. The Commission was asked to report before the end of 2013 on:

- its assessment of the evidence on the nature, scale and timing of the steps needed to maintain the UK's global hub status; and

¹² DfT, *Aviation Policy Framework*, Cm 8584, March 2013

¹³ DfT press notice, "[Government welcomes Airports Commission interim report](#)", 17 December 2013; and: [HC Deb 17 December 2013, c622](#)

¹⁴ *Letter from Shadow Transport Secretary Maria Eagle MP to Medway Labour*, 10 July 2012

¹⁵ [HC Deb 7 September 2012, c41WS](#)

- its recommendation(s) for immediate actions to improve the use of existing runway capacity in the following five years – consistent with ‘credible long term options’.

The Commission was asked to publish a final report no later than summer 2015 on:

- its assessment of the options for meeting the UK’s international connectivity needs, including their economic, social and environmental impact;
- its recommendation(s) for the optimum approach to meeting any needs;
- its recommendation(s) for ensuring that the need is met as expeditiously as practicable within the required timescale; and
- to provide materials to support the government of the day in preparing a national policy statement to accelerate the resolution of any future planning applications for major airports infrastructure.¹⁶

On 17 December 2013 the Commission published its interim report. It concluded that there is a need for one net additional runway to be in operation in the south east by 2030 and that there is likely to be a demand case for a second additional runway to be operational by 2050. The Commission announced that it will take forward for further detailed study proposals for new runways at Gatwick and Heathrow.¹⁷

The Commission opted not to shortlist any options for Thames estuary airports. While it acknowledged that such proposals had the potential to reduce aviation noise impacts in the South East of England and support economic development on the eastern side of London, they presented many challenges and uncertainties. It also cited expense as a negative factor: the Commission calculated that the cost of an Isle of Grain airport (which it considered the most viable of those presented) could cost up to £112 billion. There were also significant environmental questions and economic uncertainties caused by the fact that a new estuary airport would require Heathrow to close. Taking all this into account the Commission announced its intention to carry out additional analysis in respect of the Isle of Grain option in the first half of 2014, on which basis, it would reach a view before the end of the year as to whether such an option would offer a credible proposal for consideration alongside the short-listed options.¹⁸

The Mayor of London’s preferred ‘outer estuary’ proposal was rejected by the Commission in its second sift for the following reasons:

Compared against the inner Estuary options, this is ... a more expensive proposal due to its surface access requirements and location. This option also delivers an over provision of capacity set against the assessment of need. The inner Estuary was therefore considered a more plausible option for further analysis.¹⁹

The draft terms of reference for the four research studies the Commission proposed to take forward on an inner Thames Estuary airport proposal were published for consultation on 16 January 2014.²⁰ Responses were published in June 2014.²¹ The four studies, on

¹⁶ DfT press notice, “[Airports Commission membership](#)”, 2 November 2012

¹⁷ Airports Commission, [Airports Commission: Interim Report](#), December 2013, for full details see chapter 6

¹⁸ *ibid.*, paras 6.24-6.46

¹⁹ *ibid.*, [Appendix 2](#), p23

²⁰ Airports Commission, [Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies: terms of reference](#), 16 January 2014

[environmental impacts](#), [operational feasibility](#), [socio-economic impacts](#), and [surface access](#) were published in July 2014.

Responding to the Commission's interim report Mayor Johnson welcomed its recognition of the importance of a hub airport to the economy and the decision to include the option of a new hub in the inner estuary on the Isle of Grain. However, the Mayor was concerned at the Commission's cost analysis of the different options; his team "[did] not recognise the cost figures and the extra levels of risk and optimism bias that the Commission have assigned to an Isle of Grain airport option; and feel that the Commission's assumptions about the level of surface access investment needed for new runways at Heathrow or Gatwick are woefully underestimated".²²

The Thames Estuary Research and Development Company (TESTRAD) wrote to Sir Howard on 16 January expressing the 'strong view' that:

... when tested against the Commission's own criteria, the London Britannia proposal [of an outer Thames estuary airport on an artificial island] has far greater merit as a location than the Isle of Grain (in any guise). The Commission's dismissal of our scheme as not credible, while preserving the Isle of Grain for further consideration, was a considerable surprise both to us and those bodies with which we were engaged from financial, regulatory and environmental sectors.²³

On 2 September 2014 the Commission announced its decision not to add the inner Thames estuary airport proposal to its shortlist of options for providing new airport capacity by 2030 on the grounds that the proposal has 'substantial disadvantages' that collectively outweigh its potential benefits. Sir Howard said:

We are not persuaded that a very large airport in the Thames estuary is the right answer to London's and the UK's connectivity needs.

While we recognise the need for a hub airport, we believe this should be a part of an effective system of competing airports to meet the needs of a widely spread and diverse market like London's.

There are serious doubts about the delivery and operation of a very large hub airport in the estuary. The economic disruption would be huge and there are environmental hurdles which it may prove impossible, or very time-consuming to surmount. Even the least ambitious version of the scheme would cost £70 to £90 billion with much greater public expenditure involved than in other options – probably some £30 to £60 billion in total.

There will be those who argue that the commission lacks ambition and imagination. We are ambitious for the right solution. The need for additional capacity is urgent. We need to focus on solutions which are deliverable, affordable, and set the right balance for the future of aviation in the UK.²⁴

²¹ Airports Commission, [Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies: call for evidence](#), June 2014

²²

Mayor of London press notice, "[Mayor welcomes news that inner estuary hub airport will be taken forward](#)", 17 December 2013

²³ [Letter from Bridget Rosewell to Sir Howard Davies](#), 16 January 2014

²⁴ Airports Commission press notice, "[Airports Commission announces inner Thames estuary decision](#)", 2 September 2014; and full decision: [Inner Thames estuary airport: summary and decision](#)

Mayor Johnson called the decision ‘myopic’ and said that the Commission’s “failure to take forward the only credible option for aviation expansion means their work will become increasingly irrelevant” and expressed his “disbelief that while the Commission seemed to have no single reason to rule out an estuary airport, they appeared unable to recommend it simply because of its sheer scale and vision”. He indicated that he would continue to make the case for a new airport to the east of London and ensure that the ongoing debate is considered “with the needs of Londoners at the forefront”.²⁵

4 A Thames estuary airport: Mayor Johnson’s proposals, 2008-

4.1 Initial ideas, 2008-09

Boris Johnson was not the first London mayor to float the idea of a Thames estuary airport: in 2002, press reports suggested that the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, was interested in the possibility of developing such an airport.²⁶ However, Mayor Livingstone ruled this out in a meeting of the GLA’s Planning and Spatial Development Committee on 17 September 2002.²⁷

In early 2008, the Conservative candidate for Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, raised the idea of an estuarial airport as an alternative to the further expansion at Heathrow:

Boris Johnson, the Tories’ London mayoral candidate, announced this weekend that Heathrow was a ‘planning error’ and ministers should consider phasing it out [...] Johnson is calling on the government to re-examine plans for a new airport on artificial islands in the Thames estuary, where planes could take off and land round the clock without disrupting residents [...] “What we don’t want to do is entrench a planning error of the 1960s by further expansion at Heathrow. We should look at whether there’s a solution to the east, in the Thames estuary” [he said].²⁸

Following his election in May 2008, Mayor Johnson commissioned an in-house desk-top review into the possible siting of an airport in the estuary. The review came to a provisional decision that such an airport would be feasible. The Mayor then established a study group led by the consulting engineer Douglas Oakervee (who had been project manager during the construction of Hong Kong International Airport in the 1990s) to produce a preliminary feasibility report on the practicalities of building an international hub airport with the capacity to accommodate up to six runways and operate 24 hours a day.

In November 2008 Mayor Johnson published a consultation document as a precursor to the formal consultation on his transport strategy. This stated:

We all know that Heathrow is in the wrong place, and no Mayor could accept the greatly increased noise and pollution resulting from a third runway. That is why I have asked GLA and TfL officials to produce an initial report into an island airport in the Thames estuary; and if they think it could work, then I will commission a full-blown feasibility study into an idea already gaining strong support in Parliament and among the public.²⁹

²⁵ Mayor of London press notice, “[Mayor vows to continue the fight as Airports Commission turns its back on the future](#)”, 2 September 2014

²⁶ “Livingstone resurrects plan for £30bn floating airport on Thames”, *The Independent*, 3 August 2002

²⁷ GLA, *Greater London Authority Planning and Spatial Development Committee: 17 September 2002*, Appendix

²⁸ “Boris airs plan for Heathrow-on-Sea”, *The Sunday Times*, 10 February 2008

²⁹ Mayor of London, *Way to go!*, November 2008, p27

At a meeting with the leaders of a number of local authorities in the South East of England in the same month, the Mayor said that while he was not prepared to countenance a new runway at Heathrow, he recognised the need for expansion in airport capacity in the region. It was not his intention to close Heathrow; or to ‘wreck’ parts of Kent with a massive new airport; rather he wanted to explore other alternatives, including a new airport in the Thames estuary. The minutes of the meeting stated that the forum was ‘in broad agreement’ that London should investigate an estuarial airport.³⁰

In January 2009 Mayor Johnson paid a visit to the Thames estuary on a dredger in search of possible locations for the airport and said that the trip had reinforced his belief that an estuary airport should be considered as an option in order to meet London’s long-term aviation needs.³¹

4.2 Oakervee Report, October 2009

Douglas Oakervee, a civil engineer who had been Project Director responsible for the construction of a new artificial island airport for Hong Kong, was appointed by the Mayor in November 2008 to lead the GLA’s preliminary feasibility study. He was asked to advise the Mayor on whether to establish a full scale appraisal of the Thames estuary airport option. The report was delivered to the Mayor in August 2009 and was published on the website of the [Thames Estuary Research and Development Company](#) on 19 October 2009.³²

The report provided a brief review of the issue rather than an in-depth study. It recommended that a further series of detailed studies and proper consultation should be undertaken. It also stated that the feasibility of developing a new airport in the estuary should be considered as part of wider development and environmental issues in the Thames estuary/Thames Gateway region. Rather than looking at a new airport in isolation, Oakervee recommended that a holistic approach should be adopted. He specified the following elements:

- Climate change/protection of people and property on the Thames floodplain (an outer estuary barrier could be constructed encompassing tidal energy generation);
- Tidal energy generation;
- Transport links;
- Regeneration; and
- Protection of ecology/wildlife.

Oakervee noted a series of potential difficulties including the impact on the environment and obstructions such as the wreck of the [SS Richard Montgomery](#), but said that he saw ‘no overwhelming constraints’ to the development of a two runway airport (capable of incremental extension to four runways) in the estuary.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Meeting of the Advisory Forum on Regional Planning for London, the South East and the East of England*, 13 November 2008

³¹ “Plane sailing for Boris as Mayor visits Thames estuary in search of new airport site”, *Daily Mail*, 24 January 2009; speaking at the Stansted Planning inquiry in 1982, Mr Eldon Griffiths MP recalled visiting Maplin Sands on a cockleshell boat with Sir Frank Marshall, then Chairman of the Maplin Development Corporation, “where we stuck a flag on the sandbank there and we looked at it and that was the place that we believed within ten years would see a modern runway of great pride to Britain” [DfT, [Building a new airport at Maplin: FOI response](#), 26 August 2008]

³² Oakervee, [Thames estuary airport feasibility review](#), October 2009

The report envisaged a new airport in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, existing London airports.³³ The report said an airport in the Thames estuary could be open by 2029 when London airport capacity is projected to be exhausted. The report emphasised the danger and nuisance to residents living under the flight paths of existing London airports, particularly Heathrow, and noted the potential benefits of creating a new airport away from major built up areas. Introducing a new airport in the estuary would not provide immediate relief to these people as Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted would continue to operate. Unlike these airports however, an estuary airport could increase its runways in the future with less damage to local residents.

The report was not able to say when, how or exactly where such an airport should be built, although the most likely location would be in the outer estuary approximately 7-10km north-east of Whitstable. It stated that in order to determine the most appropriate location a series of further studies would need to be undertaken.

Despite press reports describing it as a 'floating airport', the report proposed that the estuary airport should be built on an artificial island (similar to existing offshore airports in Japan) rather than on a floating platform. For a two-runway airport, the platform would be approximately 4,800 metres long x 1,800 metres wide and would be around seven metres above mean high tide level. The material for the platform could come from construction waste generated in the south east and, potentially, also from waste material which would otherwise go to landfill sites or incinerators. Additional material would be needed to provide protection against wave action and ensure stability.³⁴

The cost of building a two-runway airport, plus transport links, was estimated at £40 billion, although the report suggested that this figure could be reduced. In response to a question from Caroline Pidgeon MLA in February 2011, the Mayor stated that:

There are no estimates of cost; nor can there be until the site of the new airport is settled since much of the cost will be in infrastructure required to provide appropriate surface access.³⁵

The Oakervee report focused on engineering issues and so did not address the issue of who would pay for a new airport. However, earlier in October 2009, Deputy Mayor Kit Malthouse was quoted as saying that the mayor had received "an incredible amount of interest from countries such as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, which have signalled they would like to fund the airport. It is possible we could build it without taxpayers' money".³⁶

No further information about the nature of this overseas funding has emerged. Other promoters of Thames estuary airports have also said that funding would be available from abroad. For example, in 2003 representatives from the Thames Estuary Airport Company/Marinair scheme told the House of Commons Transport Select Committee that they had backing from foreign investors and that their scheme would 'not cost the taxpayer a penny'. However, banking confidentiality prevented Marinair from revealing further details

³³ based on forecast demand by the Department for Transport; a discussion of aviation demand figures is set out in section IV of HC Library research paper [RP09/11](#)

³⁴ op cit., *Thames estuary airport feasibility review*, pp55-58

³⁵ [Mayor's Question Time, 23 February 2011, Q0592/2011](#)

³⁶ "Sheikhs to fund 'Boris island' airport in the Thames estuary", *London Evening Standard*, 7 October 2009

about their backers.³⁷ Promoters of other estuary airport schemes have remained similarly reluctant to provide details about their backers.

The report also published a hypothetical timescale for building a new airport, based on an opening date in 2029. The timescale allotted nine years for construction – shorter than the proposed period for consultation, legislation and securing planning consent.³⁸

4.3 Thames Estuary Steering Group scoping report, 2011

In October 2009, the Mayor established the [Thames Estuary Steering Group](#), chaired by the Labour Government's former Chief Scientific Adviser Sir David King, to:

... oversee further consideration of and studies on the use of the Thames Estuary following the completion of a technical review on the feasibility of building and operating an International Hub Airport within the Thames Estuary. Issues such as climate change, flood management, renewable energy, environment and ecology, regeneration, shipping, road and rail links, and aviation will need to be properly considered when determining any future use of the Thames Estuary.³⁹

The Group was allocated £1,000 per annum, plus administrative support, from the GLA budget.

Its first major step was intended to be the commissioning of a scoping study to consider options for the future of the Thames estuary as a whole, rather than simply on a possible new airport.⁴⁰ Following the scoping study, what Sir David described as “the definitive in-depth study of options for the Thames estuary” would be undertaken. This study would take two to three years to complete and would cost between £5 million and £10 million.

In January 2011, the scoping report was published. It noted that if unconstrained aviation demand were to be met, it could be concluded that there is a need for a new airport to serve London. However, it pointed out some of the economic difficulties:

...airlines and airports are commercial businesses operating in a competitive free market environment not serving just London but the global travel community. There are three primary issues that need to be understood:

- 1) With the exception of Luton, which is locally owned but a private concession, none of the airports are owned by the State with the Golden Share in BAA sold several years ago. In fact all the major airports are owned and operated by non UK based private companies and the majority of movements into Heathrow are foreign-owned airlines. The recent enforced sale of Gatwick by BAA to improve competition between the London airports further underlines the need to understand that whatever is developed has to be in a competitive market. This is further compounded by fact that the Open Skies Agreement means that the State does not have the power to direct aircraft to use any particular airport.
- 2) Demand for slots at Heathrow is driven by its position as an international hub airport. The value of the slots and the yield of routes is dependent on the combination of high yield destination traffic and transfer traffic (38%) from the 180 destinations currently served. Without the high level of transfer

³⁷ Transport Committee, *Aviation* (sixth report of session 2002-03), HC 454, 17 July 2003, Qq1175-77

³⁸ op cit., *Thames estuary airport feasibility review*, p61

³⁹ GLA, *Request for Mayoral Decision – MD479*, 16 October 2009

⁴⁰ *Minutes of Thames Estuary Steering Group Meeting*, 4 December 2009

passengers that Heathrow as a hub airport supports the level of flying to these destinations would not be viable. Therefore encouraging airlines to leave Heathrow will be very challenging unless there was an overwhelming economic advantage which could be demonstrated.

- 3) State subsidy towards the development of any London airport is not an option due to UK and EU competition rules. Therefore the development of new capacity has to be affordable to the user. Given that BAA, comprising Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, was purchased by Ferrovial for around £10bn the difficulty of funding a new airport in the range of £20-£40bn cannot be understated. The issue of affordability is a critical issue to address.

It is important to recognise that the synergies between airports and airlines to provide services that passengers require predicate against a highly distributed airport system. Spare runway capacity does not itself attract traffic it is the network of services already at airport that does. Therefore building new runways at airports with a low level of use or at a new airport will find it disproportionately difficult to attract network traffic even if nearby airports are operating close to capacity.

Where there has been a successful development of major new airports these have largely been to replace existing airports, for example: Denver Frontier replacing Stapleton; Kuala Lumpur Sepang replacing Subang; Paris Charles de Gaul replacing Le Bourget and Hong Kong Chek Lap Kok replacing Kai Tak. New airports built without full transfer of services have often not been successful, in particular Montreal Meribel and Milan Malpensa.⁴¹

4.4 Reports from Deputy Mayor Daniel Moylan, 2011

Also in January 2011, the Mayor published the first part of a report by Deputy Mayor Daniel Moylan on aviation capacity for London. It concluded that there was a strong case for additional capacity to meet the growth in aviation demand. It was more optimistic about the creation and viability of a second hub airport, claiming that the size and structure of London's aviation is unique and that the capital was one of the few cities which may be able to support two hub airports.⁴²

In November 2011 part two of the Moylan report was published, making the economic case for a new hub airport to serve London. It stated that it was "essential that industry actors, stakeholders and the Government now work together on a long-term strategy in a timely manner to ensure the benefits of aviation for London and the whole of the UK are maximised and the harmful impacts of doing so are minimised".⁴³ The key findings identified in the report were as follows:

- 1: The economic dynamism of London's economy, which is vital to the whole UK, is closely linked to a number of highly internationally-oriented sectors.
- 2: While all sub-sectors of commercial aviation deliver benefits, business, inbound tourism and cargo generate the most potential for export-led economic growth.

⁴¹ TESTRAD, *The Thames Estuary: Needs, Opportunities and Constraints Scoping Review (Summary of Previous Work and Potential Future Studies)*, published January 2011, pp147-8

⁴² Mayor of London, *A new airport for London: Part One - the case for new capacity*, January 2011

⁴³ Mayor of London, *A new airport for London: Part Two – the economic benefits of a new airport*, November 2011

3: A comprehensive network of direct long-haul routes is particularly important for the economy and can only be provided at a hub airport, where demand from all sub-sectors is consolidated.

4. A hub airport needs to serve London and be in the South East. Any lack of capacity there will benefit hub airports on the Continent and their local economies rather than other regions in the UK.

5: High speed rail is mainly a complement rather than a substitute for hub airport capacity. It can provide an alternative for around 10% of Heathrow's flights.

6: An efficient and sustainable hub airport requires adequate take off and landing slot capacity, excellent surface access links and must be appropriately located to minimise adverse local impacts.

7: Heathrow cannot serve the UK's hub airport needs effectively.

8: A fundamental shift to the Far East in the global economy is under way. This will bring tougher competition for resources and in markets for goods and services, as well as great opportunities. London must face the challenge by providing excellent connections to the emerging megacities of Asia and elsewhere if it is to continue to prosper as a global city.

9: If no new runway capacity is created, Heathrow's connectivity will deteriorate by 20 per cent by 2050. A new hub airport could provide world class connectivity in terms of destinations and frequencies to all key business locations as well as meet the other requirements.

10: A new hub airport should become a pillar of the Government's plan for growth and should be integrated into its policies and plans.⁴⁴

It was really at about this time that those for and against the idea of an estuary airport showed their hands. For example, Kent County Council and Medway Council, which campaigned against a proposed airport at Cliffe in 2002, signalled their opposition on environmental and economic grounds.⁴⁵ The RSPB has consistently campaigned against all proposals for a new airport in the Thames estuary.⁴⁶ Airline views are mixed but they tend to be related to their own economic interests – for example BA invested heavily in its Terminal 5 hub at Heathrow and is opposed to an estuary airport.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, unions representing workers employed at Heathrow also voiced opposition to an estuary airport claiming it would lead to thousands of job cuts in West London.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the Institute of Directors, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Town and Country Planning Association all to some extent supported the idea of an estuary airport.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p19

⁴⁵ Medway Council Cabinet meeting minutes, *Thames Estuary Airport – Feasibility Review*, 5 January 2010; and: KCC, *Thames estuary airport objections: evidence to London Assembly Environment Committee*, February 2010

⁴⁶ RSPB, *Thames Estuary airport: evidence to London Assembly Environment Committee*, 2010

⁴⁷ "Airlines boss Willie Walsh slams Thames Estuary airport plan", *New Civil Engineer*, 29 November 2011

⁴⁸ Future Heathrow press notice, "Heathrow trades unions criticise Boris 'job cuts' plan", 19 March 2008

⁴⁹ IoD press notice, "Government must embrace aviation or UK will suffer, says IoD", 20 October 2011; London Chamber of Commerce and Industry press notice, "Third runway is still most sensible near-term solution", 21 November 2011; and TCPA, *Towards a sustainable framework for aviation in the UK – consultation on the scoping document*, August 2011, p4

Perhaps of more concern was the intervention by Richard Deakin, the chief executive of NATS, the air traffic service provider for the UK, who said that a proposed airport in the Thames estuary would be the “very worst spot” from an air traffic perspective, directly under the convergence of major arrival and departure flight paths for four of London’s five airports.⁵⁰

4.5 Subsequent developments, 2012-

Mayor Johnson commissioned further reports looking at possible locations for new airport capacity in the South East, including the Thames estuary and the environmental impact of a new airport.⁵¹ The mayor welcomed the proposals from Lord Foster’s ‘Thames Hub’ group for an airport on the Isle of Grain, and from John Olsen’s Independent Aviation Advisory Group for an airport on the Hoo Peninsula.⁵²

In December 2012 TfL published a consultation on establishing assessment criteria for new airport capacity.⁵³ On 11 February 2013 Mayor Johnson announced that a number of organisations had been engaged to help with work being prepared for his submission to the Airports Commission.⁵⁴

In July 2013, the Mayor submitted detailed technical proposals for three sites to the Commission. These were enlarging Stansted Airport; a new outer Thames estuary hub; and a new Isle of Grain (inner Thames estuary) hub. The paper on the outer Thames estuary airport said that it would accommodate four new runways able to accommodate up to 200 air traffic movements (ATMs) per hour; be able to expand in line with demand; have minimum connection times of around 45 minutes; have minimal noise impacts and a target opening date of 2029.⁵⁵ The estimated cost would be £63 billion for initial construction and a further £21 billion to expand capacity to 180mppa by 2050.⁵⁶

In November 2013 TESTRAD launched its plan for London Britannia Airport in the outer Thames estuary, with designs by Gensler.⁵⁷

Transport for London commissioned a report from York Aviation and Oxford Economics, published in June 2014, which found that building a new four runway hub airport would provide a £2.1 billion boost to the economy, provide new jobs and improve regional connectivity with London.⁵⁸ In August Mayor Johnson published a final report before the Commission’s decisions setting out again the benefits of a new hub airport in the Thames Estuary.⁵⁹

As indicated in section 3, above, the Airports Commission dismissed a new outer Thames estuary airport in December 2013 but indicated that additional analysis would be undertaken

⁵⁰ “Thames estuary ‘very worst’ spot for an airport”, *Financial Times*, 14 April 2012

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p20

⁵² further information on both these initiatives can be found in HC Library note [SN4920](#)

⁵³ TfL, *New airport capacity options - Assessment criteria Consultation Results*, March 2013

⁵⁴ Mayor of London press notice, “[Mayor announces world-class team to develop hub airport plans](#)”, 11 February 2013

⁵⁵ Mayor of London, *A new hub airport for London and the UK: Outer Thames Estuary*, July 2013, p3

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p29

⁵⁷ TESTRAD, *London Britannia Airport Brochure*, November 2013

⁵⁸ Mayor of London press notice, “[New report highlights billions of benefits and thousands of jobs provided by a new hub airport across the UK](#)”, 24 June; and York Aviation/Oxford Economics, *Making Connections*, June 2014

⁵⁹ Mayor of London/TfL, *Gateway to our future: why the UK needs a new hub airport*, August 2014

into a new airport on the Isle of Grain. This option was also rejected in September 2014. Mayor Johnson has vowed to continue making the case for an airport to the east of London.