

Heathrow Reveals £21 Billion Plan for Third Runway Project

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Heathrow Airport has submitted detailed plans to the Government for a new third runway as part of a wider £49 billion expansion scheme, including major terminal upgrades and infrastructure changes. The proposed 3,500-metre northwest runway is expected to cost around £21 billion and would require rerouting the M25 motorway through a tunnel to make space for the development.

The expansion aims to increase Heathrow's annual passenger capacity from 84 million to 150 million and raise flight movements to approximately 276,000 each year. The full project also includes upgrades to Terminals 2 and 5 and broader site-wide modernisation to meet growing demand.

Heathrow's submission comes ahead of an expected government review in the autumn, where it will compete with a rival proposal from the Arora Group. The alternative scheme includes a shorter 2,800-metre runway and a new standalone terminal, to reduce both cost and disruption by avoiding the need to divert the M25.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves has voiced support for Heathrow's plans, citing the potential to create up to 100,000 jobs, attract investment, and boost the UK's global connectivity. She described infrastructure development as key to national economic growth.

Despite ministerial backing, concerns persist. Environmental campaigners, local authorities, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan have criticised the runway proposal, warning of increased noise, carbon emissions, and the potential demolition of around 700 homes. The debate continues to centre around balancing economic benefit with environmental and social impact.

Airlines, including British Airways' parent company IAG and Virgin Atlantic, have expressed reservations about the cost of the project, fearing increased charges for passengers. Both firms have called for more affordable alternatives, with some industry leaders favouring Arora's lower-cost option.

If approved, Heathrow expects the project to receive planning consent by 2029, with the runway operational by the mid-2030s. The airport has described the plan as “shovel-ready” and confirmed it is prepared to begin mobilisation as soon as regulatory approval is granted.

The long-standing third runway debate has become a key test of how the UK balances economic ambition with environmental responsibility. The coming months will determine whether the Government allows Heathrow’s expansion to proceed or opts for a scaled-back solution.