

Rival Heathrow Expansion Plan Proposed by Hotel Tycoon Surinder Arora

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Hotel magnate Surinder Arora has unveiled a competing vision for Heathrow Airport's expansion, offering a more cost-effective and less disruptive alternative to the airport operator's long-standing third runway proposal. Arora's plan centres on building a shorter 2,800-metre runway rather than the 3,500-metre version previously proposed, which he claims would cut costs, avoid major infrastructure disruption, and reduce construction risk.

According to the Arora Group, the key advantage of its “Heathrow West” proposal is that the shorter runway would eliminate the need to divert the M25 motorway, a move that would otherwise involve complex engineering and prolonged traffic disruptions. Despite its reduced length, the group maintains that the runway would still be able to handle aircraft of all sizes, addressing potential concerns over capacity.

The plan, developed in partnership with engineering firm Bechtel, carries a projected cost of under £25 billion. This figure excludes the redevelopment of Heathrow’s existing central terminal area. If approved, the new runway could be operational by 2035, with a new passenger terminal opening in two stages initially in 2036 and then expanding by 2040.

Mr Arora, one of the airport’s largest private landowners, emphasised the economic importance of the proposal. He stated: “After a decade working with our world-leading design and delivery team, I am very proud that the Arora Group can finally unveil to the UK Government our Heathrow West proposal, which directly meets and supports the United Kingdom’s primary objective of unlocking economic growth at the UK’s only hub airport, with a strong commitment of doing so on-budget and on-time.”

He also welcomed the Government’s decision to open up the expansion process to alternative proposals rather than granting automatic exclusivity to the current operator. “We are delighted that the Government has taken a common-sense approach to invite proposals from all interested parties for the very first time rather than granting exclusivity to the current airport operator, no matter its track record,” he added.

Mr Arora has been a long-time critic of Heathrow’s current management, particularly regarding what he describes as excessive and unnecessary spending.

Ownership of the airport has also seen significant changes recently. In December 2024, French investment group Ardian acquired a 23% share in Heathrow, making it the largest shareholder. This was followed by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund securing a 15% stake.

Earlier this year, Chancellor Rachel Reeves publicly supported the construction of a third runway during a speech focused on national economic growth. Heathrow Airport Limited, the current operator, is expected to submit its own updated expansion proposal to the Government imminently.

Following the submissions, Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander will review the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS), which outlines the criteria for evaluating any Development Consent Order (DCO) applications. While Heathrow is said to be willing to consider a shorter runway if it can achieve equivalent operational and economic benefits, it remains to be seen how the competing visions will be reconciled.