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Heathrow Submits £49 Billion Plan for Third Runway and Expansion

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Heathrow Airport has submitted a £49 billion proposal to the UK Government for a major expansion project, which includes a third runway, new terminals, and the rerouting of a section of the M25 motorway. The plan, backed by private funding, aims to significantly boost the airport's capacity and support future economic growth.

At the core of the project is a 3,500-metre northwest runway estimated to cost £21 billion. Additional investments will include £12 billion for a new terminal complex and £15 billion to upgrade existing terminals. The scheme also includes a £1.5 billion plan to divert the M25 underground to make space for the runway extension.

Heathrow Chief Executive Thomas Woldbye said the airport is operating at full capacity and must expand to keep the UK competitive in global aviation. He claimed the project could create up to 100,000 jobs and increase annual passenger capacity from 84 million to 150 million. The airport also argues that around 60 percent of the economic benefits would be felt outside London and the South East.

The Government has indicated support for the proposal as part of its wider economic growth strategy. Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander confirmed that the Airports National Policy Statement would be reviewed to facilitate the expansion, with planning approval targeted by 2029 and completion of the runway expected around 2035.

However, the proposal faces opposition from environmental groups and some political figures. London Mayor Sadiq Khan voiced concern over potential emissions, noise pollution, and the impact on local communities. Critics also note that the project would require demolishing hundreds of homes and a historically significant 11th-century church.

Airlines, including British Airways parent IAG and Virgin Atlantic, have expressed reservations over rising infrastructure costs and potential increases in passenger charges. Some have proposed a scaled-back version of the project, including a shorter runway, to avoid rerouting the motorway and to reduce complexity.

Heathrow insists the expansion will be delivered without public subsidy and aims to contribute nearly half a percent to UK GDP by 2050. The airport has declared the plan “shovel-ready” and says construction can begin as soon as regulatory approval is granted.

The proposal underscores the government’s focus on large-scale infrastructure as a lever for national growth, though questions remain over its environmental implications and financial risks.