

Virgin Atlantic Response: Heathrow's New Flight Paths and Noise Impact Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heathrow and the Wider Economy

Introduction

Virgin Atlantic (VAA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heathrow and the wider economy's inquiry into new flight paths and noise impacts.

Over 30 years we have grown from a start-up airline to the UK's second largest global airline. We carried 5.45 million passengers and 200,000 tonnes of cargo in 2012. We employ 9,000 people and operate 41 wide-bodied aircraft, serving 35 destinations across four continents. We operate long-haul flights from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester and Glasgow. Additionally our domestic services between Heathrow and Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Manchester launched in April 2013.

For those living or working close to airports or living under flight paths aircraft noise is naturally a significant concern. Therefore, we are fully committed to developing and introducing ways in which we can further reduce the number of people adversely affected. We are currently working across industry through Sustainable Aviation (SA) to improve the adverse impacts on local communities, and in 2013 published a Noise Road-Map illustrating how aviation can manage noise from aircraft operations between now and 2050.

The Road-Map concludes that UK aviation is able to accommodate significant growth in air transport movements to 2050 and at the same time achieve a potential reduction to UK aviation's total noise output compared to 2010 levels. *Please see attached for the full report.*

VAA Aircraft Noise Management Strategy

With this in mind we also published a fully peer reviewed Aircraft Noise Management Strategy, outlining our commitment to continuing to reduce the impact from aircraft noise going forwards in November 2013. This is the first time an airline has set itself robust noise targets along with a clear strategy for delivering on those targets.

Our Strategy is underpinned by the ICAO 'Balanced Approach', and we have also taken into consideration engagement and communication on noise issues, as we are aware that perceptions of aircraft noise have not always improved in line with technological developments in recent years.

We have made five commitments on how we will tackle aircraft noise going forwards:

Commitment 1: As aircraft and engines get even quieter we will work collaboratively to make sure we are flying the quietest fleet commercially possible. We will reduce noise output by an average of at least 6 dB (a 75% noise energy reduction) per aircraft movement between 2012 and 2020. We are committed to introducing new and quieter aircraft and have 16 Boeing 787-9 aircraft on order, the first of which is expected to begin operations during the latter part of this year. These aircraft will

have a 60% smaller footprint than aircraft of a comparable size today with the below chart illustrating this.

We note that we have recently announced that these aircraft will initially be flying on our US East Coast routes out of Heathrow and therefore will reduce the noise impacts from our operations at the airport over the next few years as they replace A340-600 and -300 aircraft.

Chart 1: VAA average noise per aircraft movement 2004 – 2020

VAA average noise per aircraft movement 2004-2020

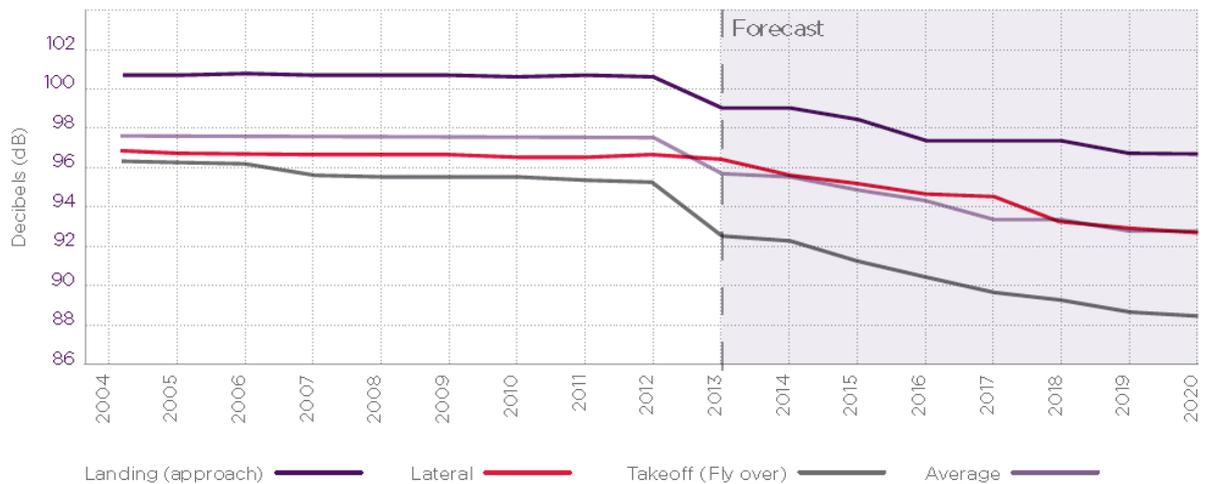
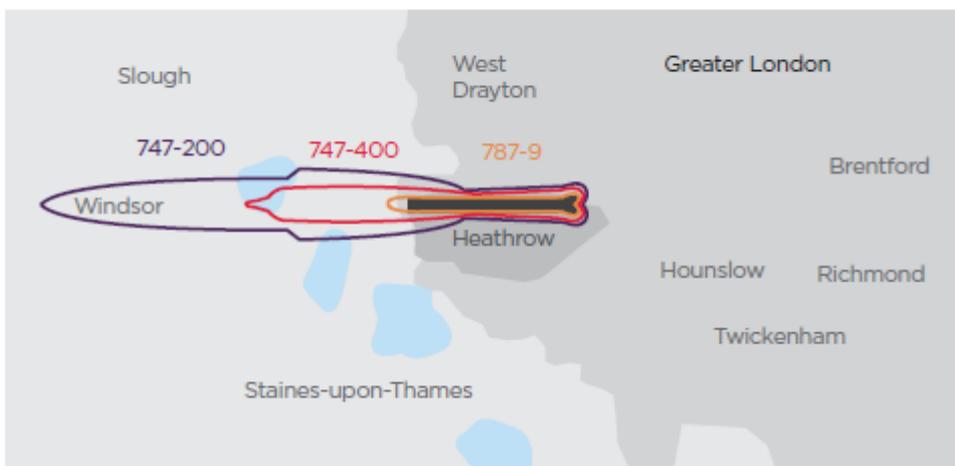


Chart 2: Boeing 787-9 and 747-400 comparison based on the 85 dB sound exposure level

Boeing 747-200, 747-400 and 787-9 comparison based on the 85dB sound exposure



Commitment 2: We will continue to follow, and where possible, increase the use of procedures to reduce aircraft noise. We will also continue to work with the wider industry in developing and exploring the feasibility of new operating techniques.

Commitment 3: We will continue to work with the airports from which we operate to ensure we minimise disturbance for local communities, and that new developments are appropriate.

Despite shrinking the noise contours around airports, noise sensitive development has continued within them, undermining the improvements made by industry. In future, it's important that the land use planning system does not permit the development of noise sensitive building in areas close to airports.

Commitment 4: We will continue to follow appropriate noise abatement operational procedures on our night flights, and minimise late-running departures through our company-wide focus on On Time Performance.

Commitment 5: We will continue to engage with local communities impacted by our operations. Working collaboratively with industry groups and airport authorities, we'll listen to local communities and respond to their concerns.

Please find attached the full strategy document.

Heathrow Specific issues and the impact of a potential third runway

Now that Heathrow, the Heathrow Hub and Gatwick, have submitted their detailed proposals to the Airports Commission, it is vitally important that there is proper scrutiny of the business cases presented by the airports to ensure consumers, who will end up funding any new capacity, are getting value for money. We believe the UK's ability to compete with its European rivals for global trade will continue to be damaged without additional hub capacity. Although Gatwick is a very important airport to us, additional runway capacity there does not address the UK's chronic hub capacity shortage.

Furthermore, given the excess demand currently at the UK's hub airport, which is operating at 99%, we would expect any additional capacity that does become available to be utilised in a relatively swift manner. However, as airlines at the airport are continually investing in newer and quieter aircraft we would expect these additional movements to be carried out in a sustainable manner, the acquisition of our 787-9 aircraft is illustrative of this improvement.

We understand that night noise from aircraft movements is the least acceptable aviation output for those communities directly affected. We only operate a limited number of night movements where it is commercially unavoidable and in direct response to consumer demand. At Heathrow our sole scheduled night flight movement is our Hong Kong (HKG) – Heathrow (LHR) services which operates throughout the year. Therefore, if additional capacity was to be made available we would be unlikely



to move this operation out of the night period due to UK economic competitive reasons and the intrinsic value that they have at arriving at such a time for the UK economy.

We would expect collaborative working across all stakeholders at the airport and those local communities affected when assessing future airspace proposals and changes to flight paths. We fully take on board the impacts of moving such flight paths and will work closely with NATS, HAL and the relevant local communities along with other necessary stakeholders to ensure that potential adverse impacts are mitigated.