

Statement on IPA and 25,000 extra flights

Heathrow is proposing to bring in 25,000 more flights a year before any new runway opens. Heathrow is describing this as the early release of capacity of the 3rd runway. In order to be able to do this safely, the airport must implement an operational practice known as Independent Parallel Approaches (IPA).

At present when planes land over London, they switch runways at 3pm to give people in West London a break from the noise. However, Heathrow can't land two planes on parallel runways at the same time. This means that, in order to allow a plane to land on the 'wrong' runway, the gap between planes landing on the other runway has to be extended. The introduction of IPA is an attempt to get around this.

The granting of an additional 25,000 flights would require planning permission from the Planning Inspectorate in order to lift the 480,000 Air Traffic Movement Cap imposed in the Terminal 5 inquiry.

The introduction of IPA will also require approval for the airspace changes from the CAA. In theory, the CAA could approve these changes before a decision is taken on the DCO.

Heathrow can introduce IPA to the airport now without any additional flights. This would have the benefit of reducing stacking of aircraft in the skies and allow aircraft to fly closer together, thus reducing delays.

However, it is not possible to add the 25,000 extra flights without introducing IPA as there is not the flexibility within current landing procedures to land that many extra planes safely on a 2-runway airport.

If a 3rd runway is constructed then Heathrow would no longer require to use IPA as they would have sufficient operational flexibility with 3 runways.

This would mean that if the additional flights are approved that local communities will experience at least two significant changes to their noise environment, one when the 25,000 flights are introduced (as IPA will enable arrivals on both runways at the same time) and a second if a 3rd runway becomes operational. Both changes will result in a loss of respite from noise for many communities.

The 25,000 additional flights would only begin if Heathrow's detailed plans for a third runway are approved by the Planning Inspectorate - expected to be 2021 at the earliest.

The planes on the IPA routes will join the final approach path closer than the current 8 nautical miles so they will be lower than many aircraft today. It is also likely that they will make their approach over areas not currently overflowed by Heathrow arrivals.

Between the hour of 6am and 7am, there will be a maximum of 25 flights across all the flight paths. Between 7am and 11pm, Heathrow expects that the average will be around 15 flights per day but this could be as many as 47.

It is vital that people object to the introduction of IPA at every opportunity, especially during formal consultations.