



AN IDEA WITH WINGS

Open mike An expanded Heathrow can be built years before the alternatives – that’s years in which we can compete in the global race for trade, jobs and growth, says Christopher Choa

CROSSRAIL, ARRIVING IN 2019, WILL CONNECT EAST LONDON DIRECTLY TO AN EXPANDED HEATHROW HUB AIRPORT AT LEAST 15 YEARS BEFORE ANY THAMES ESTUARY AIRPORT COULD

What’s the best way to provide the UK with a next-generation global aviation hub *and* regenerate East London?

We’ve been listening to this a lot during the past year, and no doubt we’ll hear even more about the subject between now and 2015. We’ve learned about extravagant apparitions poised to sprawl out in the middle of nowhere, phantasmagoric floating constructions and other proposals in the Thames Estuary, all magically tethering themselves to London. And like some economic talisman, every new UK airport proposed vaguely to the east is automatically thought to be a panacea for the regeneration of East London.

All of these new options require billions of pounds of public subsidy (at least £25bn by the mayor’s own figures – equivalent to almost three London 2012 Olympics), when we barely have the money to do other important things. These proposals for new air hubs also take a very long time to bring about, when every year of delay in providing additional hub capacity costs the UK at least £14bn a year in lost trade.

Just as disconcertingly, none of these new airport proposals really do anything for East London. Worse, they actually undermine decades of infrastructure investment and economic specialisation that have been a world-beating credit to London and the UK.

The best way to create UK jobs, the fastest and most cost-effective solution to develop the UK’s next-generation hub capacity and regenerate East London is already halfway here: Heathrow.

We’re in a global race for trade, jobs and economic growth. Four-fifths of economic growth between now and 2030 will originate in Asia, North America or Latin America; and we trade exponentially more with those markets with whom we are connected by air. To succeed, London has three choices: do nothing; build an expensive brand new hub airport (for example, at Stansted or in the Thames Estuary); or expand Heathrow.

In past generations of ships, then canals and

then railroads, London has managed with astonishing regularity to hand advantages to continental competitors. And in the age of globalisation, for some reason we seem hell-bent to do the same again. If we can’t connect to the parts of the world that are growing, we can’t grow ourselves.

We should also want to build on the success of London 2012, as a catalyst to the regeneration of East London. An expanded hub at Heathrow brings benefits to the East much faster than Stansted or any of the Thames Estuary alternatives. Think about it: Stratford is closer to Heathrow – 20 miles away – than it is to Stansted (26 miles) or to the mayor’s own airport option in the Estuary (at least 31 miles). Crossrail, arriving in 2019, will connect East London directly to an expanded Heathrow hub airport at least 15 years before any Thames Estuary Airport could.

With Crossrail, you can reach Heathrow from the City or Canary Wharf in 30-40 minutes. A new aviation hub to the east? This increases journey times for millions of Londoners, with over 4 million of us pushed over an hour’s travel from the UK’s hub airport.

More importantly, why would we want to disrupt London’s economic centre of gravity, which stretches from West London to the Thames Valley, an extraordinary set of globally competitive business clusters that have developed around Heathrow for the last 50 years? Moving the Hub would mean closing Heathrow and risks doubling unemployment in five London boroughs, creating an economic aftershock not seen since the decline of the Royal Docks.

Heathrow is best placed for the UK and for all of London, including the East. We need to build from strength.

Christopher Choa is a principal with AECOM and helped write Best Placed For Britain, a report that has been submitted by Heathrow as evidence to the Davies Commission. The full report is available at <http://mediacentre.heathrowairport.com/ImageLibrary/downloadmedia.ashx?MediaDetailsID=1507&SizeId=1>