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Transport bosses call for government commitment for Heathrow rail links

22 October, 2018 By [Sam Sholli](#)



Key figures in the UK transport sector have this week demanded improved public transport connectivity to Heathrow as the airport prepares for expansion.

Speaking at the Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum, leading representatives from Transport for London (TfL) and Network Rail expressed concerns about the government's commitment to improving rail links to the airport.

TfL city planning director Alex Williams said he wanted "firm commitments" to providing additional infrastructure and said he was pleased at work being undertaken on Western Rail and Southern Rail access to Heathrow.

But he added: "What we want is firm commitments that Western Rail access happens, and Southern Rail access happens, and it happens in a way that genuinely increases capacity.

"Our concern is that neither are firmly committed."

The [Heathrow Southern Rail scheme](#) would enable trains to operate between Heathrow and Waterloo via Clapham Junction, Putney, Hounslow, Twickenham, Richmond, Staines and other intermediate stations. It also will connect Heathrow to Woking, Guildford and Basingstoke.

Meanwhile a [Windsor Link Railway](#) would be expected to link the Great Western and South Western franchise routes while connecting both to Heathrow.

Network Rail strategy and planning director (south) Rupert Walker expressed concern that only a “relatively small” number of people currently choose to use rail to travel to and from Heathrow.

Walker noted that only 13M of the 48M people arriving at or leaving Heathrow by surface access currently use the train.

“The number is even lower for people who work at the airport, with fewer than 1% of them arriving by surface rail,” Walker said.

He added: “That tells us something about the offering we currently have because where there is good public transport passengers will generally choose to use it. The challenge we therefore face is lack of effective public transport connectivity rather than a lack of demand or willingness from passengers to use it.

“For example, if you live in Guildford, City Mapper says that it will take you two hours to get to Heathrow Terminal five by public transport, compared with just 40 minutes in your car. For Maidenhead it’s 60 minutes by train and bus, or just 20 minutes in the car. The choice is fairly obvious and therefore it’s no wonder that the M25, the M4 and the other roads around the airport are hugely congested.”

Network Rail and the Department for Transport are working together on market soundings for Western Rail and Southern Rail access, both of which are subject to their own business cases.

Concern about transport connectivity to Heathrow as it plans for expansion have come amid [legal challenges](#) to the government’s plans to build a third runway at the airport.

The High Court is set to rule on legal challenges to the government’s plans to build a third runway at Heathrow Airport in March 2019.

The legal challenges were mounted after the House of Commons voted in June by 415 votes to 119 in favour of building the third runway.

Heathrow Airport plans to start construction of the third runway in 2021.

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[Alistair Lenczner](#) 22 October, 2018 12:56 pm

Whilst both the Western Rail and Southern Rail access proposals for Heathrow would make a useful contribution to increasing the proportional of passengers accessing Heathrow by rail, the proposed HS4Air line (connecting both Heathrow and Gatwick to the north and west UK by direct high-speed rail services) would complement these lines and allow a step change in the modal percentage who would choose to use rail for airport access.
