The inner Thames estuary airport proposal not shortlisted.

The (UK) Airports Commission reported from London on 2nd September that it had announced its decision not to add the inner Thames estuary airport proposal to its shortlist of options for providing new airport capacity by 2030.

Following detailed further study into the feasibility of an inner Thames estuary airport the commission has concluded that the proposal has substantial disadvantages that collectively outweigh its potential benefits.

Airports Commission Chair Sir Howard Davies said, “We are not persuaded that a very large airport in the Thames estuary is the right answer to London’s and the UK’s connectivity needs.

“While we recognise the need for a hub airport, we believe this should be a part of an effective system of competing airports to meet the needs of a widely spread and diverse market like London’s.

“There are serious doubts about the delivery and operation of a very large hub airport in the estuary. The economic disruption would be huge and there are environmental hurdles which it may prove impossible, or very time-consuming to surmount. Even the least ambitious version of the scheme would cost £70 to £90 billion with much greater public expenditure involved than in other options – probably some £30 to £60 billion in total.

“There will be those who argue that the commission lacks ambition and imagination. We are ambitious for the right solution. The need for additional capacity is urgent. We need to focus on solutions which are deliverable, affordable, and set the right balance for the future of aviation in the UK.”

The commission received and developed a substantial body of evidence that it considered very carefully over a number of months before reaching this decision.

Alongside today’s announcement the commission has published a paper in which it sets out in more detail the reasoning behind its decision.

The commission will now continue its appraisal of the three shortlisted proposals for additional capacity and will publish the appraisal for public consultation in the autumn.
About the Airports Commission
The Airports Commission was set up by the government in November 2012 as an independent body to examine the scale and timing of any requirement for additional capacity to maintain the UK’s position as Europe’s most important aviation hub. It will identify and evaluate how any need for additional capacity should be met in the short, medium and long term.

In its interim report published in December 2013 the Commission identified a need for one net new additional runway in London and the south east of England and it shortlisted three proposals to deliver this capacity for further, detailed appraisal:

- A proposal from Gatwick Airport Ltd for an additional runway to the south of the existing runway at Gatwick Airport
- A proposal from Heathrow Airport Ltd for an additional runway to the north west of the existing northern runway at Heathrow Airport
- A proposal from Heathrow Hub Ltd for an extension to the existing northern runway at Heathrow Airport to operate as two separate runways

In the report, the commission also announced its intention to carry out further study into the feasibility of an airport in the inner Thames estuary before taking a decision on whether or not to add this option to its shortlist.

In January 2014 the commission announced it would conduct feasibility studies on four aspects of an inner Thames estuary airport these being:

- Environment impacts (study 1)
- Operational feasibility and attitudes to moving to a new airport (study 2)
- Socio-economic impacts (study 3)
- Surface access impacts (study 4)

At the same, the commission launched a call for evidence inviting interested parties to submit evidence in relation to the four study areas, with a deadline of 23rd May 2014. Just over 170 responses were received, and were considered by the commission as it developed the studies.
The commission carried out further consultation in July 2014 on the studies themselves. The final decision and summary of consultation responses has been published above.