Summary Report: Main Themes from HATF Board Member Interviews on Surface Access and Expansion

Spring 2025

This report summarises insights from interviews with Heathrow Area Transport Forum (HATF) board members carried out in March and April 2025. The interviews explored the following themes:

1. Priorities for improving surface access at the airport in the coming years.
2. Board member organisations' positions on an expanded airport
3. Specific concerns around impacts of construction activities on the transport network
4. How improved surface access provision can best be funded
5. Expectations around engagement on the plans by the airport and via the Heathrow Area Transport Forum. Reflections on the previous DCO round (2018-2020).

Key stakeholders interviewed:

Interviewee Name	Organisation / Role
Shamal Ratnayaka	Aviation Strategy Lead, Transport for London
Polyious Polyviou	Programme Director, London First
Paul Millin	Chair, HSPG Surface Access Group and Assistant Director Strategic Transport, Surrey County Council
Nigel Wicking	Chief Executive, Airline Operators Committee
Matt Haywood	Strategic Planning Lead, Network Rail
Pawel Jarza	Policy & Compliance Advisor, British International Freight Association (BIFA)
Christian Wolmar	Trustee, London Cycling Campaign
Liz Garlinge	Strategic Projects Director, National Highways
Peter Bradley	Managing Director, UK Coach Operators Association
Cllr Puja Bedi	Representative from the Local Community Forum
Tanvi Vyas	Heathrow Access Advisory Group
Susan James	Head of Casework for London TravelWatch, and on behalf of Transport Focus

1. **Top Priorities for Improving Surface Access**

The following areas were highlighted by two or more board members as requiring particular attention in coming years.

- **Facilitation of Active Travel**
    - There is a strong call for Heathrow to become an exemplar for active travel, with specific priorities including restoration of cycle access through the airport tunnel; improved cycle parking; and better cycling facilities more generally – including provision of best practice segregated cycle lanes where possible. Full and early implementation of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and consideration of a best practice "active travel zone" extending at least 5km around the airport are recommended. Wayfinding and signage also require improvement to enhance visibility of existing infrastructure amongst users.

"The Airport should be a real exemplar for active travel – learning from best practice internationally as well as other UK airports."

- **Enhancing Public Transport Connectivity and Managing Demand for Car Access**
    - All stakeholders emphasized the need for ambitious public transport mode share targets. New high-capacity rail links were seen as key to achieving that mode shift, but there was also recognition of a need for improvements to bus and coach links, especially to serve staff journeys. Southern rail access in particular is seen as essential for opening new markets and relieving road congestion. There is also some support for a staged approach to delivering rail infrastructure, such as extending the Elizabeth line to Staines as a "phase 1". Managing car access via an ambitious parking strategy and enhancements to interventions like the terminal drop off charge are also seen as vital and will play an important role in driving demand for sustainable modes.

"Southern rail access in particular is essential given it creates and opens up a wide range of new markets for the airport by train with the added bonus of relieving pressure on the M25."

"People do compare ease of access to different airports and may choose their flights accordingly, particularly in the competitive London market, so it's important that we are able to offer the best possible access in order to influence those decisions..."

"There's lots of really good building blocks that we didn't have before - the LCWIP and the BSIP are good examples - we need to make sure that we take the opportunity to

build on those through the expansion programme, and get them delivered up front as far as possible"

"Car parking at the airport drives a huge proportion of the trips on the highway network so we need to get a handle on it quickly and use all the levers that we can to crack down on the quantum of parking in order to be able to control that impact as far as we can."

- **Delivering Accessibility for All**
    - While promoting public transport and active travel, stakeholders stress that vehicle access remains crucial for passengers with restricted mobility, who often require cars or taxis due to equipment needs. The design and location of drop-off spaces, Blue Badge parking, and wayfinding for these users are critical considerations. Better monitoring of the experience of passengers with specialist mobility needs is required.
- **Cargo and Freight Access**
    - The freight community's top priority is the urgent redevelopment and modernization of the cargo village to improve efficiency and throughput. Maintaining reliable road access for freight during construction and ensuring their needs are not overlooked in stakeholder engagement and communications is also key.
- **Resilience and Reliability**
    - Maintaining multiple, reliable access routes and improving the resilience of both road and rail networks remain key priorities. New rail and potentially road infrastructure (e.g. a southern road tunnel) can do much to remove or reduce the risks posed by single points of failure and this should perhaps be valued more highly than it has been. There is a call for better management of logistics chains during construction and for active travel links to be maintained throughout any disruption.

"Recent events have shown the need for more focus on resilience and this applies beyond energy…we desperately need to ensure that we have more resilience in the surface access offer too"

2. Stakeholder Positions on Airport Expansion

As expected, HATF board members carry a wide variety of views on the merits of expanding the airport, however there is consensus that transport is a key issue to overcome if any growth is to be accommodated in a workable and sustainable way.

"…transport is the biggest problem that the airport faces in expanding - there are basic laws of physics that says that it is very hard to get another 60 million more people in and out of a site that is already facing very significant constraints and congestion. If this is

going to work that is going to require active management and a hugely ambitious approach to changing the way things work at the moment..”

Digging deeper, there are differing positions depending on whether the airport is looking to facilitate growth in passenger numbers within its existing fence line and cap on aircraft movements vs the building of a third runway and a lifting of the cap.

Business stakeholders are more likely to see expansion as positive for global connectivity and local economic growth - provided improvements are delivered sustainably. There is also a desire for more comprehensive approach to planning across to region ensure the opportunities for wider growth are properly seized.

“There's some really exciting stuff happening internationally like airport cities in Dubai, and at the moment Heathrow is not in that space - the area around the airport is quite under used for economic benefit and this needs to be reviewed as part of any expansion.”

Amongst those stakeholders that represent the interests of the local community there is also recognition of the positive economic benefits of the airport in terms of jobs and supply chain opportunities, however this is matched with a strong desire to see the negative impacts of airport operations better mitigated in future. Opportunities to link the success of the airport and the benefit to local communities more strongly should be explored.

The broad range of HATF membership, including a number of arm’s length government agencies, means forming a public consensus position on issues associated with expansion will not always be possible, however the collective discussion is always valued.

3. Construction-Related Issues and Mitigation

There was significant interest amongst board members in discussing potential construction impacts. Key issues raised include:

- **Disruption Management**
    - Stakeholders are concerned about major construction impacts, particularly on the Strategic Road Network and other key access routes. Maintaining access for all users - including cyclists, disabled passengers, and freight - is essential. Past closures, such as the central terminal area tunnel for bikes, are viewed as negative precedents to avoid. Consideration of the costs and impacts of construction on major links (e.g. M4, M25) should be quantified and considered as part of the design optioneering stage. Best practice from areas such as the Netherlands in managing the impact of disruption of traffic flows could be considered (see: Factsheet: Spitsmijdenprojecten)

- **Communication and Engagement**
    - Advance notice and clear communication about construction impacts are critical, especially for freight operators who need to plan for disruptions. Visible staff and clear signage during the construction phases are recommended. Given the project will last years if not decades, it's just as important to monitor the impacts of construction on the network on a day to day basis as it is to give consideration to the end-state. HATF should be engaged in that.
- **Workforce and Community Impacts**
    - The influx of construction workers raises concerns about the impacts on local housing. While dedicated worker housing is not universally favoured, proactive planning is needed to manage these effects and the airport will need to give some active consideration to that.

"It's important that we deal with construction as its own project and so considering for example construction impact modelling is really important. It will need its own mitigation package as well. Arguably the key thing here is that the airport needs to adopt a mission statement of being a good neighbour."

"the impacts of that construction need to be a material consideration as to whether the entire project should go ahead or not"

"There is also lots of other building going on in the area e.g. huge data centres and there needs to be some thought given to how all of these big projects can be managed at the same time and in a way that minimises the negative impacts on residents."

4. Funding Surface Access Enhancements

There is general consensus that Heathrow as the "developer" in this case should fund the bulk of required improvements, but large-scale projects with wider benefits (e.g. rail links) may require public/private partnerships in order for their potential to be fully exploited. There is also an awareness around the challenges of financial viability within the scheme for privately funding 100% of the larger interventions. The Battersea Northern Line extension is cited as a successful example. The forum should play a role in exploring innovative funding solutions and should be actively engaging with all key decision makers in this space.

"the regulatory framework is really important at determining what is possible and we as HATF need to really engage with that"

5. Engagement and the Role of the Heathrow Area Transport Forum (HATF)

HATF is a valued forum with room for evolution. Stakeholders highlighted its broad engagement and well-run meetings. Stakeholders support the creation of sub-groups or Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to address technical issues in greater depth, such as detailed transport impact assessments and mitigation strategies.

"the job of the forum in these coming months should be to keep surface access at the forefront of thinking about the impacts of growth and how it can be sustainably accommodated."

"the system has to work as a whole, it's not possible for the airport to do everything on their own so they need to be working collaboratively with other stakeholders, particularly local councils"

Key suggestions for improvement:

<u>Strengthen Thematic and Technical Sub-Groups</u>

- **Expand Special Interest Groups (SIGs):** Board members favour the establishment of additional SIGs focused on key issues-such as transport modelling; active travel, accessibility, freight and cargo, parking, rail and construction impacts. This would allow for deeper technical engagement and problem-solving. Depending on the content, such groups might run for a number of sessions or for a time limited period to facilitate subject specific "deep dives".
- **Structured Impact Assessment:** Use SIGs to systematically assess the impacts of airport developments (e.g., expansion, construction) on different modes and user groups, and to co-design mitigation strategies.

"We can use the SIGs to get a clear view of the transport impacts of the development so we can start going through sequentially i) what the impact is going to be ii) what the mitigation options are and iii) how much they address the problem and iv) what if any gap is leftover."

"the use of a modelling subgroup last time was welcomed as a way of bringing everybody together around the evidence base so with the intent of ensuring that we were arguing about the issues not about the data and that has to be welcomed by all stakeholders in this discussion"

<u>Ensure Broad and Diverse Representation</u>

- **Ensure All Voices Are Heard:** Continue to ensure representatives from underrepresented groups, such as disabled passengers, freight operators, cycling advocates, and local community forums, are able to feed into both the main board meetings and SIGs. Current practice is good, but this needs to be

maintained throughout the expansion programme so thought will need to be given to pacing engagement.

- **Integrate Accessibility and Freight Throughout:** Make accessibility and freight issues core agenda items, not just add-ons, ensuring their needs are considered in all discussions and planning.

"HATF Members have great expertise and experience that can be drawn on to support the Heathrow team take the best decisions – but time is not unlimited so engagement needs to be efficient and effective"

Seek a Balance Between Delivery of Quick Wins and Ensuring Long-Term Ambition

- **Don't Lose Sight of the Need for Immediate Improvements:** Identify and deliver a live schedule of "quick wins" such as improved wayfinding, signage, and information for sustainable transport options at terminals etc, alongside longer-term infrastructure projects. The forum shouldn't abandon improving the business-as-usual today by focussing exclusively on future growth.
- **Ensure Future Targets are Ambitious:** The Forum needs to take a lead role in encouraging Heathrow to adopt ambitious, measurable targets for public transport, active travel, and accessibility, and to report progress regularly. The forum should also give some consideration to an Environmentally Managed Growth framework and how this might work in practice, drawing on recent best practice from other schemes such as the Luton DCO.

"There is a lot of interest in environmentally managed growth… the proposals that came forward before were unsatisfactory on a number of levels so a lot more needs to be done to explore how that mechanism can be developed moving forward - this can't be worked up overnight, a lot more time needs to be given to explore how this can work in practice – HATF could be a good forum for doing some of that legwork"

Foster Collaboration with Other Forums and Stakeholder Groups

- **Cross-Forum Engagement:** Strengthen links with other Heathrow forums (e.g., Local Community Forum, Air Quality Working Group and the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group) to ensure cross-cutting issues are addressed holistically and not siloed.
- **Invite External Expertise:** Bring in outside voices and best practice examples, including from other airports and transport authorities, to challenge and inspire new thinking. There is also a need to consider improving DfT engagement.
- The drafting of **position statements** on key issues is a valuable consensus building activity, recognising however that many government agencies on the board will not be able to able formal co-signatories.

"There are various crossovers between HATF and HSPG and we probably need to give some thought to where the best places for different projects to sit. A good example could be active travel - might be led by HSPG. On Modelling, HSPG would have a big inputs into that but it might sit within HATF framework. The BSIP follow up work might be a HSPG/HATF joint production via a special interest group. There's lots of different ways of doing it."

Lead the conversation on innovation in Funding and Delivery

- **Explore Innovative Funding Models:** Use the forum to explore innovative funding mechanisms for major surface access improvements, drawing on successful examples like the Battersea Northern Line extension. Encourage open discussion about funding needs and arrangements for all surface access modes, including freight and active travel. Strengthen engagement with government and the regulator on this point.

Maintain Regular, Structured, and Inclusive Engagement

- **Consistent Meeting Schedule:** Maintain a regular "drumbeat" of main forum and SIG meetings, ensuring ongoing engagement and momentum. Ensure timeliness of board agenda and papers in advance to allow for maximum opportunities for engagement and informed scrutiny.
- **Consider more Flexible Formats:** Continue to offer a mix of full forum sessions, smaller workshops, and one-to-one consultations to suit different stakeholder needs and encourage active participation. The annual wider forum could become a bit more of an "event" to further strengthen engagement from wider stakeholders.

Summary Table: Key Recommendations

Area	Recommendation
Sub-Groups	Expand SIGs (ongoing or focussed and time limited thematic "deeper dives") for technical depth and systematic impact assessment
Ensure Broad and Diverse Representation	Continue to ensure all user groups are represented across both the Board and SIGs, integrate accessibility/freight throughout. Consider further DfT engagement
Balance Delivery of Quick Wins & Longer term Ambitions	Ensure some visibility remains on immediate improvements (e.g., signage & wayfinding), whilst setting and monitoring ambitious future targets

Area	Recommendation
Foster wider Collaboration & External Expertise	Strengthen cross-forum links, bring in external expertise
Funding	Explore public/private models, encourage open discussion on funding for all modes with all key decision makers
Engagement	Maintain regular meetings, offer flexible engagement formats

Evolution of the forum to take into account these suggestions will help ensure that it remains a credible, effective, and inclusive voice as Heathrow's growth and expansion plans evolve.