

What's it like to live near an airport?

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The Airports Commission has backed a third Heathrow runway, which has long been the source of intense controversy. But how does living next to an airport affect your life?

Heathrow's location within a heavily built-up area has meant that any talk of expansion has always been hotly debated.

Here are five ways living by an airport can affect your life.

Noise

Janet Smith lives in Twickenham. Often she lies in bed awake, unable to sleep until around midnight. "You start dropping off and then another takes off," she says. But from where she lives, it's the take-offs rather than the landings that disturb her - about every 20 minutes in her direction. They're at the worst when the planes turn right after take-off, she says. Brad Earl, from

Datchet, also near Heathrow, suffers with the noise. "When jets are directed overhead the building shakes."

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Media caption Simulation of possible new Heathrow flightpath



The report suggests that a new runway would allow the airport to put "a ban on all scheduled night flights in the period 11:30pm to 6:00am". Major airports like [Gatwick](#) and [Heathrow also offer insulation schemes](#) to help the worst affected residents pay for noise-reducing technology. People can get free loft insulation, free double-glazing, and money off replacement windows. "You get used to [the noise]," says Preetham Hiremat, who lives near Heathrow and runs a pharmaceutical products company in between Hounslow and Uxbridge. "With the new kind of triple-glazing windows and insulations, once you've locked yourself off, there's hardly anything that you can hear inside."

But people don't always want to barricade themselves inside. "I have always lived next to Heathrow, so have grown up with the noise," says Rob Gunning, who lives in Sunbury, near Heathrow. He's used to it, he says. "But on a [hot] day with the windows open you have to be prepared to miss hearing the TV every other minute." At these times it's a nuisance, agrees Hiremat.

Some are less than sympathetic. "Few people in or around the airport were alive when Heathrow first opened in 1929," says Bob Fullam, from Datchet, "so complaining about noise that has always been there seems just a tad hypocritical. If you don't like noise, don't move next to an

airport." Even if there were no planes at all, the "constant buzz" of the nearby M25 and the M4 motorways wouldn't exactly make the area a peaceful oasis, adds Gunning.

But there are other consequences aside from the nuisance. In 2013 the British Medical Journal published a paper linking exposure to [aircraft noise with increased rates of cardiovascular disease](#).

Quieter planes may be the answer. Improved technology is already available, and Heathrow offers variable rates for airlines depending on how noisy the plane is, [in order to incentivise the adoption of quieter planes](#).

Jobs and business

[The Airports Commission report estimates that 70,000 new jobs will be created](#) by 2050 as a direct consequence of the new runway. And the extra flight capacity could make it easier for import and export businesses in the area. "We have been struggling to get medicines into Heathrow due to constraints on flights available," says Hiremat. "Many a time we have had to get products into Frankfurt or Paris and then truck [them] into London, facing massive logistical issues."

Not everyone is convinced that locals will benefit from the jobs. "We do not really have unemployment around here, so where are these workers coming from?" says Gunning. But Hiremat is already eyeing up one of those jobs. "I've got a young son who in 10 years' time needs a job - where will he go? Those 70,000 jobs are a lot."

And there's little doubt that an airport generates jobs in a region. "Most people I know have worked at the airport or do work at the airport," Gunning says.

Traffic and travel

More flights mean more people needing to get to those flights. And some residents are concerned at the possible impact on local traffic congestion. "I'm a chauffeur and my job involves the airport but it's big enough," says Brad Earl, who lives in Datchet. "The road structure around Heathrow cannot cope with any more traffic."

But it's not just traffic on the ground that will be affected. In the air a new runway may ease congestion. "I am a local resident living near Heathrow but am a very frequent user of [it] for business trips," says Chris Key. "The airport is at 98% capacity which often means circling around before landing."

There is of course another major benefit to living so close to an airport - using it. "That's a perk," says Smith. She can drive to Heathrow within about 10 minutes, or 20 minutes on the bus. Hiremat has to travel regularly for work. "Living close to the airport makes it easy for me, rather than going four hours ahead I'm better off going just an hour before."

Pollution



Environmental groups have been quick to respond to the Airports Commission report, promising to campaign vigorously against any expansion of Heathrow.

But how does it affect local residents? According to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), "aircraft engines emit pollutants that affect air quality, particularly for those working and living near an airport". Nitrogen dioxide and nitric oxide are among the chief culprits listed by the CAA. The impact on health can be wide-ranging but is particularly felt among those who suffer from respiratory illnesses, it continues.

"Pollution is an issue," says Gunning. "Apart from [central] London, [Heathrow is] probably the most polluted area because of the airport."

The Airports Commission is aware of the possible environmental problems exacerbated by an extra runway. In the report it urges that an "expanded Heathrow must be contingent on acceptable performance on air quality. New capacity should only be released when it is clear that air quality at sites around the airport will not delay compliance with EU limits." More fuel-efficient aircrafts, as well the future technological advances related to bio-fuels, are also mentioned as mitigating factors.

Housing



Campaigners against Heathrow expansion have for years [warned that it would wipe millions off house prices](#).

Houses near any airport often take a hit on the price, [primarily due to the noise](#).

In anticipation of a new runway - with its added noise - many residents have already started selling their houses, says Jag Sran, sales manager at Heathrow Estates. "The houses which are under the flight path are not selling as much as the others," he says. Sran estimates that these houses often cost £10,000-£20,000 less than others in the surrounding area without the same problem.

Those actually living in the noisiest houses are eligible for the highest amount of financial assistance in airport noise insulation schemes. But Sran says this is sometimes confusingly applied, with one house receiving the full amount and two doors down only a fraction.

But lower house prices are worse for sellers than buyers. "There's still lots of demand," Sran says. "People who cannot afford to buy in other places are taking advantage." And with Heathrow surrounded by Surrey and London, there are plenty of nearby places that people can't afford to live in.

If the extra runway is built, Sran estimates there will be about a 25% reduction in house prices. But at the same time, the mooted 70,000 new jobs will bring in staff more likely to rent than buy outright, he says.

But the proposal offers another problem for Sran as an estate agent. Houses would need to be demolished. "If half the area is demolished, half the business is gone."