

News story: Government to protect regional routes to Heathrow

- government ready to act for the first time to reserve slots for domestic flights
- Heathrow expansion expected to strengthen existing routes and provide new connections with domestic airports
- new competition on existing routes could lead to lower prices

The government has confirmed it is prepared to intervene to reserve slots at Heathrow for flights to airports in nations and regions around the UK if expansion goes ahead.

Public Service Obligations (PSOs) will be put in place by the UK government to protect routes if required, which would also exempt them from Air Passenger Duty.

It would mark the first time that flights from Heathrow to regional airports have been safeguarded, offering reassurance to people living around the UK that these important links will remain in place.

PSOs already exist to protect flights from one city to another but reserving flights specifically from domestic airports to Heathrow would ensure direct links to the UK's hub airport, opening up vital connections with the rest of the world.

The news follows confirmation that the government wants about 15% of the new capacity at an expanded Heathrow to be used for domestic flights. And it comes as the government confirms that Scotland can expect to benefit from an extra 100 flights a week to and from Heathrow if a third runway is built.

Extra capacity could not only help secure and expand the number of existing routes to UK nations and regions but also be used for new connections.

Aviation Minister Baroness Sugg said:

“Heathrow is situated in the south-east of England, but the benefits of expansion will be felt throughout the UK.

“About 15% of the new capacity will be used for flights to destinations within the UK or Crown dependencies.

“And now we are going even further by confirming that the UK government will act to protect domestic flights from Heathrow for the first time.”

Routes could also be reserved for specific times to ensure they deliver services for passengers when they most need them, for example early morning flights which will cater for businesses.

Further details about the use of PSOs to protect flights from Heathrow to

other specific airports will be set out in the green paper on the [Aviation Strategy](#) later this year.

Additional capacity at Heathrow is also expected to encourage competition between airlines, bringing down prices for British passengers.

easyJet and Flybe have already outlined new routes they would expect to serve from an expanded Heathrow. easyJet also earlier this month confirmed that they intend to launch new flights to UK airports and introduce competition on existing routes, lowering fares by up to 30%.

And it is not just passengers that could stand to benefit from a new runway. On an average day Heathrow carries £360 million of freight, making it the UK's biggest port by value.

Expanding Heathrow would also bring opportunities for more jobs and apprenticeships in addition to the economic boost it could hand businesses and exports. Up to 114,000 local jobs and 5,000 apprenticeships could be created as a result of expansion.