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For Immediate Release

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PRESS RELEASE and PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: Climate and local campaigners around Gatwick Airport call on the Government to “back trains not planes”.

Climate and local campaigners will gather at outside Department of Transport Offices in London at 1pm on Wednesday 27th November 2024 to coincide with the Government receiving the recommendations of Planning Inspectors on plans to expand Gatwick Airport – to highlight the spare capacity of Eurostar which should be used for international journeys from London instead.

Jonathan Essex, Vice Chair of GACC and Green Councillor on Surrey County Council says, "It is shocking that Eurostar, which has a fraction of the climate impact of flights, is still running at only 40% capacity and could accommodate a further 30 million passengers a year, whilst London's airports say there is a need to expand. GACC trusts that the advice from the Planning Inspectorate of Government will reflect the unacceptable impact of expanding Gatwick, not least on the climate - and that Eurostar services running at less than half the tunnel's capacity is yet another reason why there is no need for the proposed expansion of Gatwick, nor Luton or City Airports for that matter. Gatwick is Big Enough Already."

Peter Barclay, Chair of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC) says, "Why does the government permit slots at London Airports for over 6 million people to fly from London to destinations already served by Eurostar destinations each year, which is far less climate polluting as a form of travel? A quarter of these (1.5 million) are passengers flying from Gatwick. Considering the Brussels - Cologne - Essen route (which is now also run by Eurostar) over 7.5 million passengers fly to the same destinations reached by more climate-friendly Eurostar in a similar overall journey time in 2023."

Peter continues, "Instead of permitting expansion of climate damaging flights the Secretary of State should require the Channel Tunnel and our UK train network to be fully utilised, ensuring trains replace short-haul flights and then manage the overall demand for flights to reduce within the UK's carbon budget."

Jackie Macey, local climate campaigner in Surrey says, "Using the Channel Tunnel's full capacity, putting train before plane and managing aviation demand as recommended by the UK's Committee on Climate Change would remove the need for any airport expansion, not just in London Gatwick but at any UK airport. Instead of expanding airports which would jeopardise the credibility of UK carbon reduction plans the government must review the UK's aviation and climate policy in light of the new Carbon Budget due to be released at the end of February and put in place measures to manage demand for aviation so its emissions reduce in line with the rest of the UK economy."

All enquires to:

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Peaceful Demonstration outside at: Department of Transport, 33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR from 1-2pm on 27th November 2024. Photos available on request.

ENDS

Supporting information

Wednesday 27th November 2024 marks exactly three months of deliberations by the Government's Planning Inspectorate (PINS) follows a six month planning enquiry earlier this year (February to August 2024) in response to Gatwick's application to permit flights from its Northern Runway to rise to 76 million a year, 30 million more than its peak in 2019 (<https://www.gatwickairport.com/company/about-us/key-facts.html>).

Eurostar capacity neglected in push for airport expansion – Research from the campaign group Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC) have found that Eurostar has potential to grow by the current volume of all of the flights from all London airports to France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg - an extra 20 million passengers a year.

Domestic aviation from London is also significant. A further 10 million London airport passengers are flying from London to UK domestic airports, most of which are within reasonable travel distance to London by train. However, the UK it has now been demonstrated that the rail system can match journey time to most major domestic destinations with significant reductions in carbon emissions (Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and other main cities which should have increased journey times from HS2 and other rail investments).

Climate impact. Should the project go ahead carbon emissions of Gatwick Airport are forecast to rise beyond that allocated to the airport in the government's aviation strategy – to around 5.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions by 2038 – which equates to 4% of the UK carbon budget or 19% of the aviation and shipping carbon budget by 2038. Instead of expanding aviation the government should choose to shift existing flights to trains.

Supporting references and numbers supporting the above

1. 2023 Aviation passenger numbers (<https://www.caa.co.uk/data-and-analysis/uk-aviation-market/airports/uk-airport-data/uk-airport-data-2023/annual-2023/>):

UK and London flight passengers in 2023	million passengers per year
Total UK departing passengers in 2023	257.0
Of which - domestic passengers	238.5
- international passengers	18.6
Total London departing passengers in 2023	167.8
Of which - domestic passengers	156.9
- international passengers	10.9

London flights to Western Europe (area 1)	77.9
London flights to Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg, France and Germany	20.3
London flights to Eurostar cities (including Thalys line to Dortmund)	7.6
London flights to Eurostar cities direct from London (Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam)	6.3

2. Eurostar has the potential to increase its passenger numbers to 2.5 times its current numbers. In 2023 Eurostar had 18.6 million passengers, so this would equate to an increase of around 30 million passengers each year. See https://mediacentre.eurostar.com/mc_view?language=&article_Id=ka4Rz000002KzmBIAS and <https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/05/06/eurotunnel-operator-offers-cash-to-attract-new-cross-channel-services#:~:text=The%20FT%20reports%20that%20a,offsetting%20the%20initial%20high%20costs.>

3. Eurostar and Thalys have recently merged which includes the Brussels - Cologne - Dortmund high-speed train line. (<https://www.eurostar.com/rw-en/about-eurostar/thalys-becomes-eurostar>). Eurostar passengers from London climbed back up to almost 19 million in 2023 - https://mediacentre.eurostar.com/mc_view?language=&article_Id=ka4Rz000002KzmBIAS.

4. A recommendation on whether or not to grant expansion of Gatwick Airport is required to the Secretary of State for Transport by today, November 27th 2024 by the Government's Planning Inspectorate, as today marks exactly three months since the examination of this planning application ended. Both of Luton and Gatwick have planning applications for expansion of runway capacity, which are due to be decided by Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh MP early in 2024.

5. Aviation Environment Federation highlight the missed opportunity of trains as an alternative to flights to Europe. <https://www.aef.org.uk/2024/11/21/the-elephant-in-the-middle-aisle/>.