DRONE DELAYS HEATHROW FLIGHT AS MPS SAY THEY BACK EXPANSION OF AIRPORT

News / Airports / Routes

A flight was delayed at Heathrow Airport on Saturday after a drone was flown over one of its runways.

The departure runway was closed for seven minutes between 12.45 and 12.52pm – delaying at least one flight - after a drone was spotted flying in Heathrow air space.

One passenger, Aimee Fuller, a member of the British Olympic snowboarding team, wrote on Twitter: "Onboard! At Heathrow when the flight gets delayed due to a 'likely Christmas present' a drone flying over the runway!"

A spokeswoman for Heathrow Airport said: "The departure runway was closed for seven minutes. It didn't cause significant disruption."

Drones proved to be one of the must-have toys this Christmas, with thousands sold by retailers, but police and safety bodies have warned they pose a potential danger to passers-by and other modes of transport.

Last month police revealed that a drone had close to hitting aircraft landing at Southampton Airport

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in July.

Hampshire police said they received more than 46 reports of drone incidents in the county alone last year. They included drones being found in people’s gardens, and one that hit the roof of a house “causing damage”.

The incident came as a new poll showed support has grown among MPs for the expansion of Heathrow and the building of a new runway.

The first survey of MPs’ opinion since the publication of the Airports Commission report which recommended the expansion of Heathrow found cross-party support for the move.

It found 65 per cent of MPS back the expansion of Heathrow, compared to 53 per cent who back the growth of Gatwick.

File photo: a sign reading "Stop Heathrow Expansion," protesting against the building of an additional runway at

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sign reading "Stop Heathrow Expansion," protesting against the building of an additional runway at London's Heathrow airport Photo: Getty Images

Among Conservative there was 68 per cent backing for Heathrow expansion, with 66 per cent of Labour MPs supporting expansion.

The findings show a significant rise in support since a poll of MPs taken in 2014 found six out of 10 backed the building of a new runway.

An overwhelming number of Parliamentarians – nine out of 10 – accept the need for an expansion in airport capacity in the south east.

But only a third of MPs say that expansion should take place at Gatwick airport, which had campaigned heavily to be allowed to build a second runway.

According to the ComRes poll, commissioned by Heathrow, there is more support for Heathrow

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expansion among MPs than for both High Speed 2 (HS2) and Gatwick expansion, which came last in a list of six infrastructure projects backed.

Crossrail 2 topped the list, followed by Hinckley Point power station.

Nearly 85 per cent of MPs agree ‘an additional runway in the south east is necessary for the UK to remain competitive as a centre for international business.’

Heathrow said that while the survey showed that a second Gatwick maintains support, particularly amongst London MPs, a third runway at Heathrow has more consistent support and more support overall - particularly amongst English MPs outside of London.

File photo: London Heathrow airport terminal 2 check in desks

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File photo: London Heathrow airport terminal 2 check in desks Photo: Alamy

Among northern MPs support for a second runway at Gatwick (32%) is less than half of that of a third runway at Heathrow (76%).

The majority of MPs also disagreed that an additional runway would prevent the UK from meeting its emissions targets.

This was a view echoed by the Government’s Airports Commission, which took the view that a third runway at Heathrow can go ahead without breaching environmental legal limits, as long as Heathrow continues to implement its mitigation plans.

Last year the Government’s Airports Commission made a unanimous recommendation for Heathrow expansion after it was asked by the Government to investigate how to keep the UK as a hub for aviation.

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In September 2014 an Ipsos Mori poll found that six out of ten MPs support expansion at the West London hub airport.

Heathrow expansion faces significant opposition from local communities because of worries about increased air pollution and noise.

A number of prominent Tories, such as Boris Johnson, who represents Uxbridge, and Zac Goldsmith, the MP for Richmond, are also vehemently against expansion, with a further five cabinet members also believed to oppose the proposal.

Building a third Heathrow runway has been recommended three times in the past 12 years, but has never taken place because the political obstacles have been so great.

But Heathrow maintains that with expansion, it can be “the best connected airport in the world and the most environmentally responsible”.

John Holland-Kaye, Chief Executive of Heathrow Airport, said: “Heathrow expansion has backing across the UK from business groups, trade unions and exporters across the breadth of the UK because it is the only way to connect the nation to the fastest growing economies in the world.

“Expansion will allow Heathrow to be the best connected airport in the world, as well as the most environmentally responsible. As we move in to a new year, this latest polling demonstrates we have majority support from MPs and confirms the breadth of support for Heathrow expansion across the political divide.”

A Gatwick spokesperson said: “Britain has a clear choice on airport expansion: get on with growth at Gatwick or yet more delays and inertia with an illegal Heathrow scheme that continues to stall.

“For the first time there is a real alternative, Gatwick expansion is deliverable within 10 years of a decision and would provide the country the economic benefit it needs at a dramatically lower environmental cost."

* ComRes interviewed 150 MPs online and by paper self-completion questionnaire between 12th November and 16th December 2015.

04 JANUARY 2016

SOURCE: THE TELEGRAPH
ARTICLE LINK:
https://50skyshades.com/index.php/news/airports-routes/drone-delays-heathrow-flight-as-mps-say-they-back-expansion-of-airport

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