



STANSTED AIRPORT – A BID FOR THE BIG TIME

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Owners of London Stansted Airport recently announced a major investment package including an extension to the terminal. Artemis Aerospace takes a look at the rise of Stansted and the new plans.

In wartime 1942 a runway was built by the US Air Force on the green fields of Essex, near a village called Stansted Mountfitchett. Stansted means ‘stony place’ in Anglo-Saxon, possibly not ideal for take-off and landing, but the runway went down anyway and the airfield begun its service to the allied war effort.

Used for heavy bombers, Stansted was also a maintenance and supply depot undertaking the overhaul and modification of Martin B-26 Marauder twin-engine bombers. On D-Day in 1944, bombers from Stansted were at the forefront of 600 aircraft patrolling over the beaches of occupied France.

In 1966, the British Airports Authority, which had just come into being, took over Stansted, and it soon became apparent that it was going to become a major player in British aviation. The terminal

needed an extension only four years later, and eight years after that a significant expansion was proposed by the government. This would enable Stansted to handle first 8 million then 15 million passengers per year in two phases; since then there has been a steady increase in Stansted's capacity. In 2002, planning permission was granted to expand the airport to serve 25 million passengers per year – by 2007, 2.5 million people passed through Stansted's gates in August alone. Three years later and the airport was granted permission to handle Code F aircraft, including the behemoth Airbus A-380 and Boeing 747-8.

The sky has literally been the limit, and in October 2024 a £1.1 billion upgrade, to take place over a five-year period, was announced by airport owners Manchester Airports Group. This will involve a £600 million extension to the passenger terminal, including extra seating areas and more shops, restaurants and bars. Extending the terminal rather than building another one means that Stansted will still be a single-terminal airport, which its owners believe is a point in its favour in terms of simplicity of travel.

The security hall is also due to be enlarged, with additional check-in desks and new baggage reclaim carousels, and the airfield taxiway is to be upgraded. With an eye to sustainability, a new 14.3-megawatt solar farm will be constructed on site to manage Stansted's increasing electricity requirements. The airport already has a biomass boiler and holds a Carbon Trust Standard, and was awarded Level 3+ carbon neutral status by the Airports Council International.

Once the development is completed, the annual passenger total is expected to be 43 million passengers per year, meaning Stansted would overtake Gatwick at 41 million and become the UK's second busiest airport after Heathrow. To those in the know this is unsurprising, as Stansted has broken its record for passenger numbers every month during 2024. On Friday 23rd August over 103,000 passengers passed through Stansted, a record for that month believed to have been boosted by legions of fans flying home from Taylor Swift's concerts, which had taken place at nearby Wembley Stadium earlier that week.

The government believes that the new expansion will double the airport's yearly economic contribution to the UK to £2 billion. As a bonus, it's hoped that around 5,000 new jobs will be created as a result of the investment.

In March 2024, British Airways returned to Stansted for the first time since the Covid pandemic, travelling routes to Florence, Ibiza and Nice. However, the airport isn't limited to these alone as it serves 200 alternative destinations for passengers to choose from. Further new carriers which joined the Stansted line-up in 2024 include the Turkish-German airline Sun Express and Royal Jordanian Airlines.

From a greenfield runway in 1942 to a crucial part of the UK aviation industry, Stansted has come a long way in just 82 years. Aviation enthusiasts will be watching with interest as the latest development takes shape.

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