



An edited version of this letter appeared in the Evening Standard on 14th October 2009

Dear Sir

A cosmopolitan city like London should neither be covered in concrete nor preserved in aspic (13 October). Simon Jenkins argues against Heathrow, against air expansion, against Crossrail construction, against the Olympics, even against mobility.

London flourishes by being a hub for global talent which, with thousands of daily commuters, makes the capital the most economically productive region of the UK. Failure to improve the Tube or failure to invest in Crossrail would sentence commuters to decades more travel misery and would handicap London's ability to foster the economic growth which UK plc needs to fund essential public services and meet its debts.

Our response to the challenge of climate change should not be Luddite retreat into mud huts and clothes, hand-made of straw. A relentlessly tightening emissions regime should be applied to planes, and international carbon trading must be made to hurt where it counts, applying to air travel and car travel, power generation, domestic and industrial activity.

The national Conservatives would deny Heathrow expansion, but business needs to know the Tories' solution to the parallel problems of an overfull Heathrow and increasing demand for air travel, one which doesn't hobble the British economy. Neither Gatwick nor Stansted can offer Heathrow's range of destinations. Removing short haul flights from Heathrow with High Speed Rail does not provide sufficient capacity for the expected growth in long haul journeys.

Neither will Heathrow's problems be solved by banishing the leisure flyer. Ibiza and Ayia Napa rarely feature on the Heathrow departure boards. Aircraft departing Heathrow aren't neatly split between tourist flights and business flights, they almost always carry both. The range of destinations which makes Heathrow an asset to London's international business community is partly supported by leisure flyers, some of whom are making occasional flights home while developing their careers in London.

By contrast, City Hall does seem to accept the need for more investment London's transport systems and for more aviation capacity. But in the thirty years Boris Johnson's estuary airport might take to build, London would be undermined by an overfull and underinvested Heathrow. And if Mr Jenkins had his way, by a decrepit and overfull Tube. Not the first choice for a footloose Far Eastern company to base their European headquarters, then?

Baroness Jo Valentine
Chief Executive
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