

AIR QUALITY AT HEATHROW



2M
against
Heathrow
expansion

2M Group meeting with Commissioner Stavros Dimas

Strasbourg - July 9 2008

The issue

Air pollution in the residential areas around Heathrow currently exceeds the average annual limit for nitrogen dioxide prescribed in the EC Air Quality Directive. It will continue to do so in 2010 and 2015.

The UK Government has no current action plan for achieving compliance within either of these time scales

The UK Government is now actively considering a 12.5 per cent increase in the capacity of the existing runways - leading to an extra 60,000 aircraft movements a year and 1 million more vehicle movements. The additional flights could begin as early as 2009.

Background

The EC Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC came into force on June 11, 2008. It requires Member States to reduce exposure to nitrogen dioxide in urban areas. The limit value of 40 micrograms per cubic metre should be achieved by January 2010. Member States may seek a five-year extension to this deadline but will have to meet specific criteria for derogation to be allowed.

The Directive applies throughout the EU. Member States are required to prepare action plans which address those locations or 'hot spots' where compliance will be difficult.

The UK position

It is expected that the UK Government will prepare an air quality action plan for the Greater London area or agglomeration. This will include Heathrow and its surrounding communities.

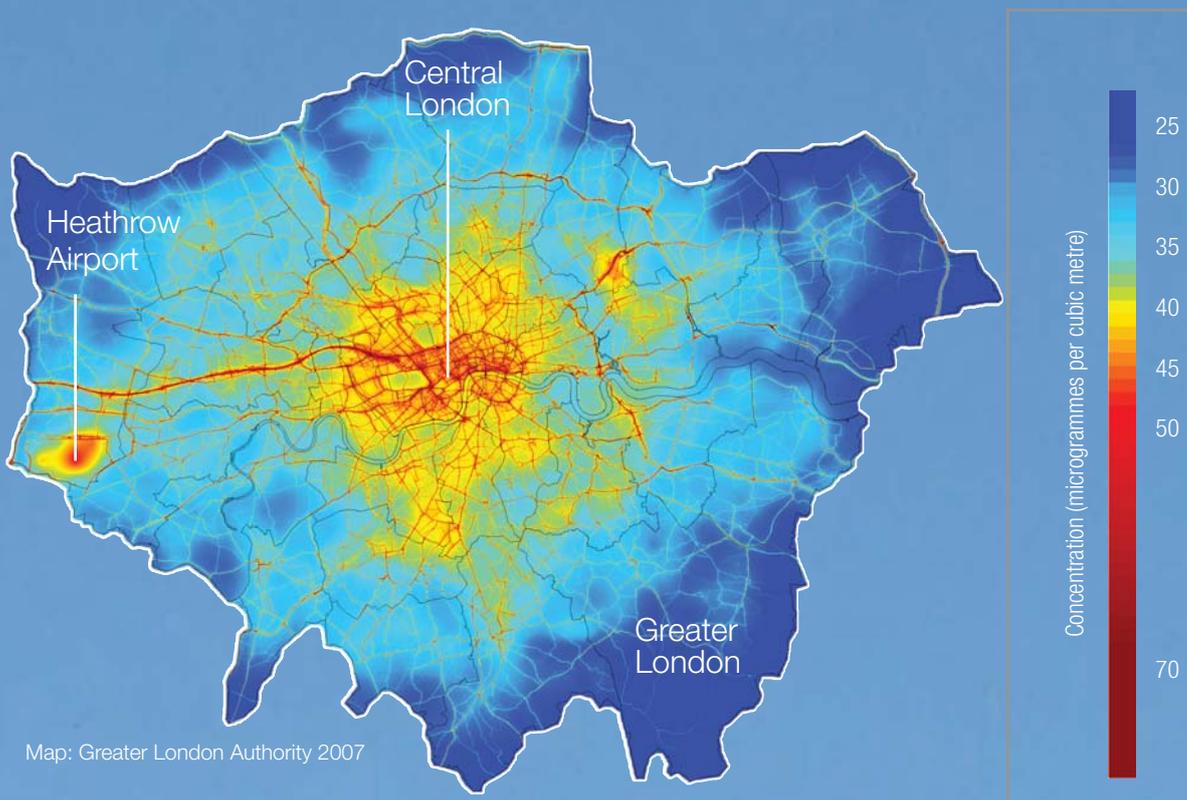
Fig 1 (below) indicates the extent of non-compliance across the area in 2010. In the central area, where the Mayor of London has initiated congestion charging schemes and low emissions zones, it will be possible to demonstrate an intent to reduce pollution levels towards the EC standard.

The Heathrow area to the west is clearly indicated as a separate hot spot. Fig 2 (overleaf) demonstrates the proximity of local communities to the airport. Monitoring stations show levels in excess of 40 micrograms per cubic metre in most parts of these residential areas.

The UK Government has no current action plan for addressing non-compliance at Heathrow. The only current constraints are a planning condition setting a ceiling of 480,000 movements a year and another imposing a limit of 42,000 car parking spaces.

Both conditions were secured following the Public Inquiry into the building of Terminal Five and are enforced by Hillingdon Council.

Fig 1. Annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration (2010 model)



Heathrow - a known problem

The Inspector at the Terminal Five Public Inquiry concluded in 2001 that nitrogen dioxide levels in residential areas would remain above the EC limit as far ahead as 2016. This is the date when the new terminal is expected to be fully operational.

The UK Government has therefore been aware of its difficulty with meeting air pollution targets at Heathrow for at least seven years.

Ministers confirmed their awareness of the problem in the 2007 'Adding Capacity at Heathrow' consultation.

In the longer term (post 2015) the Government argued that developments in vehicle technology and changes to the aircraft fleet mix would bring improvements in air quality. This is particularly relevant if the Government announces its support for a new third runway which would become operational after this date.

In the interim period, before any additional runway is built, the consultation document proposes an intensification of use of the existing runways. This would enable an extra 60,000 aircraft movements a year and 1 million more vehicle movements.

The consultation document conceded that the 40 micrograms per cubic metre limit for 2010 could not, under current airport operations, be met. No measures are put forward to address the problem. There is a clear assumption that a derogation will be allowed to 2015 (Paragraph 3.119).

Implications for the Heathrow communities

The people who live around Heathrow experience high levels of nitrogen dioxide. Their homes are hemmed in by the airport and two motorways. They suffer pollution from both vehicles on the ground and aircraft.

These are long established communities with nurseries, schools, and care homes. The health impacts of air pollution are experienced by all groups - young and old, fit and frail.

Even if no further growth in aircraft movements were envisaged, the situation would demand an urgent action plan that would work towards sustained reductions in nitrogen dioxide levels.

The scale of the task makes it unlikely that any action plan could achieve compliance by 2010. The existence of a plan would however demonstrate a commitment to year-on-year improvements in air quality in a manner consistent with the intentions of the EC Directive.



An open dialogue

The local authority members of the 2M Group do not seek to engage the Commissioner in the UK's airport expansion debate.

We have three main objectives:

- To open a constructive dialogue between our own technical officers and their counterparts in the Environment Directorate on issues relating to the Air Quality Directive and its implementation by Member States.
- To establish the processes by which local authorities and MEPs may contribute to the assessment of action plans and applications for derogation in respect of their own countries and the relevant information that may be provided.
- To secure recognition of the unique circumstances, within Greater London, of people in the Heathrow area and the excessive air pollution they will continue to suffer for many years.

About 2M

The 2M Group took its name from the combined 2 million population of its original 12 members. Today it comprises 21 local councils in London and the South East and represents more than 4.5 million people. Members are not anti-Heathrow, but all share a concern about the environmental impact of the airport's activities. It is an all-party group which works closely with supportive MPs and MEPs.

This position paper has been prepared on behalf of the 2M Group by Hounslow, Hillingdon and Wandsworth Councils.

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The 2M delegation

2M Group

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