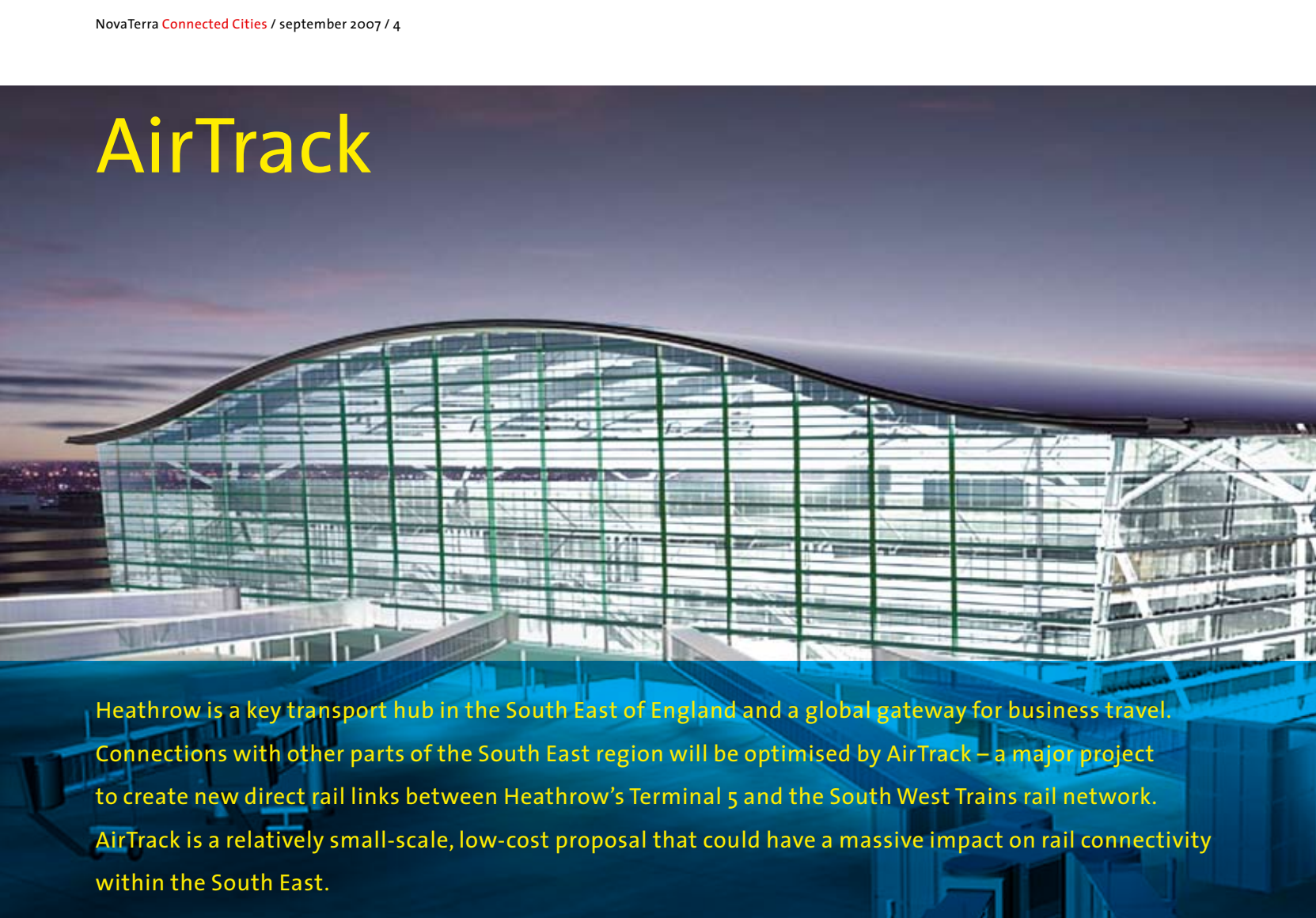


AirTrack



Heathrow is a key transport hub in the South East of England and a global gateway for business travel. Connections with other parts of the South East region will be optimised by AirTrack – a major project to create new direct rail links between Heathrow’s Terminal 5 and the South West Trains rail network. AirTrack is a relatively small-scale, low-cost proposal that could have a massive impact on rail connectivity within the South East.

AirTrack: direct rail access to Heathrow airport. (source: SEEDA)

Detlef Golletz, Head of Transport and Infrastructure, SEEDA, UK

The world economy is undergoing a fundamental change. Countries such as China, India, Brazil and Russia, along with the Central and Eastern European Accession States, are emerging as huge new markets. They not only offer significant opportunities to business within the South East of England, but also pose a considerable threat. The South East of England region faces competitive pressures not only from these emerging economies but also from other developed economies aspiring to sustain their economic performance and retain and enhance their ‘wealth generating’ economic functions. South East businesses need to be able to respond to these opportunities and challenges in a way that is sustainable and takes advantage of the expanding global economy. In 2003, 120 million journeys were made through airports in the South East of

England: London Heathrow, London Gatwick, London Stansted, London Luton and Southampton. More than half of the air travel in the UK takes place within the South East.¹ Projections for 2030 show a similar picture. Demand is high, mainly because of the nature and strength of the economy within the South East, and in London in particular. The associated pressures on existing capacity in the region are already worse than across the rest of the country. Airports are themselves a significant driver of economic growth and their expansion needs to fit in with the Government’s wider policies for sustainable growth.

EFFECTIVE TRANSPORT ESSENTIAL FOR REGIONAL ECONOMY

The Regional Economic Strategy for the South East 2006–2016², prepared by the South East England Development Agency

and its partners, identifies needs and priorities for continued economic growth and targeted, early investments in their three overall objectives: Global Competitiveness, Smart Growth and Sustainable Prosperity. The Regional Economic Strategy clearly recognises the importance of transport in delivering economic successes: ‘An effective transport system is one of the fundamental requirements for the continuing competitiveness of the region (...) To address congestion and avoid the tipping point that will undermine the region’s competitiveness, focus needs to be put on solving bottlenecks in the infrastructure system.’ It also sets out the need to reduce road congestion and pollution levels by improving travel choice, promoting public transport, managing demand and facilitating modal shifts.

'Globalisation and the shift to the informational economy give special value to large cities as centres for efficient fact-to-face information exchange. They are the locations of the major hub airports and high-speed train stations; they are also hubs for commuter traffic.'

Sir Peter Hall – The Future of the European City



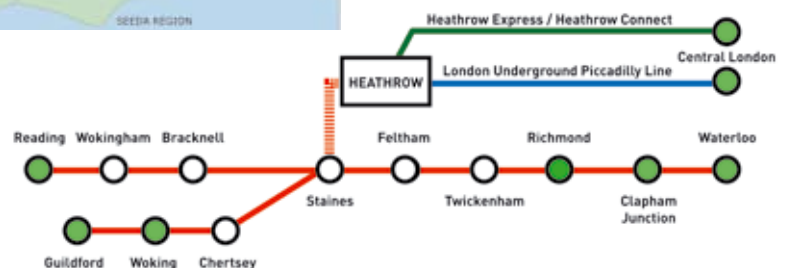
In 2005, a National Policy Review was commissioned by the Government and undertaken by ex-British Airways Chief Executive Officer Sir Rod Eddington.³ Published in December 2006, the Eddington Transport Study provides advice to the UK Government on the long-term links between transport and the UK's economic productivity, growth and stability within the context of the Government's commitment to sustainable development. The report identifies key international gateways as a strategic economic priority for the future and the vital role of aviation in supporting the international competitiveness of the UK's high-tech manufacturing, financial and business services sector, which are reliant on global markets and good international communication.

These conclusions are in line with the analysis from the White Paper 'The Future

Heathrow is much more than just an airport for London



- KEY
- AirTrack on existing lines
- - - AirTrack on new track
- Heathrow Express / Heathrow Connect
- Piccadilly Line
- Major Interchange Stations
- Intermediate Stops



AirTrack: the missing link. (source: SEEDA)



More than half of all air travel in the UK takes place within the South East

Heathrow's terminal 5 under construction. It is due to open in March 2008. (photo: Eyevine / Hollandse Hoogte)

of Air Transport⁴, which sets out a strategic framework for the development of the airport capacity in the United Kingdom over the next thirty years. A significant part of forecast economic growth in London and the South East is in those industries. Heathrow is also a prime driver of the economy of West London and the Thames Valley. Its significance as a primary destination for global businesses is noted in the White Paper as being recognised by all nine of the UK's Regional Development Agencies as of great importance to their respective economies.

CONGESTION STIFLING ACCESS TO HEATHROW

Long established and widely recognised as a global transport hub, Heathrow is much more than just an airport for London; travellers from all over the UK rely on access to Heathrow's global route network. It is the prime business airport for London and the South East and it will almost certainly continue

to be the case for many more years to come. The demand for Heathrow is extremely strong and is always likely to be far in excess of its capacity. Travel from Heathrow to global destinations is relatively easy and straight forward, and its excellent connections to the major cities in the world have been a significant factor in foreign investment.

Although the air connections to and from Heathrow are excellent, the ground connections are less optimal. Heathrow is the only major European intercontinental hub airport that is not well connected to the suburban rail network (as distinct from long distance/express rail services and/or metro). It is evident that western and southern access to the airport in particular is now under serious and growing pressures. Traffic growth to the airport has risen by 18.5 per cent over the last decade, with the current primary mode of transport being by private

vehicle. Businesses suffer too, but in a different way. The lack of viable public transport alternatives forces employees to take private cars or even taxis to Heathrow, pushing up transport costs and aggravating congestion on the roads.

Looking at the wider South East region, with its complexity of passenger, commuter and freight movements around and through London, there are a number of other locations that operate as major transport hubs. For example, the Thames Valley area to the west of London hosts several global and European headquarters and is seen as the economical capital of the region. It generates greater revenue for the UK Government than anywhere else outside London, but also suffers from increasingly high levels of congestion, hindering international access to Heathrow.



The scheme will require only 4 kilometres of new railway line. (source: SEEDA)

AirTrack could take 5000 cars off the road during peak hours

In the light of this growing pressure on transport infrastructure, the projected economic and productivity growth could be unsustainable given existing levels of transport infrastructure provision, and the area might lose its competitiveness as a result of this rising congestion. In turn, this could have a serious impact on the region's ability to attract foreign investment and recruit appropriate skilled labour. As identified by Eddington, the answer is not to build more roads, but to remove some of the traffic from the existing, inadequate network. It is also a more economical solution. An effective transport system is one of the fundamental requirements for the continuing competitiveness of the region. The major challenges lie in addressing congestion and the disparities between the economically successful areas and those with untapped economic potential.

AIRTRACK MOST VIABLE SOLUTION

The long-standing objective of a rail connection to Heathrow from the south and west of England has been the subject of considerable study for more than thirty years. Since 1960, there have been more than ten studies or proposals on how to improve surface access to Heathrow by means of an additional fixed rail link. The construction of Heathrow's new Terminal 5 in the south-west corner of the airport now provides an additional impetus for a link to be built. AirTrack, a proposed rail transport initiative, would at last see the fulfilment of this objective. AirTrack is a rail service linking Heathrow's Terminal 5 (scheduled for completion in 2008) with London (Waterloo Station), the Thames Valley (Reading) and Surrey (Guildford). Most of the infrastructure necessary currently exists. Only a relatively short link between Staines and Heathrow Airport and the platforms at the new

Terminal 5 station at Heathrow need to be built. This would create direct or one-change access to Heathrow from areas in south and south-west London and southern England which currently have no rail link to the airport, and improve frequent convenient public transport access to the major transport and employment hub that Heathrow has become. AirTrack will provide a direct rail service to Heathrow from the local authorities where over twenty per cent of Heathrow's passengers and about fifty per cent of its staff live. Nobody is suggesting that they would all switch to AirTrack, but it would create a viable public transport access alternative for many thousands who simply do not have such an option at present.

Based on the existing South West Trains Network and running over 95 kilometres of existing rail network, the scheme will require only 4 kilometres of new railway line and one new connection to the rail network at Staines. It is a perfect example of the smaller scale, big win schemes that Eddington largely favours, arguing that bit-by-bit management of the existing infrastructures is by far the most cost effective and economically viable solution. Because of the projects self-contained scope there should be little operational impact on the national rail network during the construction phases. It is these factors that boost confidence in the ability to construct AirTrack in a predictable and economical way.

BENEFITS

The completion of the scheme would fulfil a number of key strategic objectives for transport in South East England:

- Relieve congestion in the Thames Valley area, on the M4 and on local roads, reducing environmental impacts and the economic inefficiency of time lost in travelling.
- Fulfil Government policy and legislative requirements for improving access to Heathrow for the current and potential workforce, and building on Heathrow's current status as a major transport hub.
- Provide surface access to secure Heathrow's future in a sustainable way.

The environmental effects of the scheme are mostly positive as it follows the route of existing or recently disused transport corridors. By providing increased rail access to Heathrow, a viable alternative to using a car automatically provides a positive environmental impact. It should deliver a reduction in noise and greenhouse gas emissions, while helping to improve local air quality. There may be some impacts on biodiversity and aquatic environments during the construction and operation of the scheme, but water quality will improve in the long term due to the reduction in traffic on the adjacent section of the M25 motorway. The scheme might lead to some reduction in the amenity value of surrounding areas, but careful design and mitigation measures should keep this to a minimum. Heathrow airport derives 49 per cent of its air passenger movements in the UK from the South East of England. By providing regular and reliable rail transport, AirTrack is a realistic alternative to car use in one of the most congested parts of the South East. It could attract up to 15 million passengers a year and take 5000 cars off the roads during peak hours.

chaired by Surrey County Council, and comprises a cross section of local authorities, businesses and community organisations from Surrey, Berkshire and London, the South East England Development Agency, the South East England Regional Assembly, British Airways, Transport for London's Rail Directorate, the South West London Transport Conference partnership, the Highways Agency and BAA Ltd. Their common interest is to see that the AirTrack proposal is brought to successful fruition and to maintain the involvement of the stakeholders as the scheme is developed further.

In 2006, BAA Ltd granted funding for the promotion of a Transport and Works Act order (TWA) which would provide the planning consent to begin construction and for the operation the railway, the acquisition of necessary land and associated planning consents. Detailed work on engineering and environmental impacts, operational issues and much else, including demonstrating overarching wider economic benefit, has now begun. It is hoped that this work could be completed by 2009, with construction beginning in 2010/11, and the first AirTrack

The AirTrack Forum acknowledges it is most unlikely that public funds will meet all the costs. It is estimated that 220 million Euros could be funded from fare receipts; the remainder might be sought from a mixture of airport-related funding, public funds, possibly including the Department for Transport's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF), and EU Trans European Network programmes and development contributions.

Actively seeking ways of meeting this challenge will be a primary activity for the scheme promoters and for the AirTrack Forum as the TWA work moves forward.

BUSINESS CASE

In 2004, the AirTrack Forum commissioned an 'Outline Business Case' study, the results of which confirmed the practical and business case for the scheme. An in-depth study, revisiting costings and the business case, was completed on behalf of the Department for Transport during 2005. Although it identified variances from earlier work, this study reconfirms the overall conclusions, including a very robust Benefit/Cost ratio of 3.6:1 and projections of an operating surplus – making AirTrack one of the most cost-effective rail schemes currently under consideration in the United Kingdom.

Reactions to: lucas@novaterra.net

Notes

- 1 Air Transport White Paper – Chapter 11 The South East. '<http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/air/chapter11thesoutheast>'
- 2 The South East England Development Agency Regional Economic Strategy. 'http://www.seeda.co.uk/RES/docs/RES_2006-2016.pdf'
- 3 The Eddington Study. '<http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/eddingtostudy>'
- 4 The Future of Air Transport (ATWP) White Paper. '<http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/whitepapers/fot>'

Website

<http://airtrack.org>



The environmental effects of the scheme are mostly positive

Although the implementation of AirTrack is not forecast to hugely impact on the modal share for trips between Central London and Heathrow, the new service will lead to a substantially higher public transport modal share for trips between Surrey (Guildford) and Heathrow and between the Thames Valley (Reading) and Heathrow.

TOWARDS REALISATION

The AirTrack Forum is an important driver behind the push to get the project actually built. The Forum was founded in Autumn 2002 through the initiative of British Airways,

service to Heathrow can be operational by 2013/14. The estimated cost of the scheme is 520–600 million Euros, but greater certainty about this, construction timescales and operational details will be achieved only when all the work of the TWA process is complete. This development is a huge step forward for the project and substantially enhances the prospects for its realisation.

The final challenge before construction can actually commence will be the agreement and establishment of a funding package.