

**PRESS RELEASE
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AIRSPACE CHANGES TO BE POSTPONED – YET AGAIN

National Air Traffic Services (NATS) has announced yet another postponement of plans to change flight paths and aircraft stacking areas across East Anglia.

The official reason given for this latest delay is the lack of urgency for the changes as a result of the downturn in the air travel market over the past two years, but there is no doubt that the overwhelming strength of community opposition to the plans is also a key factor.

In February last year NATS published the first round of highly controversial proposals for new flightpaths and holding stacks across East Anglia. Billed as 'the biggest ever consultation on airspace change' its proposals caused uproar amongst communities in Hertfordshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Overall, there would have been far more losers than winners across the region and many towns, villages and rural areas which had never previously been overflown would have found themselves directly beneath the new flight paths and stacking areas, radically changing the character of their area and shattering the tranquillity of local communities.

So great was the opposition that NATS agreed to go back to the drawing board and re-consult. Although scheduled for July this year, the consultation was subsequently pushed back to the end of 2009. Now, it is understood that it will be another year before revised proposals emerge.

Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) was highly critical of the inadequacies of the original consultation because, apart from safety and logistical issues, the main focus appeared to be on cost savings and efficiency gains for NATS and its airline shareholders. SSE also condemned NATS' failure to offer any rationale for the single solution proposed or to provide any meaningful information on the other options considered and rejected. In addition, SSE pressed NATS to give thorough consideration to offshore stacking options and to provide a full explanation of the assessment methodology used to take account of environmental and community impacts.

The practical effect of the latest news is that all the six existing departure routes from Stansted will be kept in place instead of two of them being changed to overfly more of the region. In addition there will be no additional impact in the region from flights from Luton, Northolt and London City Airports. The two new stacking areas proposed between Ipswich and Stowmarket and to the north of Saffron Walden to Newmarket are off the agenda – at least for the time being.

However, the postponement could also mean that the introduction of continuous descent approach (CDA) routes for aircraft landing at Stansted from the west, over Ware, will be delayed. SSE maintains that CDA should nevertheless be implemented to alleviate the current noise disturbance suffered by those living under this existing arrival routes. There is already a precedent for NATS taking action on this specific issue following the 2008 consultation with the introduction of changes to the London City Airport departure procedures.

SSE Campaign Director Carol Barbone said: "In view of this latest postponement, NATS should, as a matter of urgency, look for other ways to fully implement continuous descent approaches for Stansted and thereby reduce the noise impacts upon many local communities to the west of the airport. We will also be asking NATS to ensure that any new consultation – if and when it ever does resurface – fully examines the option of offshore stacking and that it takes account of the second runway proposals for Stansted which the original consultation ignored."

She continued: "Furthermore, it would be completely unacceptable to tell people only half the story about future flight paths and stacking areas as in the previous consultation by ignoring the fact that BAA has a planning application for a second Stansted runway on the table. The public should be given all the information they need to understand the extent of the long term noise impacts arising from an airport the size of Heathrow being developed in the Essex countryside."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Of more than 15,000 responses received from members of the public (including 578 from MPs, local authorities, parish councils, environmental groups and other representative bodies), some 86 percent objected to the plans. Even the House of Commons Transport Committee instigated an inquiry into the proposal because of the widespread concerns and interest it sparked.

The two departure routes that NATS proposed to change in February last year were those leaving Stansted Airport towards the north and west. Both proposed new routes would have overflowed more of the region in Uttlesford and Saffron Walden since NATS' intention was to lengthen these departure routes and add between 6 and 8 miles to the flightpaths previously flown. NATS had acknowledged that this additional route mileage was inconsistent with the objective to reduce average emissions per flight. The resultant environmental impacts in this region would have been more noise, more visual intrusion and more emissions.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND COMMENT

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