

Dear Rosalie James,

I wanted to write further to last week's Community Noise Forum (CNF) which felt a little heated at times. I believe that shows the level of concern from community groups about the impacts of aircraft noise and a desire to see the industry take action, and, from my side, a passion for Heathrow to be doing the right thing.

Our intention in setting up the CNF was based on a genuine desire to improve our engagement on these issues and work with community representatives on finding ways to improve noise both now and also in the future with airspace modernisation. The nature of the issues we discuss mean this will be difficult at times but it is far better than the alternative, where there is no constructive engagement or challenge.

I have set out some of my own reflections on the CNF process to date and also proposed some tangible steps from our side to improve the process. This is a relatively new Forum for all of us and it is valuable to take stock and refine things as we go.

I have three main reflections on the Noise Forum process to date:

1. Much of the conversation we have been having has been a two-way education process: the community educating the industry about the impacts of noise and the industry setting out how its different constituent parts (airlines, airport, NATS) work together and what we can (and in some cases cannot, at least immediately) do to improve things. My view is we are still building a common language to have that conversation.

For much of 2015, a common message from community groups was that flight paths hadn't reverted back to pre-trial patterns. The industry response was to look at a 2D map and say that they had. In reality some of the community concerns (leaving aside the "Compton Gate" change which affected some communities) were driven by underlying changes that in most cases had been happening over a period of years and were not related to the trials, but could nonetheless make a perceptible change to noise on the ground. These include for example, the average height of the aircraft getting lower in some areas, and more aircraft using some departure routes as a result of airline choice. We have now gathered more granular data on these issues which enables us to evaluate what can be done to improve things while avoiding unintended consequences. For me this shows the value of the process.

2. It is absolutely right that Heathrow and the wider industry should set out a series of improvement actions that we are taking and that we are prepared to be held to account on. As I look at the work plan of the Forum, I see a number of tangible actions being taken which would not have happened if the Forum did not exist, or at least would not have happened as quickly or with the same degree of community involvement. These include:
 - a. Installing 38 new noise monitors to total 50 instead of the current 12.
 - b. Working with airlines towards a trial of different departure procedures and climb gradients to understand the noise impacts of aircraft departing higher.
 - c. Creating a new set of metrics to better describe noise in terms that are meaningful and relevant to communities.
 - d. Looking at options to more equitably share late evening departures, while recognising that the long-term goal is to avoid late running aircraft.

As important is that the industry communicates clearly when things are not possible or at least not possible in the short term or without support from regulators or policy-makers. Not to do so creates false expectations and makes the community relationship worse in my view.

Taking the example of aircraft heights again, it is not clear from the evidence that we have to date that a steeper climb gradient would improve noise for everyone. Hence the commitment to model and trial it in real-life, to properly assess the community impacts (noise) and also industry impacts (e.g. increased fuel burn). Pushing for a change without good evidence and then discovering unintended consequences might satisfy some of those groups currently on the HCNF, but could make it worse for others.

If the evidence does provide a clear case for change on noise grounds, pushing up the minimum climb rate is not within our powers and will require the involvement of the CAA and the DfT. That should not be read as “inaction” but a recognition that of the complex system within which aviation operates. From a Heathrow perspective, you have my commitment that we will a) work to gather evidence and b) where the evidence supports it, champion changes to improve noise.

3. Going forward, I think it is imperative we consider how we reach consensus in the group, and indeed if that should be our aim. That is easier for less contentious issues, for example improving the metrics that we use to communicate noise. For other issues this will be more challenging since there may be losers as well as winners. An example from last week’s meeting is how we share late running departures more equitably while driving towards a goal not to have late runners. We need to consider how we can supplement discussions in the Forum with more structured consultation and where that consultation should extend beyond Forum members (of course any formal airspace change will be publicly consulted on). I firmly believe that the CNF can play a helpful role in building common ground wherever possible and that it can complement more formal consultation.

In terms of some tangible improvements, to start to address some of the points above, I propose to do the following

- First, we will share a status update against the Forum action plan a week before each meeting (I have reattached a copy for reference). That will provide an overview of the plan we developed and allow you to hold Heathrow and others to account for delivery.
- Second, I will establish a formal pre-meet with other industry representatives (airlines and NATS) before each meeting to ensure that the most appropriate sector is prepared to talk to elements of the work plan and respond to specific community questions that have arisen.
- Third, we will develop some options on the decision-making process within the Forum. That work will suggest which topics are likely to require more structured consultation of both Forum members and of the wider community.

As I said last week, the HCNF is an influential Forum. Heathrow will continue to use it to shape our approach to noise management. Longer term the ultimate goal of the Forum is to ensure that airspace modernisation delivers benefits for both the community and the industry. This is a huge prize and a very different approach to that taken by airports that have already implemented PBN technology and seen huge challenge from their communities. I am quite sure that no other airport around the world is investing the same amount of effort that Heathrow is in engaging with communities to ensure we work together to find the best ways to implement the new airspace

technology. The steps we are taking and the work we are doing is breaking new ground. I encourage you to continue to use your engagement and influence to shape what we do in future.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Gorman
Sustainability & Environment Director

CC Community Noise Forum members