

Gatwick ‘seeks to raise capacity through use of emergency runway’



Gatwick is poised to reveal a new plan to create a second runway enabling it to handle up to 84,000 extra flights a year.

The airport previously submitted a proposal to build an entirely new runway two years ago, which was rejected by the government. Approval was then given for a third runway at Heathrow.

Gatwick’s plan is due to be showcased in a draft masterplan, which involves using the airport’s existing emergency runway so a costly building project would not be required, the Sunday Times reported.

After the previous plans were rejected, Gatwick, which handles around 282,000 flights a year, said it would put together new growth plans using “existing infrastructure”. The masterplan will include the proposed ‘routine’ use of its 8,400ft emergency runway.

Gatwick would require planning permission from the Civil Aviation Authority to use its standby runway. The runway, which is normally used as a taxiway or an alternative when the main runway requires maintenance, runs parallel to the 10,800ft main runway.

A legal agreement from 1979 that prevents the runways being used concurrently expires next August.

The emergency runway, which is normally used as a taxiway or an alternative when the main runway requires maintenance, is understood to be primed for use by smaller, short-haul aircraft.

This could boost the airport's capacity by between 20% and 30%, adding up to 231 extra flights a day.

The runway could potentially be used after 2023, before Heathrow completes its third runway in 2026.

It is believed that Gatwick will be seek to use the emergency runway as an interim plan for growth.

But campaign group Communities Against Gatwick Noise and Emissions (GAGNE) said: "This is simply betrayal of communities of Sussex, Surrey and Kent who have already endured the increases in long-haul movements this year by 24.1% – this is a second runway by the backdoor, how can communities ever trust Gatwick management again?"

Gatwick said any new development "would be fully compliant with all international safety requirements".

A Gatwick spokesman said: "Airports are required to publish new master plans every five years, setting out their future growth plans and Gatwick has consistently confirmed it will do so before the end of this year. The draft plan will set out for our local communities, partners, airlines and stakeholders three possible growth scenarios, which we will then open up for views and feedback.

"In line with recent government policy, Gatwick has previously set out it is exploring how to make best use of its existing runways, including the possibility of bringing its existing standby runway into routine use. This would deliver an incremental increase in capacity that complements the expansion schemes of other airports across the south-east.

"Safety and security are always our key priorities and any new development would be fully compliant with all international safety requirements."

Meanwhile, Gatwick's major shareholder Global Infrastructure Partners is reported to be considering selling some or all of its 42% stake in the airport which could raise up to £10 billion.

Gatwick handles 45 million passengers a year