

INTRODUCTION

The Transport Safety Organisation

The Transport Safety Organisation was established as a Company Limited by Guarantee in October 1999 after the Ladbroke rail crash and after the end of the Heathrow Terminal 5 planning inquiry, when it became clear that the UK was lacking an organization with a mandate and responsibility to focus on the health and safety of the public adversely affected – or potentially affected – by transport operations (particularly air, rail and ferry transport; the typical field of major public disasters).

The company has never traded, in terms of financial activity. It has operated in name only to bring greater public and institutional awareness of the absence of a designated public institution in the UK with clear responsibility for care for the health and safety of the wider public beyond the limited current focus on passengers travelling within transport vehicles.

In transport infrastructure planning in the UK, it is notable that public and societal risk is not normally a factor properly considered before decisions are made on the location of public transport facilities.

The lack of public resources and attention to this field has meant that the Transport Safety Organisation has necessarily had limited reach over the last decade and a half; however the dire need for such an organisation remains, particularly as the current approach to corporate responsibility and societal risk means that no one is responsible or liable for the sometimes serious societal risk associated with transport operations.

To the UK Airports Commission

This report to the UK Airports Commission, chaired by Howard Davies, draws attention to the continuing absence of proper institutional focus on the wider societal risks of transport operation, both generally and specifically in relation to the operation of Heathrow Airport.

The risk of an aircraft crash on London remains around one every ten years. In 1998, at the Terminal 5 Inquiry, the period was established from crash statistics to be between 5-14 years, by the author of this report who was the only body to oppose the development on the grounds of the crash risk to London. Heathrow operations have continued to develop over the years, with the risk increasing correspondingly, as the Inspector highlighted that they would in his Report.

The lives of a very large number of people around airports are seriously disrupted by the well-established adverse health consequences of noise and pollution from aircraft activity. Yet the UK Government bodies and the industry continue to maintain a complex system specifically designed to misrepresent both the impact and the risks associated with air transport, in the knowledge that the public are specifically barred from challenging this system in the UK courts. Through the conclusion in its Interim Report on the development of Heathrow, the Airports Commission has demonstrated an apparent lack of understanding of the serious issues involved. The appointment of a Commission with an apparent mandate, imposed by the Government, to continue to pursue growth in the industry is yet another mechanism to remove the public from involvement in the decision-making.

The Need for Public Authorities

Because of the lack of resources for the Transport Safety Organisation, this report can only provide a limited overview of the problems. Resources do not permit the provision of detailed evidential data and analysis in this report. Such analysis, together with the necessary challenge to Government and industry interpretation of complex data is sufficiently important to society to require the provision of proper publicly funded and mandated Transport Health and Safety Authorities, to which the public have rights of access and appeal in law.

This report is not designed to be an academic report, but to draw the attention of the Commission to matters that it appears to have overlooked. In particular, it is designed to encourage public discussion on a subject that is generally kept hidden from public view, especially in the case of societal risk. It is written in the hope that the Commission will work to protect people harmed by or at risk from air transport industry operations, rather than compound the failures of previous decision-makers who have, in many cases, merely supported fallacious and one-sided industry arguments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a UK Transport Safety Authority to be responsible for all individual and societal risks which might arise from UK transport operations
- Establish a UK Transport Health Authority to develop a more accurate and reliable noise measurement real-time mapping and control system together with analysis, research and prevention of the actual societal consequences which arise from transport noise exposure in people, animals and building structures
- Establish a UK Transport Authority as a permanent leadership body for decision-making in relation to the development of the UK transport system
- These three leadership bodies to give free rights of access, contribution and discussion for members of the general public to understand and challenge the assumptions upon which decisions are to be made and the processes by which decisions are to be made
- In view of the statutory legal bar to access to the courts, to set up a formal system for appeal and resolution for members of the public placed at risk from air transport operations
- Begin the progressive reduction of activity at Heathrow; to reduce Heathrow's status from the busiest international airport in the world, to the Glidewell Inquiry level of 275,000 air traffic movements per annum, which will substantially reduce the societal risks
- Begin a decision-making process, with proper public and professional involvement, on whether an airport hub elsewhere is actually necessary for the UK