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From the Chief Executive Officer

Our ref: 0840/CM/TS/L
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28th November, 2008

Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Increasing public confidence in the environmental limits of Heathrow expansion

BAA has long supported the Government's approach of striking a balance between the economic benefits and environmental considerations of expansion at Heathrow. We believe that the economic case for growth is compelling, and remain confident that the strict environmental limits set down in the Air Transport White Paper (ATWP) can be met.

However, I am deeply aware that for many people the environmental consequences of expanding Heathrow remain a major concern, and some have serious questions around how the noise and air quality limits will be met. As you know, for BAA these limits are absolute and non-negotiable, and we are keen to increase public confidence that the limits can and will be met.

In our response to the Department for Transport's 'Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport' consultation, we called for the environmental impacts of growth to be managed through set capacity parameters based on noise impacts and air quality levels. We anticipated that these parameters could be managed through reform of the slot allocation system, thereby ensuring that additional flights could only go ahead if the environmental limits were not being breached.

Today, we would like to go one step further. If the Government decides in favour of growth at Heathrow, we would ask you to appoint an independent assessor to monitor the environmental impacts of expansion. By calling on an independent expert to scrutinise the airport's performance on noise and air quality, we can provide an uncompromising assurance that BAA will operate the airport within the strict environmental limits laid down in the ATWP. We want to make sure the public can have confidence that, regardless of the theoretical capacity created by mixed mode and a third runway, the airport will only raise the number of flights it operates if the environmental limits are being met.

I hope you agree that an independent assessor could be key to helping provide assurance to the public and, in particular, local communities that BAA is serious about operating the airport within the set environmental limits. We are a responsible developer and keen to underline that growth at Heathrow is not growth at any cost.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Colin Matthews