



CRISPIN BLUNT MP
Member of Parliament for Reigate

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Robert Goodwill MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

Our reference CB/AH

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Dear Robert

I wrote to you last November regarding the increase in aircraft noise disturbance arising from the implementation of performance-based navigation (PBN) or precision-area navigation (PR-NAV) departure routes at Gatwick Airport.

Since then, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has indeed undertaken a Post Implementation Review of the changes and, despite delays, has made a recommendation to change the westerly departure which was straying most from the Noise Preferential Route (NPR) and newly affecting the populated areas of south Reigate and Redhill in my constituency. I am hopeful that when this route is changed there will be some relief for those who have been affected outside the NPR. However, whilst there may be a degree of dispersal due to vectoring of aircraft once they have reached 4,000 feet, the route is likely to remain highly concentrated, as are easterly departures from Gatwick.

I therefore remain very concerned about the impact of PBN routes which risk unremitting noise for those living, working or studying beneath them. Since aviation will gradually embrace PBN technology globally, I would appreciate an update on how the Government is addressing public concerns about associated airspace changes leading to concentrated flight paths. Unless they are designed in a sensitive and intelligent way, they have the potential to cause a constant noise nuisance for people beneath them.

In particular, what policy guidance is the Government planning to provide to ensure that PBN is implemented in a way that reduces concentration and maximises dispersal within NPRs, and creates multiple arrival and departure routes, and thereby respites, to avoid the creation of 'noise ghettos'?

I am concerned that current policy, as set out in the Aviation Policy Framework of 2013, is inadequate because it favours concentration “in most circumstances” and needs revisiting and/or further clarification.

On Airspace, the Aviation Policy Framework says: “Consistent with its overall policy to limit and where possible reduce the number of people adversely affected by aircraft noise, the Government believes that, in most circumstances, it is desirable to concentrate aircraft along the fewest possible number of specified routes in the vicinity of airports and that these routes should avoid densely populated areas as far as possible.”(3.31)

Whilst a concentrated flight path may “reduce the number of people adversely affected by aircraft noise”, it can increase the number of people significantly impacted by relentless noise. Airspace changes should assess performance against the Policy Framework’s overall objective on noise to “limit and where possible reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise”.

The statement that “It is desirable to concentrate aircraft along the fewest possible number of specified routes” seems to caution against as the desirability of having as many specified routes as is practical to ensure adequate dispersal and respite within NPRs.

Paragraph 3.32 seems to open the possibility for local communities to have a say on respite options and signals “further guidance on these airspace matters ... when the Department for Transport updates its guidance to the CAA on environmental objectives relating to the exercise of its air navigation functions”. Has this guidance been issued and does it provide for public consultation on proposed changes and respite options prior to implementation?

Without a firm basis in guidance, I believe that the CAA, NATS and airports will only propose and implement rigid, highly concentrated flight paths, as we have seen at Gatwick. You will appreciate that they rely upon Government policy to steer them on matters of public concern and as a secure legal basis for acting and I therefore look forward to hearing about your plans in this important policy area.

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Crispin

Crispin Blunt