

- 2 MAR 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

STANSTED G2 PUBLIC INQUIRY

I am writing to you today for two reasons. Firstly, to inform you that I have now had the opportunity to consider the recommendations of the Inspector to me on the proposed timetable for the G2 public inquiry (a copy of which is enclosed). Secondly, that I have decided to delay my formal announcement of the inquiry timetable for a short time.

As a result, the inquiry will not start on 15 April, as was scheduled. I set out below my reasons behind this approach.

I have carefully noted the views of the Inspector on the timetable and inquiry start date, as well as the correspondence received from interested parties. I agree with the Inspector's reasoning that both the revised air traffic forecasts published recently by the Department for Transport and the legal challenge to the joint decision on Stansted G1 can be accommodated within the recommended inquiry programme.

Turning to the Competition Commission's forthcoming final report on BAA Airports, whilst the Inspector notes that their Provisional decision on remedies report published in December 2008 suggests that they would seek to avoid disturbing the inquiry programme, I am certain that we should neither be seen to second guess the contents of the final report, nor the response of the airport operator until after they have had time to consider its findings and implications. I understand that the Competition Commission is due to publish its final report by no later than 28 March. This being so, and notwithstanding the views of the Inspector, I do not consider that an inquiry start date so soon after publication will allow sufficient time for the airport operator to consider its findings fully, including any possible implications for the inquiry.

I will make an announcement on the start date for the inquiry within 4 weeks of the publication of the Competition Commission's final report. Committing now to making my formal announcement within this 4 week period will minimise the uncertainty for all parties.

It is clear to me that this is the right way forward at this time. I accept that this will mean a period of uncertainty for all interested parties. To this end I am also prepared to commit now to ensuring that there will be a minimum of 8 weeks notice between my formal announcement and the start of the inquiry.

Given this delay, I have asked that the Inspector consider whether a further programming meeting would be beneficial after I make my announcement on the inquiry start date. This would consider the implications of that date on the Inspector's existing recommendations to me concerning the proposed inquiry running order and timetable. It would also allow the Inspector to explore further whether the later start to the Inquiry presents opportunities for utilising concurrent inquiry sessions as provided for in the Major Infrastructure Inquiry Procedure Rules. If necessary, the Inspector will submit a supplementary report to me, to enable me to make an announcement on the inquiry timetable before the inquiry opens.

I have asked the Planning Inspectorate to advise parties of any implications to the inquiry procedure, such as for the imminent submission of proofs of evidence.

Hazel Blears
HAZEL BLEARS
—