

A RECORD August at Heathrow Airport is expected with nearly 6.5 million people, mostly on well-earned holidays, tramping through the crowded corridors.

Tourism industry leaders are already urging Heathrow's new owners, Grupo Ferrovial, to improve the airport.

Bob Cotton, chief executive of the British Hospitality Association, describes the state of our national hub as "pretty awful, and deteriorating".

What is absolutely clear is Heathrow needs more room to breathe – not just for perspiring travellers, but for aircraft.

The biggest cause of passenger complaint is delay – and the vast majority of flight delays stem from inadequate infrastructure.

A congested airfield means extra minutes spent stacking in the air, being held at taxiway points on the ground, or waiting for aircraft stands to clear.

About a third of all Heathrow departures take off more than 15 minutes late. This is the worst record of any airport in the UK, and significantly worse than any other major European hub.

The heart of this problem is lack of runway capacity.

All the other main continental hubs have more than Heathrow's two runways. Amsterdam has five, Paris Charles de Gaulle four, Madrid four and Frankfurt three (with a fourth on the way).

In worldwide terms, only Mexico fares worse. This is an alarming position. We cannot hope to maintain London's status as a world-class business centre, supporting millions of jobs across the country, unless we provide the world-class air links that businesses need in a global economy.

Shortage of runway capacity results in a shrinking network, as financial pressures force carriers to devote their scarce slots to the most profitable routes.

Unless firm action is taken now to

New third runway is the key to prosperity

Unless Heathrow expands its rivals will leave it behind

In a special article for *BA News*, Lord Soley (right), campaign director for Future Heathrow, puts the case for why Heathrow Airport needs a new runway. Future Heathrow is an alliance of trade unions, business groups, airlines including BA, and professional associations which supports the airport's sustainable modernisation.

increase runway capacity, the undisputed number one airport in Europe will find itself struggling to stay in the top ten.

The impact of Heathrow's decline is felt particularly in the UK regions.

The ever-tightening squeeze on slots has resulted in the disappearance of connecting flights to parts of Scotland, the North and the South West, which are desperate for the best possible transport links to attract inward investment.

That is why the regional development agencies support Heathrow as the priority for runway development.

I believe Heathrow must be allowed full utilisation of its existing runways, and the addition of a third.

According to the Government, a short third runway would deliver a net benefit to the national economy of at least £8 billion a year – a far higher return than a runway at any other location.

Of course, environmental concerns

must be addressed. As a long-term west London resident, I am fully aware of the importance of the noise and air quality issues.

I am adamant that the Government should stick to its requirement that the noise contour around Heathrow should be no bigger with a third runway than it was in 2002.

I am also confident that the forthcoming EU limit on nitrogen dioxide pollution can be satisfied.

Most of these emissions around Heathrow are caused by road traffic, not aircraft.

As the Department for Transport's technical report on air quality has shown, NO₂ emissions have been falling steadily and are not as serious a problem for airport expansion as was first thought.

There is no doubt that global warming is a very serious issue.

But it demands a response that will reduce total carbon emissions from all

industries and all areas of human activity across the world.

There is much more that can be done to power ground vehicles by alternative fuels and generate electricity for airport buildings from renewable sources.

The case for the sustainable expansion of Heathrow is overwhelming.

I look to Heathrow's new owners to show much-needed vigour and commitment

in pursuit of the increased runway capacity that is crucial to the airport's future.

"Net benefit of at least £8 billion"

