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Business chiefs demand politicians end 50 years of dithering and Let Britain Fly

Leaders from more than 100 of Britain's top firms have warned politicians that failure to commit to airport expansion risks condemning the UK to being a second-rate economy until at least 2040.

The warning came as business leaders and politicians met for the launch of "Let Britain Fly"* , a campaign aimed at pressurising MPs to avert the UK's looming air capacity crunch.

It calls on all major parties to include a commitment to tackle the problem in their manifestos for the 2015 General Election.

This would mean a commitment to act following the findings of the Airports Commission, which reports that year.

Leading firms that have thrown their weight behind Let Britain Fly include Associated British Foods, Boots UK, Dixons, John Lewis, Land Securities, Lloyds Banking Group, Hilton Worldwide, Next, Westfield Group and WPP.

This makes Let Britain Fly the biggest and most influential business-led campaign ever created to address the issue of airport expansion.

Also backing the drive are Louise Ellman MP, chair of the Transport Select Committee and Graham Brady MP, chairman of the 1922 Committee, as well as other senior and influential backbenchers.

Other signatories include the City of London Corporation, the Institute of Directors, the British Chambers of Commerce, the London Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and CBI Northern Ireland.

Among the speakers at today's launch were John Allan, CBE, Chairman of Dixons Retail, Rebecca Kane, General Manager of The O2, Louise Ellman MP, Graham Brady MP and Baroness Jo Valentine, chief executive of London First, which is organising the campaign.

John Allan, CBE, Chairman of Dixons Retail said:

“Sorting out policy quickly to increase airport capacity in the South East is vital to enable long term economic growth, not just in the South East but for the UK as a whole. At Dixons, for example, the impact of increased tourism alone would boost our business and encourage further investment in the UK.”

Rebecca Kane, General Manager, The O2

"Last year more than 15 million international tourists visited London spending more than £10 billion. Both figures are set to increase by the end of the year, highlighting the importance and value to the capital of providing effective air links. At The O2 we welcomed 8.6 million visitors in 2012, of which more than a million had travelled from all four corners of the globe, a figure which continues to rise year on year since our opening in 2007. Taking this and our status as the world's most popular music venue into account, it is essential that our visitors can reach us via the most efficient and safest air links available in London.”

Louise Ellman, MP, chair of the Transport Select Committee, said:

“We need more hub capacity in the south east. Failure to tackle this means that the UK will continue to lose out to its competitors in Europe and beyond.”

Graham Brady MP, Chairman of the 1922 Committee, said:

“I know from first-hand experience in my own constituency the huge impact that a thriving airport has on the economy of the surrounding region, as a powerful driver of job creation and growth more widely. It's imperative that politicians finally set their party interests to one side and forge a cross-party consensus to safeguard and enhance the UK's economic and social interests. Fifty years of political indecision is inexcusable. The Airports Commission must mark the end of 50 years of indecision: for Britain's sake we need to get on with the job of building the airport capacity that is so badly overdue.”

Baroness Jo Valentine, Chief Executive of London First, said:

“After 50 years of stop-start government mismanagement of our airport infrastructure, the Airports Commission represents the final call for

politicians of all parties to step up and sort out the problem. If they don't, another generation will pass us by while our continental rivals build more runways and bring in more business from the world's emerging economies. Last year, we saw Germany take our crown as Europe's leader in attracting foreign investment projects. Do we really want to become an also-ran in the global race?"

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Editor's Notes:

For a full list of signatories to the campaign please [click here](#).

For the founding statement please [click here](#).

Today's launch is backed by an advertising campaign and a video explaining the urgent need for action.

In the coming months, the campaign will be holding a series of debates and other meetings to press home the importance of resolving the air capacity problem.

* *Let Britain Fly* is a new independent campaign coalition whose founding statement has already attracted support from more than 100 senior business leaders from Britain's top companies, trade and professional associations, unions and educational institutions, along with organisations including the British Chambers of Commerce, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, London First, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Hospitality Association.