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Faster rail link to Stansted urged

By Rose Jacobs

Stansted airport would stand to gain an additional 1.4m passengers a year if politicians and the rail industry came together to reduce the train journey time from central London to 30 minutes, according to the airport's operator.

Analysis of passenger data suggests a faster rail link – compared with the 47 minutes to an hour required for the journey from Liverpool Street Station – would significantly boost the airport's catchment area and could help Stansted play a bigger role in solving the south-east's airport capacity crunch.

London's third-biggest airport by passenger numbers is only half full, processing 17m travellers last year and attracting the attention of politicians keen to maintain London's hub status but reluctant to expand Heathrow airport.

Boris Johnson, London mayor, has moved from strongly advocating the creation of a new hub airport in the Thames estuary to suggesting Stansted could also offer a solution.

But surface transport would prove a sticking point. The architecture firm Make, which last month unveiled a masterplan for a four-runway Stansted, included in their vision an extension of the Crossrail line to the airport.

Tim Hawkins, Stansted's director of regulation and planning, said his team had begun talks with Network Rail and Abellio, which runs the West Anglia main line, about taking steps toward achieving the 30-minute target over the next 15-20 years.

Shorter-term aspirations include the introduction of a 3.20am service from Liverpool Street, improving punctuality of trains and achieving a five-minute reduction on the shortest journey times by 2017.

Douglas Jack, an aviation analyst with Charles Stanley securities, said the airport – which is being sold by its parent, Heathrow airport Holdings – would do well to get its biggest airline customers on board, since landing fees would help fund any investment in surface transport.

Ryanair, which dominates Stansted traffic, has dismissed Stansted's lobbying in the past. It said on Thursday: "Ryanair hopes that the new owner of Stansted airport will significantly slash prices – rather than worrying about rail lines – in order to stimulate rapid traffic

growth.”

Stansted hired advisory group York Aviation to analyse passenger data gathered by the UK's Civil Aviation Authority. As well as suggesting the boost from shorter journey times, it showed about a third of people travelling through Stansted started or finished their journeys in central London, with another third coming from or going to the east of England.

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