

Stansted wants fast track to compete with better-connected airport rivals



Stansted wants to attract more long-haul flights Handout

Andrew Clark Deputy Business Editor
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The owners of Stansted airport are launching a campaign for an upgraded rail link to London as part of an aggressive effort to expand the Essex terminal by attracting long-haul carriers.

Manchester Airports Group, which bought Stansted for £1.5 billion in February, said that it was in “active discussions” with 30 airlines in an attempt to diversify away from Ryanair, easyJet and holiday charter flights.

However, the 47-minute journey time for trains to the capital has proved to be an obstacle in attracting business travellers.

Andrew Harrison, the managing director of Stansted, said that the rail link should be upgraded as part of a broader plan to improve connections to East Anglia and Cambridge — home to scores of hi-tech businesses and to the new headquarters of AstraZeneca. “If you look at the potential that exists in Cambridge, linking into companies like Google in North London, that corridor becomes of national significance — with Stansted at the heart of it,” he said.

A joint paper by MAG and London First, the business lobbying group, will be published shortly, listing options that include “four-tracking” the line to separate fast trains from stopping services. This has been costed previously at up to £300 million. Alternatives include introducing a direct link to Stratford’s transport interchange beside London’s Olympic Park, or incorporating Stansted in the second stage of Crossrail.

Stansted estimates that a million people live within an hour’s journey of the airport. If the rail journey could be reduced by ten minutes, that number could double to two million.

“Overall, in terms of the budget of Network Rail, it would cost a fairly nominal amount,” said Mr Harrison, who added that the presence of Britain’s second-biggest drugs company in Cambridge would be a big incentive to expand the airport.

Last week, Stansted struck a deal with Ryanair that will increase its traffic at the airport by up to 50 per cent over ten years, in return for lower landing charges. Of the 17.5 million people who use Stansted annually, 12.5 million are flying with Ryanair. The number of airlines flying from Stansted, which peaked at 30 a decade ago, has dwindled to 11.

MAG claims that the previous owner, the former BAA group, made little effort to broaden Stansted’s customer base because it also owned Heathrow and Gatwick, which were aimed at premium traffic.

“Stansted has been carved out, historically, as a low-cost airport more out of what BAA wanted to do with it than as a result of the opportunity,” Mr Harrison said.

“Our primary focus has been to get Stansted back into growth and to compete in London, rather than be part of a system of

airports.”

In particular, he said that “fairly detailed conversations” were under way with two long-haul carriers interested in using Stansted. Previous long-haul services by Continental, American Airlines and Air Asia X were short lived.

MAG says that it was open-minded about building a second runway at Stansted and would await the findings of the Davies commission on aviation capacity.

6 comments




 **Michael Daventry**


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 **Stephen Skinner** 22 hours ago
It's unlikely that other big carriers will re-locate as the airport is definitely not a hub. E.g. no flights to Paris or Amsterdam to name but a few. As for Astra Zeneca they can now fly from Cambridge Airport to Amsterdam and use that as a hub. The Kings X to Cambridge line is far quicker than the Liverpool St link. If MAG really want this link, let them pay for it, it is they who will profit from it.


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 **Text** 1 day ago
Perhaps they should have thought about the rail improvements before giving the Highways Agency monies for the M11. A similar re-run is about to happen at Cambridge with the A14 improvement rather than EWRL!

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 **Andrew Halket** 1 day ago
There already is quite a quick line to Cambridge - out of Kings X (which is where google is being based too I believe) - this doesn't go via Stansted so a little disingenious suggesting a route to Liverpool St helps Astra Zeneca and Cambridge business in general - it does nothing of the sort

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 **Neil Marshall** 1 day ago
It sounds like MAG are trying to cover up Stansted's key negative - it's in the wrong place and is rejected by the major international airlines. Why should Britain subsidise what is essentially a large regional airport at the expense of our national hub, Heathrow?

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Swiss Tony 2 days ago
Given the debate over HS2 there is little or no hope of a new route to Stansted in my lifetime. And I'm only 12.

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Brian Davies 1 day ago
[@Swiss Tony](#) Probably a sounder proposition than HS2 though!

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