



Transport Select Committee

Oral evidence: Surface transport to airports, HC 516

9 November 2015

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Members present: Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair), Mary Glendon, Stewart Malcolm McDonald, Huw Merriman, Will Quince, Graham Stringer, Martin Vickers

Questions 122-168

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Chris Chalk**, Aviation Practice Leader, Mott MacDonald, and **Grant Brooker**, Senior Executive Partner, Foster and Partners, gave evidence.

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. Could you tell us your names and positions in your organisations?

Chris Chalk: My name is Chris Chalk. I am the aviation practice leader for Mott MacDonald.

Grant Brooker: My name is Grant Brooker. I am head of studio at Foster and Partners.

Q122 Chair: You both come from organisations that “think big”. What are the barriers to “big thinking” in terms of airports and airport expansion?

Grant Brooker: One of the issues we are faced with in the UK is that we are growing our airports organically and adjusting. Quite a lot of our experience is that we have been given completely fresh starts, and that is a much easier canvas from which to work as designers. If you are in the world of replacing airports in their totality, you can look at what is the very best that can be achieved in all respects; what is the most desirable shift; how you want people to get there; and how you want people to travel from there. With complete freedom, you can achieve great things. It is much harder when you are dealing with airports that already exist, where you are tweaking or trying to make small changes. I do not underestimate that difficulty; we have worked on master plans and changes to existing airports, and done some of the replanning around Heathrow, and that is a much harder task.

Q123 Chair: Mr Chalk, do you want to add to that—in particular, how do you see surface access applying?

Chris Chalk: Airports are a transport interchange for people who arrive by surface transport who go by air, and vice versa, or air to air, or even surface transport to surface transport, recognising that these are transport hubs and not just an airport. Certainly the very largest ones are that. The key element of surface transport is that if you are going from surface to air you want to catch your flight. The mode choice will depend on the reliability and simplicity of you doing that. Study after study shows that people want to get their flight easily, which is perhaps not a surprise, and therefore the reliability of the mode of transport they use—it may be different modes at different times of day, depending on congestion issues—is important. They want to be able to get to their flight in time. Most people travelling are doing so for leisure, so they are unlikely to have a flexible ticket. They need to get that flight. If they do not get that flight, they lose their holiday and everything else, and there is no compensation. Making the flight is important, and it is the departure route that is the critical one rather than the arrival route.

Grant Brooker: It is something that you can affect and shape. You need to find creative ways of working with the operators and how far you can push them. They are used to being pushed because they are pushed very hard by the airlines. That is part of a dialogue that all the airport operators are constantly dealing with and measuring. It is quite interesting to explore how you could stretch their requirements working in the other part. They try to create a cocoon for the passengers from the moment they arrive at the airport. It is quite interesting to explore what you might be able to do with them in terms of service standards. Airports are very governed by service standards.

Q124 Chair: Are there any international examples that would help in doing this or point the way?

Chris Chalk: There are lots of different examples that we have worked on together. Perhaps the most extreme example of efficiency is Hong Kong. Mr Brooker worked on the original design of it, and I have been working on the design of taking it up to something which is very large. That has 80% of the passengers going by public transport, but Hong Kong has a uniquely efficient transport organisation, where people have high frequency and high certainty of being able to make that journey. They do have a choice. People will go by taxi if they want to, but many people will go by the airport express. The most extreme public transport example is Hong Kong.

If you go to Singapore, which you would think would be very similar and would have very good public transport networks, the public transport component is about 30% rather than 80%. It does not mean that Singapore Changi is a bad airport—in fact, recently, it has got awards as the best airport in the world more than any other. It is because of where the population is and the modal choices they have. The population is much closer but more spread out, and therefore going by taxi becomes a simpler choice. These are two places where car ownership is quite low.

Q125 Chair: Mr Brooker, do you want to add anything to that? I am looking for global examples that could point the way to us doing it better.

Grant Brooker: As designers, one of the things inherent in the design of any new airport is that you are looking to influence passengers into making choices as they move through the building. In Hong Kong, there was a very specific move to make a direct connection to public transport. We prioritised that in the design of the terminal building. You walk straight through from the meeters-and-greeters area, on the same level, and if you keep walking in a straight line, which people will do, you walk straight on to the train at the same level with minimum fuss.

Q126 Chair: Who took the decision on what they wanted?

Grant Brooker: It was determined by the Government. That is another advantage: the Government own the airport through the authority. You do not have the full set of cards to play with here. They are making those decisions and determining what that modal shift is and what provisions they will make. You are also dealing with a population that has incredibly low car ownership, with a very highly efficient and centralised transportation system; so things are in our favour. None the less, the airport we replaced had very poor access, and no train access at all. It was a very high-level decision to say, “We will prioritise this; it will work; and the alternative shifts will take you to the buses and the taxis.” It was a very clear message. Generally, the shift is between the buses and the airport express.

Q127 Chair: So in this case the Government who owned the airport had an objective, and that was then built into the design.

Grant Brooker: Exactly, as a standard requirement. Of course, most new airports have this determining factor. Everybody understands that it is better to get a good transportation system, but we are not just connecting a generalised transport system into an airport. It is quite specific and it is quite hard. Chris made the point that it is the departing passengers who are key because they are the ones under a time pressure. The time pressure on travel has changed dramatically, and that completely affects the design of the airports that we are designing now.

Security, 15 to 20 years ago, was almost like a line that people would pass through. It is now one of the most significant elements in any passenger terminal building. That has meant that people have to allocate a greater amount of time to pass through security. You can be at a terminal building and still miss your flight if you have not allowed adequate time.

Terminal buildings are getting bigger because they have to deal with more people who are spending a longer time there. There is a much greater dwell time. They have to have much bigger security processes, which, depending on the status, could be a few minutes or 40 minutes. It just depends on the alert status and what screening they are doing. The key thing is that it is unpredictable. People have to allow a great amount of time to clear those passages and zones, and what they cannot have is another unpredictable part of a journey that will precede that. That departing passenger has a real priority. One of the things about transport is that they are looking for dedicated transport links where they are mixing very little with other passengers. That puts another shift and another pressure on transport.

Heathrow is obviously very car-bound, but if there are family travellers it is very hard to see how that works with our public transport system.

Q128 Huw Merriman: As well as the operators signposting and directing the departing passengers on to public transport, is there something also to be said for the airlines, when the contract is formed, locking the passenger into public transport usage at the time the transaction is entered into?

Chris Chalk: The airlines themselves are quite often incentivised to sell on. If you go on Ryanair and others, they will be looking to sell on other services as much as they can, because they have you as a captive passenger not only once you are flying but even before that. You will find that you have to disaggregate the different sorts of passengers because they have different needs. All passengers are looking for reliability and ease of access. If you look at Stansted airport, it has the highest proportion of public transport of the UK's airports. The reason for that is because you have a lot of people who spend a lot of time to get the cheapest price, and if you want the cheapest price, then you go by coach. A very high proportion of the passengers at Stansted travel into London and they go there by coach because they get a good deal. Quite often that will be sold through the same operator. Different airports have different needs for different passengers.

Q129 Huw Merriman: But this is not the airports—this is the airlines. Let me rephrase it. In your experience, looking at the airlines, do they offer that public transport option in the same way as they offer private Hertz rent-a-car options?

Chris Chalk: I have not seen it on the mainline carriers, no, but I have on the low-cost because they incentivise and up-sell on everything they do.

Q130 Huw Merriman: Would you not agree that it would make sense for them that, as well as having the signposting and directions of the airport operators at the time you come into the airport, locking in beforehand is going to double your chances of getting someone on to public transport?

Chris Chalk: The question then is: will that public transport operator take responsibility for lateness? If they are late and the person misses the flight, will that public transport operator take that responsibility or not? If they do, you've got a deal. That's the rub.

Q131 Huw Merriman: I recognise that on one leg, but in terms of coming in from Italy on EasyJet and landing at Gatwick, if you sell them the Gatwick Express rather than allowing them to make up their mind at the time, it means that you have minimised the chances of them using a taxi, a car and so on.

Grant Brooker: If it is included in the price, you can imagine that you would be able to influence it. Chris's point is that you always have very different types of traveller. The people who are using budget and low-cost airports as point-to-point are very different from the business or other travellers who are using the main hub airports. They are very different and they will accept different types of transport. I am sure it would help if something was included in the price of a ticket, particularly with the budget airlines. The

issue is that they are so price-sensitive that the bus option is a fraction of the cost of the train option. You might feel that the train option is the thing that everybody should be taking, but it may be three times the cost of the bus. Again, you cannot dictate which would be the correct mode. It would be odd to pay more for a train ticket than you have paid for the air fare.

Q132 Chair: Are there any other ways of encouraging both passengers and employees to use public transport rather than private cars to get to the airport? I am looking at existing airports and not at building a new one.

Chris Chalk: Employees are a large proportion of the people who travel to airports. Unfortunately, most airports have what we call “slot 1”, which is flights that leave between 7 and 8 a.m., so as an employee, that means you will be arriving at the airport at 5 or 6 a.m. It then puts pressure on public transport. Is that a sensible option at that stage? If you run a system through 24 hours, you need to have a break to do your maintenance for resilience. The challenge as far as the employees are concerned is the early morning and the late evening. The majority of people at airports work shifts, so that is a constant challenge for airports. I know all airports will be providing direct bus services and such like where they can collect people. The main thing for passengers is that they know what is available. When they go on to a website, as most people do now, what options do they see first? Do they see car parking first or buses? I think they probably see car parking more often, for obvious reasons.

Grant Brooker: I would have thought employee access would be a much easier target than some of the passengers. The pressures are great but they are not as great, and it is about tuning supply. You would get a much better take-up. There are huge employee demands around any airport and any facility. I would have thought that is something you can mandate with the operators and talk about. They would have to work in parallel with whoever is driving the local transport, but it seems to be such an obvious and softer target; it is easier fruit to pick.

Q133 Mary Glindon: In relation to private cars and taxis accessing airports, are you aware of any success stories that relate to this?

Chris Chalk: Do you mean successful in reducing the number of private cars and taxis?

Q134 Mary Glindon: If you are trying to discourage them. What are the pros and cons of such schemes, if you have charges?

Grant Brooker: In our experience, it is about how you target them and what alternatives you are able to offer. You have to provide coherent alternatives that will be better than the car. In Hong Kong, prior to the opening of the new airport—so quite some time ago—they were still operating an in-town check-in service. That was a great facility because it took away the bags from people within 24 hours of them travelling. They had a whole series of marked points within the city where people would deliver their luggage and check in. That meant that for the rest of the day they did not have their bags to worry about. That changes your perception in terms of how you are going to travel, because it makes it much easier. It

makes public transport much easier as a choice if you do not have to move bags around. In-town check-in is a great facility, because the check-in is taken from the city in a secure way and checked on to the flight as if you have done it in the terminal building.

The disadvantage we have is that we have a much more expanded drawing area for our airports. We draw population from such a wide area, whereas it is much more concentrated in Hong Kong. The facility of providing in-town check-in has been experimented with in the UK but it has never quite worked. I am sure there must be versions at transport points or major transport nodes where it would really be worth exploring. It completely changes the psychology of the passenger.

If you are travelling with a family or in a group and you have luggage, getting on public transport is a completely different experience. It just does not work for you. But if you do not have those bags, it is a much softer and much easier choice. Again, you have to understand the dilemma for the passenger you are dealing with and see if you can solve parts of the problem. That is easier to do, in my experience, than providing a dedicated train with dedicated passenger areas that does not involve the rest of the public and has storage and luggage areas. That is a much harder thing to achieve.

Chris Chalk: You touched on the meeters and greeters. Some passengers will travel by themselves, but if you have people flying in, say, from India or wherever into Manchester you will get a large number of meeters and greeters for that one passenger. That is part of the cultural thing, so you need to be able to allow for that to happen. They will naturally travel by car because they will fit as many people in their car as they can as a part of the welcome that they will want to do. You need to allow for that. Obviously the parking needs to discourage them from staying too long.

With taxis in smaller locations, if people arrive at an airport and they need to get into town, if there are not that many of them, having a reliable taxi service is an essential transport link. It is quite inefficient in a number of locations, and in a number of airports you have to encourage the taxi drivers to provide a service. Quite often they have to drive some distance and wait for some time for a number of fares. That is why it is expensive to get a taxi from Heathrow. There are large ranks of taxis and they are not picking up lots of fares.

There is a limit in some places as to how many taxis you can reasonably have. An example of that is Singapore, which has a lot of taxis. It has a finite amount of resources. If they want to double the throughput, they will end up with all the taxis at Changi airport and none for downtown. There is a balance of resources and maybe in some places as well there is a balance between the different modes of transport. The key thing is to have a reliable service and to run that. One of the challenges is that people see a bus as a bus, which is a long vehicle, and with minibuses, which have a lower operating cost, you do not necessarily need to have so many empty seats. They are downsizing things to provide a van service, as they have in the United States.

Q135 Will Quince: I want to pick up Mrs Glindon's point. Do you not think that a pick-up and drop-off charge in relation to taxis and private cars is in effect just a tax on the passenger? Would it not make more sense to incentivise people to use public transport instead of disincentivising people from using cars and taxis? It clearly just lines the pocket of the airport. Shouldn't we be encouraging people to use public transport instead of disincentivising people? As you rightly say, often with luggage, the easiest way is to go by car with a convenient drop-in or drop-off.

Chris Chalk: Quite probably the passenger will not make that choice, depending on whether there is a charge at the forecourt. The choice will be on the reliability and ease of the mode. That comes down to frequency and everything else. If people travel that route a lot, they will get used to understanding whether they can save a pound here or there. There are a number of airports where everybody goes through a barrier and if you stay for more than a certain length of time then you have to pay. Part of that is to recognise that people will need to drop off and they do not have a choice; but if somebody is going to be stopping and meeting somebody, you want to capture that as a parking space.

Q136 Will Quince: That is an interesting question because more and more do seem to be charging just to drop off. Regardless of how long you stay, you go through a barrier. From what I have just picked up from what you are saying, it is not necessarily about behavioural change at all; it is just a cash cow for the airport.

Chris Chalk: It depends if everybody pays. Some airports are regulated, so if the fee is coming in through that part it is saving on charges elsewhere.

Grant Brooker: The difficulty always is that it needs to be something that is predictable and reliable. The reliability is the difficult part for a lot of passengers. They can move luggage and their family very easily with a car. It is quite hard to say they should move those things to public transport, where you need a car or a taxi to get you to a public transport node. It is a complex dynamic and that is why people use it. It is definitely very expensive. All collection at the airport involves paying. They do not run a regular pick-up point where people can wait in a queue. They will force everyone to park. You are right that you could take that money, rather than the airport collecting the money in parking charges. If there was some way of diverting that as a pure incentive for a subsidised ticket payment, that would be a fantastic move, but you have to provide something that is effective for people to deal with and it will respond to the times of arrival. Remember that public transport works probably at its worst at some key times for the airports, which is the really early morning drive and the late evening.

Q137 Will Quince: In effect you would like to see airport operators take all the money that they make from those pick-ups and drop-offs and invest that in subsidising public transport options.

Grant Brooker: I think that is what I am saying. There is a contract that the airports have with the airlines which is all based on time and service standards that they have to provide, or people will not come to the airports. They charge the airlines a great deal of money for bringing their planes there, but they have to process passengers within time constraints to make that work. That is their functional role. On the other side—the passengers coming to and leaving the airport—it is not something with which they engage overmuch. Those are the areas to start to explore. It should be possible to set a service standard. Having cleared immigration and customs, there should be a service standard time in which you should be able to reach a public transport node, with a guaranteed time that would take you to a city centre. That would be a great thing. It would be like a service standard. If you explored that from each of the airports, you would start to know what variation you have in service standards, whereas they have fairly constant service standards for how they are dealing with passengers going in the other direction. They really know how they process them.

They know how long it will take them to transfer and how long it will take them to reach their gates and planes with their bags. All of that is very driven. It is almost like you cross that line and you are on your own. I think it would be very good to explore, or at least investigate, how you might do that in different areas and what the standards are, and what people can drive.

Q138 Graham Stringer: I want to go back to what you said before about experiments with remote checking-in facilities. Where are they and why did they go wrong, or why didn't they work?

Chris Chalk: In-town check-in works very well in Hong Kong because most of the departing flights, certainly to Europe, leave late at night. People check out of their hotels in the morning, drop their bags and go about their business or whatever, and go to the airport in the evening. So they do not have bags with them. The challenge, say, in London with the Paddington and Gatwick drop-offs was that the time required to take that bag on the train down to Gatwick or Heathrow was longer than if you carried it on yourself. It meant that the pick-up worth of that was not as effective and did not offer anything in particular to the passenger. They did not perceive a benefit. They could perceive a benefit, saying, "I have checked in and therefore I am going to get on to the flight," but now people know that until you have got through security and you have got to the gate you are not secure in getting on to that flight. As Grant said, you have other processes in the airport that can slow things down. It is the certainty of getting on the flight and where you are in that process. With modern technology and people's iPhones or whatever, there is the ability coming up to know where you are in that timeframe. Are you on time, late or early? When you are driving a car, you can see how long it is going to take to get from A to B. We can see that technology is going to be coming in fairly quickly whereby you can see where you are on your journey for your route.

Q139 Graham Stringer: Have there been any trials or experiments in the regions for remote check-in?

Chris Chalk: No.

Grant Brooker: I am not aware of that.

Q140 Graham Stringer: Has state aid been a benefit or a disincentive in getting better surface access—a benefit inasmuch as it can be a planning condition to ask a privately owned airport to fund surface access to an airport? Or has it been a disincentive and a competitive disadvantage because a lot of competitor airports on the continent are publicly owned and therefore there are no problems with state aid rules?

Grant Brooker: Overseas it is generally a huge advantage that everything is planned in a single source. The primary owner of an airport still tends to be the Government. Therefore, everything that can be done in terms of transportation connections is perceived to be of a total benefit rather than the state somehow getting behind private enterprise. It is complicated once you have broken that link. I can see the complication, but, again,

airports are good payers into the local economies. They pay good money to those things and I guess these things still have to be partnerships. The scope of investment is huge, and it is better—and certainly easier—if it is seen as being one connected enterprise.

Q141 Graham Stringer: I do not want to put words into your mouth, but would you say that the fact you have to go through the state aid rules if you are a privately owned airport is a barrier or a disincentive to the funding of surface access?

Grant Brooker: It must be harder.

Chris Chalk: Yes.

Q142 Huw Merriman: You mentioned at the start, Mr Brooker, that when you are designing a new airport it is easier to build in the public transport provision. Where the Government are building a new public transport provision, do you think it adequately covers the existing airport network—take HS2 as an example—and properly links up the opportunities on its way?

Grant Brooker: It is a great point. All new public transport initiatives should look at tying nodes together. Where you have air transportation nodes or bus nodes, you should be trying to pull them together. It is a really important consideration. It is a tragedy if things are missed and surfaces that could connect and tie nodes together don't. With all opportunities, particularly when the investment is already agreed or things are going to happen, it should, if possible, be stretched to connect on spurs or direct points to main nodes. It just makes so much more sense. Part of our role as a nation is that we must surely be interested in connecting all of our transportation together. We are quite a small country, and if we can tie these points together using every particular means it will get better.

Q143 Chair: Who is the “we”? Is this the Government?

Grant Brooker: It is the Government. You should be doing this. Part of Government's mandate is looking at how they can make any infrastructure that we are building serve the people better and serve to connect these other nodes. Almost accidentally, we have seen with low-cost airports that, because people won't pay for trains, the buses start to use them; they then start to become nodes for bus transportation. You can get to almost any point from there and then people suddenly think, “Actually, we have a coach node here, so if I can get to that place I can get almost anywhere else.” It is how an airport hub works. They become, accidentally, transport nodes. If any of your other transport planning took advantage of that and connected in a rail link as well, you suddenly have something that is quite powerful, almost accidentally.

Q144 Huw Merriman: Using HS2 as an example again, and perhaps East Midlands airport, do you have a view on how that is looking, bearing in mind what you have just said positively about—

Chris Chalk: On these things you need to look at what the value of the proposition is. If you spend a lot of money on infrastructure, how many people are really going to use that

and are you going to get value from that or not? On all high-speed services, the more times they stop, the slower the service is obviously, but also it takes up capacity. The most efficient trains are the ones that just go from end to end and do not stop. You can get a higher capacity on that route. That quite often serves the big metropolises but it does not necessarily serve the locations en route. It is a question of where you stop and how you get to that stop.

If you think of Luton, they have a very good rail service but there is no train that goes into the airport. They have quite a good bus service that makes that journey. People say that there should be a proper spur and everything else, but what is the real gain on that? You are in a bigger bus which is on a steel rod and on time. What does that last bit of rail look like? There are semantics on these elements, but you have to look at what the value is and how many people are going to use that part.

Q145 Chair: Mr Chalk, are you confident about the predictions made by Government, Network Rail and Highways England on the need for surface access?

Chris Chalk: While we have a national infrastructure plan, we do not have a national transport plan. With the Airports Commission having come to a conclusion, quite what is going to happen around London is difficult to predict, but aviation is a part of the UK transport plan. It provides a low-cost service for many people.

Q146 Chair: But are you confident in the predictions that are being made on the surface access needs for airports, including the south-east but not only the south-east? Are you confident in the models that are used by Government, Network Rail and Highways England, or are they all different models? What is your assessment of those?

Chris Chalk: I cannot comment on the modelling myself.

Q147 Chair: You cannot comment on any of them?

Chris Chalk: I cannot comment on the accuracy of the models that they have used.

Q148 Chair: But do you have confidence when you hear predictions being made?

Chris Chalk: I think there is a general confidence in how demand is developed. There are going to be some ups and downs in the national demand, which is used for aviation, but generally the predictions have been pretty reliable. A lot of surveys and research have been done. The UK does more research on this than any other country in the world.

Q149 Chair: When Network Rail tell us that an expanded airport capacity in the south-east will not be a “game changer” for them, would you accept that statement?

Chris Chalk: As far as the volume of air passengers that would travel on rail is concerned, it is a relatively small number compared with the background traffic.

Q150 Chair: So do you accept that statement that it is not a game changer?

Chris Chalk: It is not a game changer.

Q151 Chair: It is not, you say.

Chris Chalk: It will not make a huge difference to the total number of passengers that are going to go by rail.

Q152 Chair: Are you telling me that you are accepting Network Rail's statement?

Chris Chalk: I am not familiar with the background behind that statement. It is difficult for me. I am not trying to avoid the question; I am just not familiar with the background behind the statement that they make.

Q153 Chair: Network Rail have told us that in their view an increased capacity in the south-east would not be a game changer for them in relation to network capacity required above what is already agreed. Does that sound right to you?

Chris Chalk: If for some reason somebody decides to go to a Gatwick environment, I would have thought that would be quite difficult to support.

Q154 Mary Glendon: We have talked a lot about business passengers. Do you think there is sufficient attention paid to surface freight in the planning of airport access?

Chris Chalk: The largest volume of freight goes through Heathrow; that does 90% of the freight. That is almost entirely through passenger aircraft. They carry about 1.5 million tonnes a year. To put that in context, the busiest freight airport is Hong Kong and they do 4 million tonnes a year. That is a very important part of our import-export trade.

The second busiest is East Midlands. That is busy because of its location on to the road network. With freight, as soon as you get it on to a truck you can take it a very long way. It is rather like for maritime; you go into a big port, put it on a truck and then you can truck it across Europe. East Midlands is an important airport for its connectivity for freight, its central location and also its long operating hours. Freight, and in particular mail, wants to be operating at times so that it can get the deliveries in for the next day. Having a location where you can operate late at night without annoying people is important for freight. If you are operating at night for freight, clearly the demand on the roads is less at that time. For the likes of Heathrow, which is a daytime operation, you will be taking that freight out on to the roads during the day.

Q155 Mary Glendon: Are there good international examples that we could use to improve or increase freight access?

Chris Chalk: Quite a lot of airports in their cargo area will have freight that is using the airport as a ground-to-ground connector. Rather like bussing, it is the same with freight;

there will be people who will be bringing things into some of those warehouses and going out on another truck. There will be some components coming in by air as a part of what makes it work. Freight is important and air freight is important because it is just-in-time. Time matters for air freight, although it does not necessarily matter in quite the same manner for what comes across in the channel tunnel. They need to have good access. Clearly what you do not want is for trucks to be stopped in the rush hour.

Q156 Mary Glendon: Should this be taken into account in any expansion of any airport? Some of them are more particularly involved in freight, but is it a big issue to include in the expansion plans?

Chris Chalk: It tends not to be. The volume of movements is quite small. Given that a lot of other things go in and out of airports just to serve the passengers, such as the catering and everything else, although the actual freight element of 1.5 million tonnes may sound quite a lot, if you divide it by 365 it starts to dilute down in numbers.

Q157 Martin Vickers: Mr Chalk, if I understood you correctly, a few minutes ago you mentioned that this country did not have a national transport plan. That is probably true, but to my knowledge Governments have been talking about having a national transport plan at least since the 1960s. What comparable countries do have a successful transport plan?

Grant Brooker: Quite a lot of countries have a transport plan.

Q158 Martin Vickers: Successful ones?

Grant Brooker: Yes.

Q159 Chair: Can you name them for us?

Grant Brooker: Most other countries have successful transport plans. We are in a difficult place because we don't know where our hub should be. There seems to be quite a bit of debate about whether we should have one. If we were serious, we would know where our hub was and we would have a really clear and coherent strategy about how we would develop that. If you were talking about airports, that would be the start of a transport plan, and we should know that.

Q160 Chair: What about other airports apart from—

Grant Brooker: I would say that you have to start with the international and your place globally because that is something that is critical.

Q161 Chair: There is one at the moment. Let us start where we are. What should the national transport plan be doing in relation to surface access to airports?

Grant Brooker: Absolutely supporting it and absolutely supporting that hub.

Q162 Chair: What about other airports?

Chris Chalk: A national transport plan looks at all modes and how they all contribute to the movement of people around the country and outside the country. When you have a number of what would be seen as competing modes of rail, road and air, it is about what priorities should be given to each of those for the different needs of the different sorts of passengers who are going to be using them.

Q163 Martin Vickers: A national transport plan would have to be based on the predictions of the various agencies involved. You say that you accepted the air predictions for air travel and so on, but you cast doubt on the Highways Agency, Network Rail and so on.

Chris Chalk: The other element is that for many years it has not been able to work with predict and provide, certainly for the railways. If it was, we would end up with wider and wider roads and a less and less pleasant place for people to live. There has to be a balance on what our different modes can achieve so that we can get the appropriate amount of mobility. We live with a finite amount of asset. The M25 and the M1 can only be so wide.

Q164 Martin Vickers: But a national transport plan that was made 20 years ago would not have anticipated the massive growth in rail travel, for example. Which countries have made correct estimates and given a good example?

Chris Chalk: I cannot be sure but I know that Norway has a very efficient plan. Asia has historically had five-year plans and this is part of the way they work.

Grant Brooker: In France, they have very clear attitudes as to how they want their rail network to support their air network and bring those parts together. They do that very successfully. They make sure that they connect. It needs overarching guidance, I would have thought, because some passenger types are probably more lucrative than others and bring with them fewer issues than others. Someone needs to steer all the parts of the policy together to make sure that everybody is supported. You might decide as a rail carrier that you are not interested in air passengers because they are quite tricky. They bring with them lots of things and they make your trains go slow; maybe it is easier to avoid them. Someone has to steer it quite hard to say that these things have to join up and that there are no choices. You have to make those things cross-support even if, economically, they may not be the passengers that you are chasing. I do not know because I am not a rail person, but it would seem to me that there are other people that you could sell rail tickets to. It needs someone to drive these things together to make sure that they do all support one another.

Q165 Chair: Where should we be looking to find a better way of ensuring a good passenger experience in getting to and from airports? Is it France, which you have just mentioned? Is that a better way of doing it?

Grant Brooker: They look at something that is coherent. In south-east Asia, from Hong Kong to Singapore, they are very clear and they understand that people value that experience. The airports themselves know how important that passenger experience is. They want it to be completely joined up and they are offering people a completely connected solution. That is very important. That is a normal expectation of a world-class facility.

Q166 Graham Stringer: They have a slightly different relationship with democracy though, don't they?

Grant Brooker: But they are not working against the people.

Q167 Graham Stringer: They are not always working with their consent either; neither with the previous Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and certainly not in Hong Kong. They are producing an efficient transport system, I will grant you that.

Grant Brooker: I would take that outside the political. You are right that they have powers to be able to make decisions and make things happen, but I do not see that as being something that is driven by a cruel or oppressive state. It is being driven in a very positive way because the people they are attracting and supporting are not just their local citizens. They are positioning themselves in a very competitive area where each of the countries is seeking to be the hub and the focus of the travel and business in that area. They see it as a really important part and they always want to be a step ahead of the opposition in terms of the total service and experience that they are offering. From the moment you arrive you feel that everything works, and they see that as a really important national message. You communicate indirectly with people. They think well of you if all the processes, systems and experience work and join up. If you do not provide that experience for people who are arriving in your country, they do not think so well of you. It is your front door. Looking at it from an airport situation, it is the way it is seen and that is why it is so important to get it right. If you subvert things to it and drive those things, it is good and it is good for all of us too.

Both of us work internationally and it is part of our world. We are selling services globally. It is very important that people who are doing business with us enjoy coming here and having that experience too. We are travelling a great deal and we encourage people to come here to see us. It is great if we present a really positive front door because it should be part of our national identity and a matter of national pride for us. We take that side really seriously. If you can make these things join up and connect, it is the inferred extra benefits that are the great things.

Q168 Chair: So you see this as being a global player. Is that how you are looking at it?

Grant Brooker: For us, yes. We are global players and you have to make these decisions on a global and international basis. We have a fantastic geographic advantage because we are just an hour closer to the Americas and also an hour further away from south-east Asia. That is fantastic because it means that planes flying from south-east Asia to here very late

at night can arrive at almost a sensible time in the morning and would take in the traffic an hour earlier. It is a wonderful advantage and we should really exploit it.

Chris Chalk: Perhaps people do not recognise that terminal 5 has been voted the best airport terminal in the world for the last four years by everybody in the world. We tend to play down how good our infrastructure is, while in Asia they play up their infrastructure. They have very good infrastructure and there is a national pride in how efficient it is. That is really important to them because there is always a choice.

Chair: Thank you very much. You have been very helpful.