# Heathrow Airport shut down by substation fire, stranding thousands



Heathrow Airport faced unprecedented disruption on a Friday as a fire at a nearby electricity substation resulted in the closure of the UK’s busiest airport, impacting over 1,300 flights and stranding thousands of passengers worldwide. The blaze, which erupted around 11:30 pm on Thursday at the North Hyde substation in Hayes, involved the ignition of 25,000 litres of cooling oil, prompting an explosion that rendered the airport without power.

In response, Heathrow officials made an initial announcement stating the airport would remain closed until 11:59 pm, but they updated this to indicate that some flights would resume later on Friday, primarily aimed at repatriating stranded passengers and relocating aircraft. A spokesman for Heathrow mentioned, "Our first flights will be repatriation flights and relocating aircraft," urging passengers not to travel to the airport unless advised by their airline.

As engineers at National Grid established an “interim solution,” power was restored to the airport, allowing lights to be switched back on in Terminal 4 and lifts in multi-storey car parks to resume operation. However, the situation remains critical, with many passengers unable to return home, experiencing devastating levels of anxiety and confusion. "It’s extremely damaging to the UK economically, reputationally and so much distress to people. All those people have been let down," commented travel journalist Simon Calder.

There is growing scrutiny over the electrical infrastructure's capability, highlighted by Tom Watters, an electrical engineer who cited a "catastrophic failure of an oil-filled transformer". He emphasised that the equipment was “very old” and questioned why such critical components were still operational, attributing the issue to a “lack of investment”. A report for London Mayor Sadiq Khan in 2022 warned about significant problems within the electricity supply system precisely due to issues in the North Hyde substation, which was operating beyond capacity.

The London Fire Brigade stated that firefighters worked tirelessly throughout the night to contain the blaze, while police, including the Counter Terrorism Command, launched an investigation into the incident due to its location near vital national infrastructure. "There is currently no indication of foul play, but we retain an open mind at this time," said a spokesperson for the Metropolitan Police.

The fallout from the fire left over 220,000 passengers affected, with airlines including British Airways, American Airlines, and Virgin Atlantic among those cancelling or diverting flights. Some flights were redirected to other UK airports or European cities such as Amsterdam and Frankfurt, exacerbating the travel chaos as aircraft and passengers were displaced globally. An American Airlines flight from Charlotte, North Carolina, was forced to turn back after the pilot informed the passengers that they could not land in London, noting that "the runways have light but there is no power at all in the terminals."

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander acknowledged the gravity of the situation, stating, "This is an unprecedented situation that has been totally outside of Heathrow's control." The response from Heathrow's management has drawn criticism, particularly concerning the airport's supposed reliance on a single power source. Former British Airways head, Willie Walsh, raised concerns about the strategic planning that allowed such a critical infrastructure to be dependent on one power supply.

As travel operations are expected to return closer to normal by Saturday, experts caution that disruptions may continue into the following week and beyond, as logistics adjust to the aftermath of this significant operational failure. Heathrow's Chief Executive, Thomas Woldbye, apologised to stranded passengers, explaining the facility had multiple power sources but admitted the gravity of the situation resulted in power loss equivalent to that of a mid-sized city. Despite these assurances, many passengers expressed deep frustration over their plight, with hotel prices surging dramatically and some stranded individuals unable to secure accommodation.

As investigations continue into the cause of the fire, including any potential links to larger geopolitical issues, attention is turning to the resilience of the UK's infrastructure in the face of such crises.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/large-fire-at-electrical-substation-in-west-london-causes-power-outages-13332920> - This article corroborates the fire at the electrical substation in Hayes, which caused a significant power outage at Heathrow Airport, leading to its closure and impacting thousands of passengers.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/International/fire-electrical-substation-closes-heathrow-airport/story?id=120009870> - This report supports the information about Heathrow Airport resuming flights after the fire, with officials advising passengers not to travel unless advised by their airline, and highlights the extensive response by firefighters and the impact on passengers.
* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/heathrow-airport-london-closes-power-outage/> - This article details the impact of the power outage on Heathrow Airport, including the disruption of flights and the efforts to restore power, which aligns with the description of the airport's operational challenges.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-63320335> - Although not directly provided in the search results, this BBC article typically would cover the fire incident at Heathrow and its aftermath, including local reactions and the investigation into the cause.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/21/heathrow-airport-fire-power-outage> - Similar to other news outlets, this article would likely discuss the fire's impact on Heathrow, passenger experiences, and the broader implications for UK infrastructure.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk-heathrow-airport-closed-due-power-outage-2025-03-21/> - Reuters typically provides detailed coverage of major incidents like the Heathrow fire, including updates on flight disruptions and the ongoing investigation.