# Heathrow's operational chaos following fire raises questions over leadership



Heathrow Airport faced significant operational disruption following a fire incident that forced the closure of the major hub on Friday, impacting approximately 300,000 passengers. The fire, which broke out late Thursday night, affected the airport's main electricity substation, leading to the cancellation or delay of over 1,300 flights.

Chief Executive Thomas Woldbye, who took the helm of Heathrow only in October 2023, has come under scrutiny after it was revealed that he delegated the decision to shut down the airport to his deputy, Javier Echave, during the crisis. Mr Woldbye reportedly chose to go to bed while the fire ravaged the facility, a decision that has prompted calls for his resignation. Critics have pointed to his substantial salary of £3.2 million last year, including a £2.2 million bonus, questioning the accountability of leadership during such critical events.

The incident raised questions about the airport's preparedness for emergencies. Government ministers and Heathrow officials had been alerted a decade ago regarding vulnerabilities in the airport's power supply, which was identified as a "key weakness." The fire incident serves as a stark reminder of these warnings, as the airport struggled to manage the fallout from the situation.

Woldbye was attending an event in central London when the power outage first occurred. After the decision was made shortly after midnight to close the airport, Woldbye’s senior management team was divided into two "gold commands" to address the unfolding crisis. However, the CEO himself chose not to stay awake to oversee operations, only returning to work via telephone around 7.30 am the following morning and arriving at the office by 9 am.

Expressing pride in the response of Heathrow's staff during the crisis, Woldbye faces significant backlash from public figures. Reform MP Richard Tice has labelled the CEO as "idle" and "incompetent," describing him as "a failure, not a leader." Tice has called for Woldbye’s removal from his position, stating, "He won’t resign - so the board should fire him.”

Lord Toby Harris, chairman of the National Preparedness Commission, echoed concerns regarding the airport's handling of the situation, calling the shutdown an "enormous failure." He emphasised that it appeared Heathrow was not adequately prepared for such an emergency, contributing to the chaos that ensued.

As operations resume, the long-term implications for Heathrow's management and crisis response protocols are scrutinised, marking a challenging chapter for Europe's busiest airport.

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

## References

* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/03/21/heathrow-airport-closed-latest-news-fire-power-outage/> - This URL supports the claim that Heathrow Airport was closed due to a fire at an electrical substation, causing a significant power outage and impacting over 16,300 homes. It also details the disruption faced by passengers and the shutdown of the airport.
* <https://www.caa.co.uk/newsroom/news/guidance-to-consumers-impacted-by-heathrow-airport-incident-21-march-2025/> - This URL corroborates the information about the impact on passengers and the guidance provided by the Civil Aviation Authority regarding travel disruptions and passenger rights during the Heathrow closure.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is mentioned as the source of the article but does not provide specific corroboration without access to the article itself. However, it is the primary source for claims about Tomas Woldbye's leadership during the incident.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heathrow_Airport> - This URL generally provides background information about Heathrow Airport, including its status as Europe's busiest airport, which is relevant to understanding the scale of disruptions caused by the fire.
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/heathrow-airport-fire-chiefs-demand-answers-after-power-outage-tk55bcmzd> - This URL would likely provide additional details on the crisis response and accountability questions raised during the incident, particularly concerning Thomas Woldbye's actions.