# UK ministers launch investigation into Heathrow Airport substation fire disruption



Ministers in the UK have initiated an urgent investigation into a significant substation fire that led to the closure of Heathrow Airport for 15 hours on Friday, impacting the travel plans of approximately 300,000 passengers. The fire broke out at a high-voltage substation in Hayes, west London, causing more than 1,300 flights to be grounded, with the airport typically managing around 600 flights on a typical Saturday.

Heathrow resumed operations on Saturday but still faced challenges, resulting in over 100 flight cancellations, including routes to New York and those arriving from Dubai. Extra airport staff were mobilised to assist an additional influx of 10,000 passengers navigating through Heathrow.

Initial investigations into the fire were led by counter-terrorism officers; however, authorities have since indicated that the cause is not suspected to be linked to any criminal activity. The London Fire Brigade has taken over the investigation, focusing on the electrical distribution equipment involved in the blaze. Deputy commissioner Jonathan Smith remarked on the complexity of the incident, stating, “The fire involved a transformer comprising 25,000 litres of its cooling oil fully alight,” which created significant hazards due to the live high voltage apparatus.

Toby Harris, a Labour MP and leader of the National Preparedness Commission, labelled the incident "a huge embarrassment" for the country, pointing to the vulnerability displayed by such a substantial disruption stemming from a fire in a single location. Jason Bona, owner of supply chain firm PS Forwarding, echoed this sentiment on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, saying that the incident has made Heathrow a "laughing stock" in the global freight community.

Responding to the incident, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has ordered a thorough examination of the outage by the National Energy System Operator (Neso) in conjunction with regulator Ofgem. The investigation aims to provide a detailed understanding of the failure's cause and derive lessons for future energy resilience across national infrastructure. Neso is expected to submit its initial findings in six weeks.

Thomas Woldbye, chief executive of Heathrow, expressed his commitment to fully support the investigation efforts and pledged to work closely with all stakeholders to bolster the airport's resilience.

In addition to airport disruptions, rail travel to and from Heathrow is set to experience challenges, with the Heathrow Express announcing a reduced service due to planned upgrade work, particularly on the morning of Sunday, 23 March.

While British Airways has indicated that about 85% of its schedule would proceed on Saturday, Chief Executive Sean Doyle warned of significant ramifications for all customers due to the disruptions. In contrast, Virgin Atlantic reported planning for a near-full schedule, with only limited cancellations, and Air India announced the resumption of flights to and from Heathrow.

As the situation unfolded, travellers described their experiences as "nightmarish" while others recognised the organisational efforts made by the airport and airlines alike. Tim Kolb, a holidaymaker from Dallas, Texas, noted, “I thought I was going to be there delayed two days... it was organised well,” highlighting the multiple flights arranged shortly after the fire was contained.

The repercussions of the incident extend beyond immediate traveller disruption, posing a financial threat to the travel industry that could reach tens of millions of pounds, amid ongoing debates on liability for such operational breakdowns. Mr Woldbye commented on the airport’s liability procedures, stating, "We don't have liabilities in place for incidents like this,” as the investigation continues into what officials characterise as a critical failure in infrastructure resilience.

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

## References

* <https://www.ice.org.uk/news-views-insights/inside-infrastructure/heathrow-airport-electrical-substation-fire-faqs> - This URL provides detailed FAQs about the Heathrow Airport substation fire, including how the fire affected operations and the role of substations in electrical distribution.
* <https://www.caa.co.uk/newsroom/news/guidance-to-consumers-impacted-by-heathrow-airport-incident-21-march-2025/> - This link from the UK Civil Aviation Authority offers guidance for consumers affected by the Heathrow Airport incident, detailing passenger rights and airline responsibilities during such disruptions.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the primary source article discussing the substation fire at Heathrow Airport and its impact on passengers and the travel industry.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heathrow_Airport> - This Wikipedia page provides general information about Heathrow Airport, including its operational capacity and past incidents.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-grid> - This UK government webpage describes the role of the National Grid in managing and maintaining the country's electrical infrastructure, relevant to the substation fire incident.