# Heathrow inquiry reveals CEO’s phone on silent during major power outage



The recent closure of Heathrow Airport due to a power outage has raised considerable concern over the resilience of the airport's infrastructure and its management protocols. An inquiry into the incident, conducted by Ruth Kelly, a former transport secretary, revealed that CEO Thomas Woldbye was unreachable during a critical phase of the disruption because his phone was on silent. The power outage, which stemmed from a fire at a nearby electrical substation, led to the grounding of flights until the evening of 21 March, affecting a staggering 270,000 passengers.

As detailed in the inquiry, senior staff members made the difficult decision to suspend operations shortly after the incident occurred. Despite attempts to alert Woldbye—including alerts sent to his mobile at 00:21 and 01:52—he remained unaware of the situation until approximately 06:45 on the following morning. The review indicated that a secondary method of communication is needed to ensure that key personnel can be reached swiftly in the event of emergencies. Lord Deighton, chairman of the airport, stated that the inquiry had produced clear recommendations for future management improvements.

The review went on to commend the airport's immediate response to the power failure. It affirmed that the decision to halt operations was not only appropriate but essential for ensuring the safety and security of passengers and staff alike. Kelly noted, "The evidence confirms that Heathrow made the right decisions in exceptionally difficult circumstances.” The inquiry, however, also pointed out the airport's reliance on previous assessments concerning its power supply, which had deemed the situation a "low likelihood event." This has sparked scrutiny about whether more stringent precautions could have mitigated the impact of the outage.

The closure led to the cancellation or diversion of over 1,400 flights—significant disruptions that cost airlines millions and stranded countless travellers. Many were advised not to travel to the airport and instead to contact their airlines for further information. Despite the airport resuming operations the next day, dissatisfaction lingered, particularly regarding the lengthy shutdown that followed the restoration of power, which was reportedly restored seven hours before flights recommenced.

Furthermore, the UK Transport Committee has launched an investigation into Heathrow’s response, seeking to understand whether alternative strategies could have minimised the disruption. They have heard evidence from key stakeholders, including Woldbye himself and representatives from National Grid and Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks, emphasising a collective accountability in addressing the vulnerabilities that led to the outage.

Interestingly, concerns about Heathrow's power supply vulnerabilities had been raised prior to the incident. The Heathrow Airline Operators Committee had highlighted issues relating to cable theft that affected runway lighting, prompting questions about whether the airport had sufficiently heeded these warnings. As the full report from the National Energy System Operator is set to be published later this month, stakeholders and passengers alike will be looking for definitive answers and a plan of action to prevent such events in the future.

In retrospect, this incident has emphasised the vital need for robust contingency planning in the aviation sector, where operational disruptions can resonate far beyond immediate inconveniences for travellers. Heathrow's management has stated its intent to implement the recommendations from the inquiry, aiming to fortify its infrastructure and improve communication protocols moving forward.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62n0y3nepzo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62n0y3nepzo), [[4]](https://www.the-independent.com/travel/news-and-advice/heathrow-airport-power-outage-timeline-flights-cause-b2747035.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62n0y3nepzo), [[3]](https://www.cntraveller.com/article/heathrow-airport-closed-after-power-outage), [[5]](https://airportindustry-news.com/heathrow-power-outage-sparks-scrutiny-over-resilience-and-response/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/heathrow-warned-power-outage-closure-advance-b1220251.html), [[7]](https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/20/travel/london-heathrow-airport-shut-intl-hnk/index.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62n0y3nepzo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62n0y3nepzo> - An inquiry into Heathrow Airport's closure due to a power outage revealed that CEO Thomas Woldbye was unreachable during the incident. Attempts to contact him failed as his phone was on silent. The closure, caused by a fire at a nearby electrical substation, grounded flights until 18:00 GMT on 21 March, affecting 270,000 journeys. The review recommended a secondary contact method for critical incidents.
3. <https://www.cntraveller.com/article/heathrow-airport-closed-after-power-outage> - Heathrow Airport reopened on 22 March after a 24-hour closure caused by a significant power outage from a nearby substation fire. The closure on 21 March led to major travel disruptions, with hundreds of flights grounded or diverted. Passengers were advised not to travel to the airport and to contact their airlines for further information.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/travel/news-and-advice/heathrow-airport-power-outage-timeline-flights-cause-b2747035.html> - A detailed timeline of Heathrow Airport's power outage on 21 March 2025, caused by a fire at a nearby substation, is provided. The incident led to the cancellation or diversion of over 1,400 flights, affecting more than 200,000 passengers. The timeline includes key events and decisions made during the crisis.
5. <https://airportindustry-news.com/heathrow-power-outage-sparks-scrutiny-over-resilience-and-response/> - The UK Transport Committee examined Heathrow Airport's response to the 21 March power outage, which led to significant disruptions. The committee assessed whether Heathrow's response was adequate and if alternative approaches could have minimised disruption. Key witnesses included Heathrow's CEO Thomas Woldbye and representatives from National Grid and Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/heathrow-warned-power-outage-closure-advance-b1220251.html> - Heathrow Airport was warned about its power supply vulnerabilities days before the 21 March outage that led to a near-total closure. Concerns were raised by the Heathrow Airline Operators Committee, highlighting incidents of cable theft affecting runway lights. Despite these warnings, the airport faced significant disruptions due to the power failure.
7. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/20/travel/london-heathrow-airport-shut-intl-hnk/index.html> - Heathrow Airport announced a complete shutdown on 20 March 2025 due to a significant power outage caused by a fire at a nearby electrical substation. The closure affected hundreds of thousands of travellers, with numerous flights cancelled or diverted. Authorities responded with emergency measures, including evacuations and setting up a 200-meter cordon around the affected area.