

Operating to London

THE PROS AND CONS FOR INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

The long-term political and economic impact of Brexit has undoubtedly been a major talking point in recent months and has created much uncertainty, both in the UK and abroad. However, in aviation terms, everything continues as normal in the UK. There are no new alerts, regulations, or conditions affecting international aircraft operations. The real issue for international operators planning missions to London is choosing the right station to suit their unique needs. Although there are many options, it's vital to consider the pluses and minuses of each to ensure you get the optimal speed, quality, and cost-efficiency you require.

Here are some key points to assist operators in choosing the best airport of entry in the London area.



Heathrow

LHR/EGLL

- Non-scheduled operations are generally difficult to schedule due to the ongoing lack of slots available at Heathrow.
- FBO and lounge facilities at LHR are provided by the airport's Royal Suite.
- The Royal Suite has two private lounges for passenger use and as a waiting area for embassy staff, drivers, etc.
- There is only one parking stand outside the Royal Suite and aircraft are typically only permitted to occupy this stand for one hour. Wide body aircraft are particularly affected by this limitation as the wingspan can potentially interfere with aircraft traffic using the adjacent taxiway.
- Crew clear security via a separate gate and not at the Royal Suite, although this is normally efficient.
- There are many catering options at LHR that meet the needs of every scale of budget and expectation.
- If you can secure parking at LHR (usually as difficult to obtain as landing slots) then prices are slightly cheaper than STN.
- There are plenty of accommodation options in the immediate airport area.

Main plus point of LHR: Proximity to London city over most other London area airports.

Main negative of LHR: It is one of the busiest airports in the world; any time saved in driving to and from the airport is often lost in holding patterns when landing or long queues for take-off (provided you can secure a slot in or out of Heathrow).

London Stansted

STN/EGSS

- The north apron at STN is better known as the general aviation side of Stansted airport.
- There are several excellent FBOs at this location, all of them specialized in assisting non-scheduled operators.
- They can also assist with obtaining night slots and parking confirmations.
- Most have excellent lounge facilities within walking distance of the aircraft apron.
- If you provide Customs and Immigration related documents and data in advance, the arrival and departure process will be far more streamlined and efficient.
- There are no hydrant fuel stands on the north apron but there are plenty of fuel trucks available so fuel uplift efficiency is certain.

- Many FBOs at STN can also handle wide body aircraft and have their own GSE and suitably trained manpower to assist and support.
- Fire Category upgrade is a consideration at STN. It is CAT7 as standard but upgrades are provided for a fee with sufficient notice.
- There are ample options for catering, and some LHR-based catering companies have ramp access at STN.
- Transportation options of excellent quality (without being overpriced) are available for crew.
- For an extra 20-30 minutes' drive from London city in comparison with Heathrow, Stansted offers the flexibility and dedicated, high quality service that many VIP, government, and business jet operators require making it an excellent and preferred choice for many charter operators.
- Parking fees are probably the only negative point at STN. They are extremely expensive and the best value option is to park on the FBO apron. However, due to ongoing arrivals, departures and towing of other aircraft, including helicopters, often aircraft staying a significant length of time or operating anything bigger than a Global 5000 end up on a remote stand.
- Accommodation options in the airport area are limited and fewer still are good in terms of quality and comfort. Cambridge is approximately 35 minutes' drive from Stansted and offers more hotel options as well as being a beautiful city to visit.
- Hangar space is also potentially available at most STN facilities.

Main plus point of STN: Dedicated FBOs that offer excellent services for non-scheduled operators.

Main negative of STN: Stansted Airport Authority parking fees.

Farnborough

FAB/EGLF

- Farnborough is a small airport dedicated to general aviation and is a home base for several business aircraft operators and aircraft management companies.
- There is currently only one handling agent / FBO at Farnborough but the quality and costs are not exploited. Their only significant limitation in terms of aircraft handling capabilities is that all baggage/cargo must be bulk-loaded. They do not have ground service equipment to deal with baggage bins and containers; everything is managed via mobile baggage conveyor belt.
- The airport is essentially a daylight hours only airport, more for curfew reasons than actual operational limitations. Noise abatement procedures are strictly enforced - even running an APU at the wrong time will invite a formal reprimand.



- Surcharges are often imposed for using the airport on public holidays and weekends.
- Fuel is provided via fuel trucks and prices are generally competitive with STN and LHR. However, fuel is often quoted in GBP pence per liter so foreign exchange rates can sometimes influence the final cost.
- Hangar space is also potentially available at FAB but many of the operators based at this airport occupy the hangars.
- Parking fees are extremely reasonable in comparison with the bigger London area airports.
- Hotel options in the area are of good quality but options are few. Heathrow is about 25 minutes' drive away which is an obvious alternative, although most crew staying longer than one night usually opt to stay in London city and not locally.
- There are ample catering options and some LHR-based catering companies are permitted access at FAB.
- Transportation for crew is good quality and reasonably priced.

Main plus point of FAB: A fully dedicated GA airport with excellent facilities and quality, flexible service delivery.

Main negative of FAB: Operational limitations: take off performance needs careful review, the strictly enforced curfew hours, and the airport limited to B737 size or smaller).

Luton

LTN/EGGW

- Luton, like Stansted, has a dedicated area where all FBOs are located.
- It is a popular airport for General Aviation traffic because of its proximity to London city.
- However, LTN is extremely congested. Due to its physical location on a hill-top, there is no way to substantially expand the airport area. It is also a main hub for EasyJet.
- The handling facilities are excellent and many of the main providers of FBO and GA handling services have invested in facilities at LTN. Each of them has their own apron, with aircraft parked in zig-zag formation for optimum use of the space available.
- In terms of value for money, LTN is very competitive for handling, parking, and fuel charges.
- Accommodation options in the surrounding area are limited. Most operators choose to stay in London city especially if they are staying more than 24 hours.
- Luton offers excellent catering options.

Main plus point of LTN: Selection of FBOs available – all the main players are there.

Main negative of LTN: Airport congestion -handling requests are sometimes denied simply because of the lack of space to accommodate the aircraft.

London Biggin Hill

BQH/EGKB

- Similar to Farnborough, Biggin Hill is entirely focused on General Aviation.
- It hosts a number of business aircraft operators and aircraft management companies.
- The airport has two runways, the longest of which is 1,678m / 5505 ft. so this obviously has some limiting factors in terms of performance planning.
- The standard fire coverage at BQH is CAT3 but upgrades to CAT6 are possible with sufficient prior notice.
- The airport can accommodate ACJ and BBJ aircraft but it mainly used by operators of aircraft types such as Piaggio, Citation, Challenger, Bombardier, and Gulfstream.
- Handling and parking fees are competitive and fuel is generally fairly priced.
- Hangar space is also potentially available but it is primarily occupied by those operators that are based at BQH.
- Accommodation in the local area is in short supply. The nearest options are about 35 minutes' drive away in the Croydon area of greater London.
- Catering can be provided at the airport and it is usually possible to order from other sources and have them deliver to the aircraft after security screening.
- BQH is effectively a daylight hours only airport. It is recommended to get a clear confirmation of schedule acceptance, especially when planning early morning and/or late evening operations. Opening hours are further reduced at weekends and public holidays.

Main plus point of BQH: For short to medium range operations, BQH is another viable option in the London area for business aircraft operators.

Main negative of BQH: The journey by road can be slow. There is no highway/motorway between the airport and London city so the drive time can take at least an hour even in the absence of traffic issues).





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