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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P J KEATING MP AND
THE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND TRANSPORT THE
HON LAURIE BRERETON MP, JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE,
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, 8 DECEMBER 1994**

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PM: ...and compatibility of the operation of the airport for passengers and for residents. Now, you will be aware that this been a matter which has been around for at least 15 years, and the Government in 1989 - with the then encouragement and support, indeed pressure of the NSW Liberal Government - decided that Sydney's expansion required a second parallel runway. That runway was built, built efficiently - again, under time and under budget - and it was opened about 4 weeks or so ago. In the meantime we have had a substantial amount of disquiet about its opening and today the Minister has brought a very comprehensive package of measures, in addition to those already announced for noise abatement, to the Cabinet after having heard the concerns of the community and residents of the surrounding area of Sydney to the issues. Now, the runway, as you know, was opened about 4 weeks ago. Before that - for most of the last 20-odd years since the north-south runway was opened into Botany Bay - we have had a cross-intersection of traffic, and we have had the flight plan arrangements so arranged by air traffic controllers and the Civil Aviation Authority to accommodate that cross-traffic. It should come as no surprise to anybody that once that changed and the air traffic control system had to accommodate 2 parallel lines of traffic - or landings and take-offs to the north and south - there had to be a re-arrangement of air traffic control, and a re-arrangement of flight paths in the area.

You will also be aware that the new control tower and the new control equipment in the tower is not yet available, and it means that given the first few weeks of the opening of the airport, there has been a view on the part of air traffic control managers and operators of aircraft that

they wanted a broader spread for safety until they became accommodated to the new environment. In other words, you can't change a traffic pattern around a major airport that existed for 15 or 20 years overnight and find everybody back in line on the new runways in the new systems without a trial and error process - a transitional process. And the transitional process is the one that has basically brought a lot of residents....produced a lot of disquiet, indeed anger, amongst residents. And they are looking for solutions to ease the noise burden on them, and to be certain about where the future traffic movements will be, and how the airport will operate in terms of curfews etc.

Laurie Brereton and I understand those concerns, and today we are here to do something about them additional to that which we have already done. Now, in the statement I think you have, you will find there are a number of key changes here. One is the establishment of designated flight paths - before this we haven't had designated flight paths - we have had a deviation of about 7.8 degrees from the centre line. But in the past...in the last past month, that has been all over the place, and that has been part of the problem - they have been traversing areas they have never traversed before. These paths will apply to all jet take-offs and landings - there will be penalties for flight path violation. That is, the adherence to the new flight paths will be closely monitored and regulations introduced under the Air Navigation Act to provide a legislative basis for their effective policing, and for penalties for violation - and heavy penalties.

The third element is requirements for jet aircraft to depart from the southern end of the main north-south runway, and obtain as much height as possible over residential areas. In other words, instead of taking off to the north - when the prevailing winds are blowing - instead of taking off to the north from halfway down the runway, they will need to go right out to the end of the seaward runway - which is another couple of kilometres - and take-off from there, and then gain as much height as possible, which is less fuel efficient for them and more costly to the airlines. So they have got more time in the taxiing, and cost-inefficiencies in the gaining of altitude, but we will be requiring them to do that. And we are going on then to reaffirm the Government's policy on operational noise controls, saying that unless otherwise required on safety or weather grounds, all take-offs must be to the south of the airport - not to the north - to the south over Botany Bay. And there will be no take-offs to the north from the new runway, and the east-west runway will remain available for use when weather conditions preclude take-offs on the other parallel runways.

And there are then further decisions about noise treatment measures. What the Government has decided to do to is to accelerate the program we have already announced, but instead of it being completed over 10 years, having it completed over 3 years at a cost of around

\$60 million each year. The levy will still stay on the airline industry, but we the Commonwealth will carry the upfront costs and collect the levy later. And the insulation programs will commence immediately for schools and colleges, and we will expect that the school and college insulation program will be completed by the end of the first term of the new school year. We are particularly concerned that schools and colleges and children - who have, of course, experienced this noise in the past, but may now experience it more frequently - will find themselves much more relieved of it, and we will be having the Department of Administrative Services assisting in the early commencement of that program.

We go on to talk about Badgery's Creek, saying that we have already spent \$150 million acquiring the airport, committing a further \$120 million to a 2,900 metre runway, commence the EIS and the operations for a national highway out to there, and also a study to secure a rail corridor and on how the airport might be developed in the future.

Lastly and importantly, there will be a stringent enforcement of the curfew arrangements. The curfew regulations under the Air Navigation Act will be amended to provide for financial penalties for unauthorised operations under the curfew because we have seen, on occasions, some substantial incursions into those arrangements. Now, we have got some maps on the wall behind me - I'll point out some points to these in a minute - and then I will invite Laurie Brereton to add to my remarks, and perhaps deal with some of the points that I haven't. But I would just like to make these points to you - this decision was always taken by the Government in terms of getting the balance between social and economic imperatives right. The airport was going to be built at some time - better for the residents to have it built more on their terms than less on their terms. There were 180,000 people affected by Mascot airport noise - that is now reduced to 90,000. So that has been cut in half. Now the aim of the game is to reduce the burden of the change on that 90,000. And the other point I would like to make is that in the month that the airport has been opened, we have had most unseasonal summer winds - persistent northerly winds which are unseasonal for this time of year. And once the northerly winds go over 5 knots, for safety reasons the aircraft are required to take off to the north. This is unusual - so we have got an unusual concurrence of events. Firstly, the change pattern of air traffic movements which is a great change from the past and spreads which have come from that which in any other operational circumstances would be unlikely, prevailing northerly winds which are way, way different than the 20 year average - with many people in the industry remarking about the unseasonality of the persistent northerly winds and the take-offs to the north - and also the silly season of a state election campaign, which is bringing out the worst - absolutely the worst - in all the political players, and most particularly of course John Fahey and his ministers. And as

a consequence we have had a very large public debate and a few public meetings.

Now, before I invite Laurie Brereton to make some points, I will make a couple of points off the charts and then I will leave the discussion over to him. But let me repeat the points - these are major changes, and they make a major difference to a lot of people living in the vicinity of the airport, or certainly under the flight paths.

(discussion of maps)

LB: If I can supplement those remarks, and say the key in terms of the restriction of the flight path, is that by the time planes arrive on take-off, at the Parramatta River, the spread of planes will be restricted to .8 of 1 nautical mile, and that is about a third of the spread that was allowed under the old arrangements that is the 7.8 degree deviation on either side. So you can see, at that point, where as the Prime Minister has said, planes fully laden jumbo's and 747's will be at about 14 or 1500 feet, it will be flying in a much tighter configuration than has previously been the case. And of course, that is, that, for the first time, will be a configuration enforceable at law, in that a corporation that flies outside of those guidelines will be liable, for prosecution with a maximum penalty of up to \$25,000, and this is a significant measure introduced to make sure that we not only have tight patterns, but that we have adequate policing of them as well. I might say something about the curfew as well, because, the Prime Minister has indicated that Cabinet agreed today to a much tougher approach in respect of the curfew at Mascot Airport. The curfew at the moment of course applied between the hours of 11 at night and 6 in the morning, subject to certain classes of planes being able to fly during the night, and subject in addition to that, to some exemptions between 11 and 12 at night and 5 and 6 in the morning, and only to a total of 14 per week. We found that the exemptions have been taken up as part of the norm, in the last 12 months there were 257 dispensations granted for flights in the curfew hours and we intend to take a much tougher approach to the whole question of the curfew and it will also, for the first time, be enforceable with penalties of up to \$25,000. All told today we have got a package agreed to by Cabinet of great significance. The bringing forward of the funding amount to \$180 million being spent over three years - not ten, paid for off the budget, recouped over the ten years by the tax on the airlines. The new tight flying paths will restrict greatly the number of people affected, and indeed, the new arrangements for maximum climb in commencing take-off from the southern most end of the runway will also greatly alleviate the noise nuisance that people are experiencing at the moment. So we think that these measures combined as they are in this package will tackle the difficulties being faced by people in Sydney quite comprehensively. It is a fact that the overwhelming majority are better off at the moment, but that does not

for a moment lift the burden on those who are suffering increase noise nuisance as a result of these arrangements. But just let me say something finally about the question of safety, it needs to be remembered that one of the key benefits of this new parallel runway configuration is not just a question of extra capacity, lifting it up to approximately 85 take-offs and landings per hour, but they're take-offs and landings that are operating on the one axis, without intersecting flight patterns, and the sort of incident that we saw only in the last couple of years, we have seen a couple of them, but there was one in particular with a Thai Airlines DC10, a Qantas 747 and an Ansett A320 which could easily have ended in a very considerable disaster, will be avoided as a result of these arrangements, because simultaneous take-offs and landings, which is a less safe mode of operation will be eliminated, so that's a plus for safety. This package is a plus for the residents affected by noise nuisance in Sydney and if I can just add one final thing, and that is, I was told this morning that the operators at the airport had the airport now operating at very close to the capacity that existed prior to the new arrangements coming into place. In fact, if you take out the second two weeks of the operation of the new arrangements, we recorded this year 52 take-offs and landings per hour, that compares with the same two weeks of last year at 54 per hour, there has been a further improvement over the last two weeks and we are very confident that the airport will be operating without any reduction in its capacity and operating more safely for Christmas. So are there any questions.

J: Mr Brereton you don't appear to have sped up the building of Badgery's Creek any faster than what was announced in Working Nation?

LB: Well I think there has been a great deal of work done, on the contrary, in respect of Badgery's Creek since the Working Nation Statement advanced the timetable for Badgery's Creek construction by some 15 years. The commitment in Working Nation of \$120 million to build a full operational strip, that is a 2900 metre strip of sufficient pavement thickness to accommodate any class of jet up to a 747, was a very big dollar commitment, and it is one that has been reinforced with our subsequent commitment of some \$200 million in road works linking Badgerys Creek with the national highway system and in turn with the M5 so that there will be a link between the two airports - Kingsford Smith on the one hand and Badgerys Creek on the other end as is of course, the study that is already under way with the NSW Government on reserving a rail corridor so that we can have a public transport link. So that you genuinely in the future can have these two airports hubbing back to back. But having said that, we only got that go-ahead in May of this year and it is a great planning job to be done to make sure that Badgerys Creek is properly planned and is sequentially planned so that it can open at the earliest possible date and can be added to to meet demand over time. Now we have a task force

working at this very moment on that and it is pulling together all of the disciplines necessary to guarantee that that master planning is done and done perfectly and that we don't have a half-baked airport out there, that we have a properly designed and built airport that can meet the future airport needs of Sydney and take some of this load off Kingsford Smith, because as the Prime Minister has said, we have had an expansion in demand between February and November of this year of 50% on the peak hours of the peak days, and with that demand coming through from the airlines, it will only be a matter of months before all of the capacity of Kingsford Smith is used up again, even with the new ground radar, even with the 85 take-offs and landings per hour. So, that makes it all the more important to get the planning right, to build the road, to get the rail link reserved, to build that runway, and we're committed to doing that and then to get on and open Badgerys Creek as soon as possible.

J: The spending in the Forward Estimates set aside for Badgerys Creek into this year's budget...?

LB: Well the job this year of course is to spend a lot of money on planning, because it is fair to say that there has not been anywhere enough planning done on Badgerys Creek to date. I mean, up until April of this year, no-one had so much as thought of putting a line on a map to reserve a road corridor to link the two airports. The NSW Government had simply not accounted for an airport link, road or rail, in its planning arrangements. Now that's the sort of fundamental planning I want to make sure we get right. That's what the master planning must encompass. That and every other element of development. We don't want to have an airport that is other than the absolute optimum design and that Taskforce is working to deliver that result for us now.

J: Does this plan turn the Liberal voters of the North Shore into victims of winner take all politics as Mr Howard alleges?

PM: Well, there is only one way you can take-off from the north/south runway, which has been built for twenty years and that's north over Mr Howard's electorate, and knowing that, Mr Howard said, when asked "do you think the Government will go for a third runway?" - this is in March '89 - "I think it will, I hope they do, they should have gone for it 6 1/2 years ago. There's an overwhelming case for building it", he said, and, you know, "if they don't build it, they will have totally betrayed Sydney's interest in the interest of the tourist industry". So that's the members own views.

J: narrow it now so that it's more concentrated

LB: Can I say something on this score of Mr Howard's comments today. Mr Howard's electorate is more than 6 nautical miles from the airport. To get to it you have got to travel over three Labor electorates. The

seats of Grayndler, Sydney and Lowe, and as the Prime Minister has said, by the time they get to Mr Howard's electorate, under this arrangement, a Boeing 747 will be travelling at approximately 2250 feet as opposed to the current practice of 1400 or 1500 feet. And if any, either Mr Howard or his constituents are troubled by that, and I know that many will be, they should come down to Sydenham and Tempe and see what real noise nuisance is all about. This is not a case of doing anything other than getting the optimum efficiency, the optimum safety and minimising the noise impact, and it will be Labor electorates that bear the burden now as they always have, and will continue in the future. And breastbeating from John Howard is really the last thing that we need now.

PM: ...hypocritical breastbeating. Can I just say, before I do just make this point though, John Howard's as are other constituents will benefit from this because the aircraft will be higher - the track that they have had over their electorates for twenty odd years. So, they will be higher and therefore the noise profile will be better.

LB: Could I just, I know that John Howard aspires to be Leader of the Opposition once again, but it is worth recalling what he published last time he was Leader of the Opposition on his 'Leader of the Opposition' letterhead in 1989 when he said this "... in the interests of safety, airport facilities should be upgraded immediately", including he said "the construction of the third runway, a decision is needed and the Government has to face up to its responsibilities". So, it is a bit late in the day for him to be putting on the performance that we have seen from him today.

PM: The core point is that aircraft have always taken this track ever since the seaward runway was built, the original north-south runway. What we are doing today is making it better, for not only Mr Howard's constituents but others by getting more height, by making aircraft take off further back down the runway at the seaward end and obliging the airlines to spend more money on fuel by getting height and, of course, we are doing - as few governments in the world are doing, none are doing in fact - developing the most comprehensive noise abatement procedures out through those affected areas.

J: Prime Minister, do you think now that may be you made the wrong decision five years ago, instead of fast tracking Badgerys Creek, instead of building the third runway now. All the problems the Minister and yourself have outlined noise and traffic congestion. I mean you could get rid of that if you accept what the minister said five years ago when he didn't want the third runway built and you, chief amongst the lot of them, was hot and strong to build it.

PM: The consensus was with the NSW government, Mr Greiner

J: ... (inaudible) ... it was a Federal government decision.

PM: No, just a second, it was a decision of the Federal Government at the urging of the NSW government that had to provide a lot of the surrounding infrastructure and who had no intention of doing anything for Badgerys Creek, as the Minister has already told you, they didn't even have the wit or the sense to at least plan a corridor for traffic out to it. Even at this point. So, let's go through the thing. 'NSW Government Swoops on the Runway'. Premier Nick Greiner said 'work on a third runway should start as soon as possible' - 20 September 1990. In 1989 the Premier, Mr Greiner '... urged the Federal government to cut the red tape and start preparing the runways EIS. Certainly the State will do all it can and will hasten the study', and he goes on in that vein. And, there are half a dozen press releases from him. Then we had John Fahey the current Premier on 18 January 1993 saying about the curfew, that we should reinvestigate the curfew. He said 'I think, we have got to remember that when the curfew was put on it was in relation to a certain decibel level of aeroplanes. That decibel level of aeroplanes has dropped significantly and it is time we had the debate.' Time we had the debate about suspending the curfew.

J: But Prime Minister, I'm not suggesting that you listened to Nick Greiner ... and not Laurie Brereton ... (inaudible) ...

PM: Just a second Alan (Ramsey). I picked up all the nuances of your question, I don't need additional help, thanks very much. John Sharp who is the Opposition's spokesman said '... I have repeatedly called for the commencement of construction of a parallel north-south runway and a new international terminal. The quickest, easiest most cost effective solution to this problem is the construction of a third runway at Kingsford Smith, not at Badgerys Creek.' Mr Fischer, Leader of the National Party '... any further delay in deciding on a third runway at Mascot would mean loss of life as well as economic insanity'. Charles Blunt who was then spokesman for transport said he was joining a petition campaign to '... add to the mounting pressure on the Hawke government to build a third runway at Kingsford Smith.' And it goes on and on. Then, you have got Mr Jull who is the shadow spokesperson for tourism, aviation and sport '... the construction of a new third runway for Sydney should be commenced immediately', he said in July 1989 and Mr Howard saying '... it should have been built six and a half years earlier'. I mean, that was the general consensus of the political parties about this.

LB: Can I just add that it was also the consensus of all the assembled journalists at all those press conferences that I attended in the days that I was campaigning about Badgerys Creek. Because, press conference after press conference people said 'well, aren't you just

interested in local parochial issues, isn't this just a case of looking after your own backyard?'

PM: We were being urged to introduce a major micro economic reform question by many of you in the room today.

J: Do you still think ...

PM: And, any questions from you Geoff (Kitney) on the basis that some tricky little ploy about whether a decision is right or not is basically hypocritical. Of course it is. It needs to be rejected with the contempt it deserves.

J: No. I still think it's the right decision. I'm asking if you still do.

PM: Well, the airport has been built, it is an actuality.

J: Exactly.

PM: Exactly. Therefore, the decision of the Government, what we have to do is to make sure that the airport operates effectively, efficiently and with much more compatibility with residents' interests.

J: What was the advice to you from the airline companies of the double effect of the designated flight paths and the take offs from the extreme southern end on their schedules?

LB: It has been indicated to me by my officials that it is likely to lead to a very minor reduction in the optimum number of planes that they can squeeze in and out of Kingsford Smith. It will, at the margin, have some affect, because aeroplanes will have to cross the major north-south runway to get onto the taxi way to proceed to the very southern most tip of runway 34L. That said, it will give us a much better environmental result and, I think, it is certainly worth the effort.

J: So, the effect of this is that fewer flights will be able to come in and out?

LB: But, I think you should see that against the backdrop of the tower coming on stream in February or March of next year and of the ground radar coming in later next year and the capacity of the airport being lifted from its present capacity of the high 50s up to 80 to 85 take-offs and landings per hour. So, this will give us safety and will give us a good environmental outcome and will not be a great burden for the airline industry to bear, especially with the very good efforts of the air traffic controllers that have already seen capacity recover to that which existed under the old simultaneous operations at the airport.

- J: Was any consideration given to allowing take-offs to the north off the new runway in order to spread the burden of take-off noise?
- PM: A policy decision was made about that in 1989 at the time and that has never been altered.
- J: It was a political opposition rather than ...
- J: There's a hotel in the way!
- PM: There is now a hotel in the way apparently, but there we are.
- J: Well, that's factually correct, but ...
- PM: Well, it's there. I don't know whether you haven't seen it as you drove past.
- J: But, it doesn't prohibit take-offs.
- PM: Well, you can occupy the top floor.
- LB: I think the reality, you need to see this airport for what it is. It is a parallel runway airport now which will have a maximum capacity operating those parallels with take-offs to the south preferably, but to the north when necessary - 85 take-offs and landings. But, when there are big cross winds, it will of necessity drop to about 40 because they can only use the east-west runway which will remain open. But, to suggest that we should add to the airport with take-offs to the north on the new parallel runway, to squeeze it from 85 up to 90, with all of the environmental consequences that would have for take-offs, twice as noisy as landings, to the north in a new area, I think, would be a very bad deal for Sydney. I would much prefer to get on with the development of Badgerys Creek and see it as the supplementary airport for Sydney.
- J: There is a suggestion it would spread the noise rather have it all running off the old north-south, having it run off both north-south ...
- PM: Tom (Burton) you have got a debate now about the additional noise affects of a parallel runway system, fair enough. Imagine the debate we would have had if the Thai's DC10 had collided with the A320 Ansett plane. The vectored directions of their collision would have then picked up a 747 which Qantas had and the whole lot of them would have ended up in the overseas terminal. That's what we had on our hands here. And, as the demand for air traffic out of Sydney has risen along with all traffic movements of Australia, it was getting impossible to run that system. The whole system is based on the fact that only pilots familiar with the system and certificated for it can use it. So, an international pilot cannot use the cross runway unless that pilot

has flown in and out of Australia, been to the CAA and has a certificate about the use of the runway.

Now, even with it, I mean, I just picked up a Sydney Morning Herald report of that incident and it said this, on the day 13 August 1991 '... simultaneous landings are standard on the two main runways at Sydney airport. When two planes land at once with one stopping short of the intersection to allow the other plane to land safely'. So, in other words if the pilot overflies and then for either water, rain, breaking or anything, can't stop short of the intersection he collects the one on the other runway. I mean, that is the system we have had.

J: But, it never happened.

PM: It nearly happened. They were in the international journal *Flight International*, I mean Alan (Ramsey), you would be wringing your hands, the rhetoric would be dripping out of your column, the papers would be soaked with the feigned indignation that that cynical remark you have just made subsumes. Now, the fact is ...

J: (Ramsey) Prime Minister, I would argue you are making cynical political ...

PM: I'm not here to debate with you Alan. *Flight International* said this '... investigators believe that the A320 passed about 33 feet above the DC10'. Now, not long later my predecessor in a VIP aircraft also had a problem with aborting a flight on the cross wind runway. The fact is, you don't have to be an air traffic controller to know that a parallel system of flights in and out of Sydney is far safer than a set of cross runways and you can have this debate, but if we had a collision on the cross wind runway it would be the incumbent Minister for Transport right in the slot, we would have hand wringing on a scale that we have never seen before. So, the parallel system is the right system and the key is to get it into place and it is, I think, a great pity that John Fahey has shown no leadership in this, that he has run off hiding with a little bit of poor politics when in fact he knows the safety issues as well as Laurie Brereton and I know and he knows that his government supported it all the way through. I mean, there must be some public decisions in this country that deserve some integrity of treatment, even from people like John Fahey.

We have got about three minutes and we have to go off. Question Time is at 3:00pm. So, two more questions.

J: What penalties apply to the airlines if they ignore the directive to take-off from the southern most end. You say penalties will apply if they ignore the deviation from the main take-offs to the north. Will they apply if they ...

LB: They will be directed to the southern most point on that runway and they will have no option but to take-off from there. That will be the standard operational practice for where jets commence their take-offs at Mascot in future.

J: How much will the extra fuel cost and do you think that will fit into higher ticket prices?

LB: I was told it might cost \$20 a flight to get these arrangements in place.

PM: Not a ticket is it?

LB: \$20 a flight, not a ticket. That is \$20 for the plane, so I suppose it will depend on the number of passengers, but I don't think it is anywhere near too great a price to bear for the sort of benefits that will flow from it.

PM: We will leave it at that. Thanks very much for coming.

ends