

## Smaller southern airports primed to spread wings

29 July 2011 | By [David Hatcher](#).

Earlier this month minister of state for transport Theresa Villiers published the South East Airports Taskforce's final report, which, in line with government policy, aims to enhance operations at Gatwick, Heathrow and Stansted without having to expand them. Here David Hatcher looks at five other airports in the region that still have expansion ambitions

### Lydd: passenger service

A public inquiry into Lydd London Ashford airport's plans to expand will conclude in September. A final decision is expected from secretary of state Eric Pickles six months later.

The airport's owner, Sheikh Fahad al Athel of Saudi Arabia, wants to expand the runway and construct a £25m, 81,860 sq ft terminal building to accommodate 500,000 passengers a year. Development would take around three years if planning permission were granted.

The airport deals with mostly business aircraft, but aims to eventually cater for passenger aircraft. At present, it provides only a weekend service to Le Touquet in Normandy.

"Even some larger executive aircraft have problems taking off, so it would be of real benefit to extend the runway," says airport manager Bernard Daly. "However, realistically, it will be five to 10 years before we could get a low-cost airline here."

Daly believes that to attract airlines, the airport must first obtain planning permission for its extension.

"There's no point going out and saying what our plans are and what might happen in two and a half years' time because no one wants to make a commitment that far in advance," he says.

### Manston: Taking on the big three

Manston airport is attempting to steal market share off the three key London airports to grow its annual traffic to 2.2 million passengers and 165,000 tonnes of freight.

Its owner, New Zealand infrastructure investor Infratil, is negotiating with airlines to divert their contracts from Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

This would mean expansion at Manston, which only caters for 35,000 passengers and 25,000 tonnes of freight a year, although its terminal has the capacity for 750,000 passengers a year and could be expanded to accommodate up to 1 million. If it won a contract for more than 1 million passengers annually, a £60m, 260,000 sq ft terminal would be developed for up to 3 million passengers.

Chief executive Charles Buchanan says Manston intends to win the business of airlines and logistics companies before it starts the costly planning process.