

The British Airports Authority claims that plans to expand Roundway airport will create 12,000 new jobs and save Barnsley's branch line from the threat of closure.

If allowed, the development of Roundway to accommodate more chartered holiday flights and scheduled domestic services will generate many of the jobs by the end of 2008, said Peter Taylor, Development Manager of the British Airports Authority, today.

There are 9,700 people unemployed within a twelve-mile radius of the airport – an area that is one of the worst in the country for unemployment, which is 25 per cent above the national average.

"Barnsley needs this scheme. Hundreds of local children left school this year and went straight on to the dole. What kind of start in life is that?" said Taylor.

He also claimed that Network Rail are considering closing the Barnsley branch line due to falling passenger numbers, but stressed that the airport's expansion was likely to prevent this.

"The station will become the main one for the airport, and a shuttle bus service will be introduced. The extra traffic of airline passengers will almost guarantee that the branch line will stay open," he said.

The comments came at a BAA press conference called to address attacks on the plans made by Owen Hopton, chair of the Barnsley Residents' Association, last week. Hopton claimed that the scheme - which includes plans for an extra terminal and local road improvements - would lead to increased traffic congestion, noise, and danger.

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Taylor responded by stressing that planned road improvements would ensure that the increased traffic would by-pass the town. He claimed noise would actually decrease over time due to reductions in the number of noisy training flights conducted from the airport to make way for more chartered and domestic flights, and that Roundway's two-mile runway and the four miles of open farmland beyond make it one of the safest in the country.

He also dismissed Hopton's claims that farmland would be used to build a "new town" to house airport workers.

"That is nonsense - there will be no extra land needed. Most people who work at the airport live here already, and there is plenty of space within Roundway's existing boundaries for any extra buildings needed to accommodate those whose jobs demand close proximity. "

The press conference is the latest development in the tussle over the airport's expansion. Taylor says the BAA knows it has a battle on its hands, but is determined to make the scheme a reality despite local objections.

"The Resident's Association are taking a selfish, dog-in-the-major attitude that ignores the benefits that the scheme will bring to the area," he said.

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**442 words**