

Dutch defer plan to expand second Amsterdam airport

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Amsterdam's Schiphol is close to its maximum capacity

The Dutch government Wednesday postponed plans to expand Amsterdam's second airport to ease pressure on the near-capacity Schiphol, after hitting turbulence over noise pollution fears.

Lelystad airport, which lies about 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of the Dutch capital, will now "realistically only be expanded in 2020," Dutch Infrastructure Minister Cora van Nieuwenhuizen said.

"We all know that Schiphol has almost reached capacity and that for Schiphol, Lelystad should have already been there yesterday," she told a press conference.

"But I want to take more time over the decision to open the airport" to commercial flights, she said, after meeting concerned groups including residents.

Initially it had been planned to open up the field—which currently handles mainly business, training and charter flights—to commercial flights from April 1, 2019.

In the first year, Lelystad is due to take some 4,000 flights from Schiphol particularly to southern European holiday destinations during peak summer periods, with that number rising to 7,000 by the second year of commercial operation.

By 2022, Lelystad should be able to handle up to 10,000 flights with an eventual maximum of 45,000, the ministry said in a statement.

The plan is to have Lelystad handle smaller jets with holiday air traffic, while Schiphol takes care of heavier planes and long-haul international flights and transfers.

Schiphol is one of Europe's busiest air hubs, handling 68.4 million passengers last year, with 497,000 flights to 326 destinations. And recent reports have sounded a warning that it is now over-stretched.

But a furore broke out last year after residents in Flevoland, where

Lelystad is situated, got wind of the plans.

The Dutch eco-left Groenlinks Party in December said there were "fundamental problems" with expanding Lelystad due to low-flying planes, as the flight paths needed to stay below those flying into Schiphol.

"The peace of countless households risks being endangered" by the thunder of low-flying jets, it said.

Jurgen van Avermaete, general manager at Air Traffic Control the Netherlands, which handles the country's civilian air space, on Wednesday presented new [flight](#) paths to Lelystad which he said would greatly alleviate fears about noise pollution.

But Schiphol bosses called the postponement "disappointing", saying "opening Lelystad in 2019 was part of the solution" to Schiphol's capacity problems, Dutch news agency ANP reported.

Dutch national carrier KLM too voiced "much displeasure" with the decision.

"Now that capacity at Lelystad is not available, growth at Schiphol must be made possible," urged KLM boss Pieter Elbers.

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