

NEW TRANSPORT SYSTEM TO START AT HEATHROW



The opening of Heathrow airport's fifth terminal in March this year is definitely an important step towards faster and easier air traffic. In less than two years however Heathrow will be remembered not for the terminal itself, but for the introduction of the PRT, or Personal Rapid Transport system. You can be forgiven for not knowing precisely what this is. A brief description is as follows: pod shaped 4-seater capsules aimed at transporting passengers between a business car park and the new terminal which require almost no energy and travel on set routes without a driver according to the passengers' wishes. However, when we take a deeper look beyond the brief description, the PRT seems an incredibly crude acquisition for the airport.

The vehicles use up just 50% of the energy used by each British bus and are 70% more ecologically efficient than cars. Furthermore, they are driverless thus eliminating the need to employ staff. This was a problem originally faced by airports which introduced shuttle or bus services between terminals and train stations or car parks. It is true to say that the PRT do not represent a cheap investment and it will take some time to recoup such an outlay. Nevertheless, in the long-run they seem to very economically viable.

The PRT are almost certain to please passengers in the future. Indeed, many tend to become frustrated by waiting for a shuttle or bus to arrive. The maximum waiting time for a PRT to arrive has been estimated at 12 seconds, which even the extremely impatient should survive. Moreover, queuing shall be eliminated and passengers will be travelling with people they know rather than going through the ordeal of mass public transport. The lack of a fixed timetable is also advantageous in the case where people are nervous about being late. Nobody likes having their scheduled arrival out of their own hands. The laser powered pods of terminal 5 should put a smile on many relieved faces.

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