



The aviation industry has seized on an apparent shift in policy on airport capacity in south-east England, as the aviation minister committed to accepting the recommendations of an independent commission.

Simon Burns, speaking at the Airport Operators Association (AOA) conference, said the Conservatives would back and implement the findings of the commission led by Sir Howard Davies when it reports in 2015. Previously his boss, the transport secretary, Patrick McLoughlin, has only pledged to "consider" its recommendations on the question of whether extra capacity, including a third runway at Heathrow or new airports, is needed.

Darren Caplan, chief executive of the AOA, said his organisation "welcomes the aviation minister's unambiguous commitment to acting on the findings of the airports commission.

"We have been seeking such a commitment since the commission was set up, to ensure that its work was meaningful and would not be a waste of time of taxpayers' money.

"We now respectfully ask whether the Labour and Lib Dem transport teams will follow suit."

The government later appeared to row back from Burns's comments, with sources saying it was "committed to the process" and hoped the commission would provide solutions.

The shadow transport secretary, Maria Eagle, said: "We've had a whole year of dither and delay

from the government since Labour first proposed an independent aviation commission. Even after appointing Sir Howard Davies to lead this work, ministers are still trying to avoid taking decisions by asking the commission not to report until after the next election."

The terms of reference for the commission and its other members are yet to be confirmed, almost two months after it was first announced.

Burns said there would be more details within weeks.