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Government report slams brakes on Bristol airport plans

Committee on Climate Change advice to meet UK carbon targets: limit expansion, cut flights, raise ticket prices, boost rail and video-conferencing

Government advisers on climate change have today published a new report on aviation which slams the brakes on Bristol airport's (BIA) plans for unrestrained growth, a policy shift strongly welcomed by Stop Bristol Airport Expansion.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) report on UK aviation growth and greenhouse gas emissions has emphasised the need for prudence to ensure a target for aviation's actual CO₂ levels in 2050 to be no higher than in 2005. [1]

It says that UK aviation cannot grow more than 60% above 2005 passenger numbers. That would limit Bristol airport's growth to 8.3 million passengers per year by 2050, and even this would require the rest of the local economy to make 90% cuts in emissions.

Campaigners said that this will have major implications for BIA as its current planning application allows for expansion far beyond even the 10 million passengers in 2020 figure publicly quoted by the airport.

The CCC report also knocks back aviation industry claims in respect of new more fuel efficient aircraft and engine technology, air traffic management gains and the "miracle fuel" contribution from biomass, labelling them "optimistic" and "speculative".

The report highlights various options for reducing demand for air travel, which is currently overtaking any realistic gains in efficiency. These include measures such as high speed rail, videoconferencing and a high carbon price to reduce the number of extra people flying. It envisages a carbon price of £200 per tonne of carbon dioxide by 2050, against today's price of around £12.

As much of the technological advances are several decades away, campaigners are calling for a reasonable cap in BIA's passenger numbers for 2020 at well below the 8.3 million level. They said there is no need for BIA's planned major expansion as the airport has stated it can already handle 8 million passengers within the existing terminal.

Stop Bristol Airport Expansion spokesman Jeremy Birch said:

"The Committee on Climate Change has placed a final limit on aviation expansion. Airports will have to deliver actual low carbon growth, not just talk about it!

"This means that North Somerset Council will have to consider throwing out BIA's planning application or severely restricting its growth to meet the aviation targets for 2050. BIA had just over 5 million passengers in 2005. A 60% increase would only allow growth to 8 million or less by 2050, dependent on a fleet of more fuel-efficient planes." [2]

The Committee's report states clearly and unequivocally that:

"clear additional policies beyond the introduction of a carbon price at this level will ... be required to constrain passenger demand"

and that *“Given the likely pace of technological progress a demand increase of up to 60% but no more could be compatible with the government’s target.”* [for overall greenhouse gas emissions cuts of 80%]

Jeremy Birch added:

“It is clear that capping expansion is the only way that we can ensure emissions from aviation don’t jeopardise our targets for cutting emissions. This report puts a hard limit on how much UK airports can expand, and it is well below the aspirations of Bristol airport’s owners.”

The report also states that the non-CO₂ impacts of aviation may lead to the 60% limit being tightened in the future.

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For more information visit: www.stopbia.com

Notes

[1] See report at:

<http://hmccc.s3.amazonaws.com/Aviation%20Report%2009/21667B%20CCC%20Exec%20Summary%20AW%20v2.pdf>

[2] The BIA draft master plan gave a figure of 4.6 million passengers per annum in 2004. The 2006 Master Plan 2006 stated 5 million plus passengers in 2005. A 60% growth on 2005 levels would allow an increase of 3 mppa to 8 mppa.