

Essex County Council Officer Comments - Airports Commission – Discussion Paper 03 – Aviation and Climate Change

Dated – April 2013

Introduction

The Airports Commission published Discussion Paper 03 entitled Aviation and Climate Change. The Discussion Paper highlights the costs and benefits of aviation for the UK, and is intended to begin a dialogue with stakeholders around climate change. The aim of the Discussion Paper is to commence debate on issues associated with climate change with the intention of reaching firm conclusions.

It is recognised within the Discussion Paper that aviation has a significant impact on the Earth's atmosphere, most visibly the familiar contrails (condensation trails) that we are all used to seeing when planes pass overhead. Less visible, are the other emissions from aircraft – carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and soot, all of which contribute in various ways to climate change.

Globally, aviation accounts for around 1-2% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. At a UK level, domestic and international aviation is responsible for around 6% of national Green House Gas emissions. Whilst this is currently smaller than for road transport, it is likely to make up an increasing proportion of total emissions over time. Aviation is one of the most challenging sectors to decarbonise, because aircraft are longer lived than for example, road vehicles, and so far there are few realistic alternatives to kerosene.

Strategic Context

Essex County Council has an active interest in shaping future aviation guidance, policy, and submitting information to inform future work. The County Council's interest reflects our role as a -

- Key partner within Essex and the South East Local Economic Partnership promoting economic development, regeneration, infrastructure delivery and new development throughout the County;
- Guardian of the environment and the interests and safety of the County's residents and workers;
- Strategic highway and transport authority, including responsibility for the delivery of the Essex Local Transport Plan and as the local highway authority; and
- Major provider of a wide range of local government services throughout the county of Essex.

The County Council is keen to ensure that we continue to promote sustainable development that seeks to minimise climate change.

Structure of County Council Comments

The comments expressed by the County Council reflect views concerning issues and questions identified in Chapter 7 entitled Conclusions. This chapter sets out a series of questions that have been identified to guide stakeholders in preparing their submissions on climate change. The questions and issues that the County Council wishes to express comments are set out below.

What conclusions should be drawn from the analysis of effectiveness, and relative cost, of airport capacity and other abatement measures in Chapter 5?

Operational incentives are correctly highlighted as the main driver of reducing emissions. The County Council acknowledge that there are ethical issues associated with increasing Biofuel usage by current technology and production methods. However it is considered that as more efficient and acceptable feedstock of Biofuel become available (algae or seaweed) then this is less likely to be an issues, and will therefore reduce emissions through increasing biofuel use.

Whilst the cost to passengers of flying is mentioned briefly, the factors of carbon tax and rising fuel costs/surcharges do not appear to be clearly shown as a driver to reduce capacity. It is recommended that modelling be undertaken to evidence the effect of increasing overheads upon the market, and at what point will capacity/uptake reduce because of costs.

What do you consider to be the main climate risks and adaptation challenges that the Commission will need to consider (a) in making its assessment of the UK's overall aviation capacity and connectivity needs, and (b) in considering site-specific options to meet those needs?

Dealing with climate change risks is not new, but the climate projections by UKCIP 2009 suggests the risks in the future are likely to be different from today and will lead to a level of uncertainty on how to adapt to these changes. Therefore the County Council recommends embedding climate risk management into the corporate risk management. The approach to risk management needs to be long-term and flexible; in terms of risk management it should be a continuous process of change management that proactively learns and responds to new information, rather than being a one-off 'optimised' decision. Then define a set of time-sensitive priorities for action, for instance, there will be areas where action will be needed now to cope with the current climate risks and potential irreversible impacts.

The County Council agrees with the information presented in the Discussion Paper that climate risk maybe different for each airport site and will need to integrate climate risks in to business continuity plans and risk management, which can be pulled together in the central commission risk management.

Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment, London School of Economics was commissioned by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to produce a policy brief to inform the development of the National Adaptation Programme and some of the principles on risk management and actions are relevant not only to government but to other sectors policy/decision makers.

A copy of the report can be viewed here:

<http://www.cccep.ac.uk/Publications/Policy/docs/PB-independent-national-adaptation-programme-for-england.pdf>

Are there any opportunities arising from anticipated changes in the global climate that should be taken into account when planning future airport capacity?

An important factor when planning future airport capacity is to identify whether existing airport infrastructure and buildings are resilient to extreme weather and climate change (e.g. flood defences, runway drainage capacity, impacts on supply chains), to reduce the potential financial implications in the future. Then to ensure that any new expansions and/or developments, consider long-term resilience and opportunities to explore low carbon and adaptive technologies within building design.

The County Council accepts that aviation has a number of interdependencies with other sectors facing climate risks, and this presents an opportunity for the aviation sector to have an influence on their supply chain through its procurement process, by implementing a sustainable procurement, not only to encourage suppliers to reduce their carbon impact, but consider climate risk in their business continuity/risk management.