

Airport Expansion: Options, Alternatives and Opportunities for Campaigns

SPEECH TO INTRODUCE CONFERENCE

The purpose of this Conference is exactly as its title suggests:

to **examine** the options put forward by the Government in its recent proposals for airport expansion, set out in the Regional Airport Studies
to **identify** and agree some alternatives to those options
and finally to **explore** the potential for some joint or co-ordinated national campaigns

The hope for this conference:

to begin to build a national anti-airport expansions movement - not just lots of individual campaigns at the specific airports involved - but a genuinely joined-up, integrated national campaign. Only in that way can we resist any attempts to play us off against each other, with promises of putting an airport in place A rather than place B - and only in that way, I believe, can we move the airports campaign out of the margins and into the mainstream.

Background to the conference

- The need to discover wide areas of common agreement between us; and a greater understanding in areas of disagreement
- Starting point: the fact that the government's plans for aviation expansion are unsustainable - the need to challenge the whole ethos of unquestioned aviation growth.
- Between 2000 and 2020, the number of people passing through UK airports is due to double from 180 million/ year to 400 million/ year (Government figures). To meet this demand would require the equivalent of 4 new Heathrow airports and 8 new Gatwicks.
- The need to look at measures to manage and reduce demand - not increase it. The Government is currently subsidising the aviation industry to the tune of around £7 billion/ year
- The solution - a combination of an aviation fuel tax, more realistic landing fees, and more public education on the impacts of aviation.

Moving from the margins to the mainstream

One of the main challenges: to make much stronger links with the wider environmental and social justice movements.

Climate change campaigners: Aviation is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions - it accounts for just 3.5% of human caused emissions today, but, at current predicted growth rates, could account for up to 15% by 2050. Aviation is not covered by the Kyoto Protocol.

Local Food campaigners: The only reason it can possibly be economical to be flying out-of-season fruit and vegetables from the other side of the world is because air freight is artificially cheap.

Anti-poverty campaigners: Many of the poorest in our society are suffering from fuel poverty, because heating fuel is taxed - yet air fuel is not taxed. In effect, those who don't fly are subsidising those who do, to the tune of £183 per person nationwide. Yet less than 40% of British people fly in any given year.

Aviation is subsidising the rich - The rich tend to fly more often than the poor, and the poor are more likely to live under flight paths.

Health campaigners: Noise has genuine and significant health effects; the fear of crashes has severe health effects; air pollution now kills more people than road traffic accidents.

Campaigners for children's rights: A recent study by researchers at the University of London shows that the reading ability of children living under flight paths is worse than that of children in

similar economic circumstances elsewhere.

Human rights campaigners: The European Court found that night flights deprive people of their human right to a decent night's sleep.

The European Parliament

My background in this issue: I am a member of the European Parliament's Transport Committee, and Rapporteur, or draftsman, for a Report which was adopted by the Parliament, calling on the Commission and Council to introduce an Emissions Charge at EU level.

The aviation industry argues that such measures as fuel taxes and emission charges put them at a competitive disadvantage compared to those countries where no such tax or charge is levied. Action at the EU level is therefore vital.

A tax on aviation fuel would require:

either

international consensus at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)

or

the renegotiation of thousands of bilateral air service agreements.

An Emissions Charge, by contrast, could be levied by the EU alone on all flights arriving at, or departing from, EU airports, irrespective of the nationality of the air carrier. It would therefore be relatively easy to introduce, and would answer the concerns about international competitiveness.

The Commission is due to bring back detailed proposals on how such a charge could be implemented later this year, or early next. We have to be ready for that - particularly since it could be brought in by a majority vote, not unanimity!

Challenges Ahead

We don't have to wait for EU proposals before we act.

Some ideas to debate: Let's have an Air Traffic Reduction Bill! As part of that, a demand that Government imposes a tax on all domestic air flights. The US does it!

Conclusion

The government has gravely misjudged strength of feeling. If we can mobilise people around some of the alternatives to aviation growth, then I strongly believe this is a campaign we can win.

I very much look forward to hearing your views, your plans, and your ideas.