

OXFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS RELEASE: Aviation and climate

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Are the UK's aviation and climate change policies impossible bed-fellows?

A report launched today by the University of Oxford presents new evidence, which shows to what extent the Government's policies on aviation fly in the face of policies on climate change. It says that by 2050, carbon dioxide emissions from UK aviation could be four to ten times higher than 1990 levels, representing up to two thirds of the government's total emission target for that year.

The report 'Predict and Decide' is being launched by the All Party Parliamentary Sustainable Aviation Group at the House of Lords to an invited audience of MPs, aviation industry representatives, policy makers and other stakeholders from the tourism industry. It brings together, for the first time, a range of forecasts of future aviation emissions and shows that, even when all realistic options for improvements in technology and air traffic management are considered, climate change targets can not be met without controlling demand.

Current Government policy supports an expansion in airports which will enable passenger movements to more than double – from 200 million in 2003 to 470 million in 2030. But all forecasts of the associated changes in emissions suggest that this will make official government targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 almost impossible to achieve.

The report also points out that the vast majority of flights are made by better-off sections of society and the recent growth in flights has come mainly from existing travellers flying more often, particularly for holidays. Three out of every four leisure passengers at major UK

airports are from the top three socio-economic groups and there is little evidence that the less well-off are really benefiting from the low price of air travel.

The conclusion of the report, commissioned by the government-funded UK Energy Research Centre, is that politicians are going to have to radically alter their strategy in order to cut emissions sufficiently, by looking at ways of curbing air travel overall.

Dr Brenda Boardman, the project leader from Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, said: 'The Government has to confront the contradictions in its policies. Unless the rate of growth in flights is curbed, the UK cannot fulfil its commitments on climate change. If government wants to be confident about achieving its targets, it has to undertake demand management. Relying on technological fixes alone is totally unrealistic.'

Dr Sally Cairns, one of the report's authors from the Transport Research Laboratory, said: 'If the government wants to reduce aviation growth, it has the power to act now. Raising air passenger duty would help to counter reductions in fares – which are estimated to have been responsible for at least 40 per cent of recent aviation growth.'

Co-author, Dr Carey Newson, said: 'Opinion polls should encourage the government to revisit its aviation policy. A majority now favour airlines paying higher taxes to reflect environmental damage, even if this means higher airfares.'

For more information, please contact the University of Oxford Press Office on 01865 280534 or email press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk

Notes for Editors:

(* For a full copy of the report 'Predict and Decide', go to www.eci.ox.ac.uk/research/energy/downloads/predictanddecide.pdf

* Present Government policy to support an expansion in airport facilities is set out in the Aviation White Paper 2003. Government targets on carbon dioxide emissions, set out in the Energy White Paper 2003, show that government policy is to reduce emissions by 60 per cent by 2050.

Additional findings from the report 'Predict and Decide':

* Carbon dioxide emissions from aviation have doubled between 1990 and 2000 whilst emissions from other sectors reduced by 9 per cent.

* Other sectors will not be able to cut their emissions sufficiently to compensate for the growth in aviation's impact

* Improvements in technology and air traffic management will bring some efficiency gains, but all forecasts suggest major increases in emissions from aviation, even if industry efficiency targets are achieved

* The economic benefits from the aviation industry are offset by the public revenue lost through tax exemptions, environmental damage, and the fact that cheap flights are affecting the UK tourism industry. For every pound an overseas visitor spends in the UK, a UK resident spends £2.32 abroad.

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