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For immediate use

GOVERNMENT IGNORING ITS OWN EVIDENCE ON AIRPORT EXPANSION

The Government is ignoring its own evidence when it comes to airport expansion and the decarbonisation of aviation. The Net Zero Strategy published yesterday, highlights how difficult it is to decarbonise aviation and places heavy reliance on the development of ‘sustainable aviation fuels’ (SAF) (1).

The indicative transport pathway includes expected emissions reductions across transport of 76-86% by 2050, including international aviation and shipping emissions. International aviation and shipping emissions would need to fall by 12% by 2035 (2). Yet, the strategy contains limited policies for ensuring that these reduction targets can be met.

The announcement of £180m to support the development of SAF plants (3), is clearly insufficient when a DfT commissioned report (by Ricardo) estimated the start-up cost of these plants to be around £600-700m (4). To reach Government targets will require a significant increase in investment from the private sector, whose willingness is yet to be demonstrated.

Further, their strategy envisages SAF use constituting between – at very best – 5% and 30% of flights by 2050, thereby leaving the vast majority of flights still entirely reliant on kerosene. Current plans for a third runway at Heathrow, which is still yet to be cancelled, would create 260,000 additional flights per year, or over 700 per day, with a large proportion of these flights long haul. The Government have decided to revisit whether to review the Airports National Policy Statement (the policy enabling Heathrow expansion) when it publishes its plans for Jet Zero aviation, expected in early 2022 (4).

In its response to the Climate Change Committee (CCC) Progress Report, the Government appear to reject the CCC’s advice that a demand management framework will be required and assert that they can meet their net zero goals without directly intervening to limit growth (5).

However, the DfT’s own analysis, as published in the Jet Zero consultation shows that aviation will have residual emissions of some 21mt in 2050 – even if the highly speculative aspirations for new fuels and technology come to fruition (6).

Further, in a document published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), “*Net Zero Principles for successful behaviour change initiatives*” (7), it is *actually* acknowledged that there is a need to reduce frequent flying, limit airport expansion, and issue conditional bailouts to airlines. This document also highlights how the Government should recognise “the hugely impactful signal it sends to, for example, approve airport

expansions, or financially support the airline industry with little demands for decarbonisation in return”.

The Government’s response to the CCC’s advice appears to directly contradict this BEIS document – which, recently, appears to have been withdrawn from the BEIS website (8).

Paul McGuinness, Chair of the No 3rd Runway Coalition, said:

“The Climate Change Committee’s advice, that there is no room for a next expansion of UK aviation capacity, was clear, as was the government’s earlier statement that approving airport expansions would signal that it was not taking its Net Zero commitment seriously.

“Heathrow Airport is the world’s second highest transportation emitter of carbon, the largest in the UK, and were it to increase its lion share of emissions, restrictions and possibly closures will need to be forced onto the UK’s regional airports. Without ruling out Heathrow expansion, the government will give the game away – that it is serious neither about levelling up economic opportunity across the UK, nor Net Zero.”

ENDS.

Notes for editors:

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1026655/net-zero-strategy.pdf
2. Ibid, p. 154
3. Ibid, p. 153
4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1015207/decision-on-requests-to-review-the-anps.pdf
5. <https://www.e4tech.com/uploads/files/final-report-aviation-abdc-feasibility-study-issue-v1-0.pdf>
6. Government Response to the CCC 2021 Progress report, p. 97 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1026734/government-response-ccc-progress-report.pdf
7. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002716/jet-zero-consultation-a-consultation-on-our-strategy-for-net-zero-aviation.pdf
8. Was online here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-principles-for-successful-behaviour-change-initiatives>