

A briefing sheet

The forthcoming Copenhagen talks will involve a lot of detailed discussion across a range of topics. This short briefing sheet aims to summarise the aviation issues.

The Problems

- Emissions from international aviation were not included in the Kyoto Agreement, because of lack of agreement on a methodology to allocate emissions to individual countries.
- At present aviation accounts for over 2% ¹ of global CO₂ emissions; but, if non-CO₂ impacts are included, it contributes around 4.9% ² of all climate change emissions.
- The proportion in rich countries is much higher. In the UK it accounts for 6.3% of emissions (2005 data); 13% if the non-CO₂ impacts are included. ³ The UK only plans to cut aviation emissions back to 2005 levels by 2050. ⁴
- Aviation is one of the fastest-growing contributors to world-wide emissions. Unchecked it will grow to a substantial proportion of global emissions, making a climate-safe future difficult or impossible - and undermining reductions achieved by other sectors.
- The combined emissions of international shipping (also excluded from Kyoto), added to those from aviation are on course to account for anything up to 50% or even 80% of a safe global carbon budget by 2050. ⁵ And that is not even taking account of the non-CO₂ effects of aviation, which double its impact.

The global aviation industry claims it can cut its CO₂ emissions by 50% by 2050, relative to 2005 levels. ⁶ But in the small print it is saying something else. An unspecified, but unlimited amount of the claimed improvements could be down to off-setting its emissions, i.e. they will not actually be cut, simply transferred to other industries or projects in the developing world. It is claimed that real reductions will be achieved through new technology and greater use of new fuels or biofuels. But the rate at which technology will improve remains speculative rather than definitive; and the use of biofuels is problematic – it is still largely untested for use on any significant scale; and doubts remain about whether biofuels should be used at all given the fact they are likely to compete for land with food and forests.

The Solutions

The International Civil Aviation Organisation, the world-wide body that regulates the industry, will be pressing to be given the task of devising detailed proposals following Copenhagen. But this will be no solution. In its painstaking work over the past 12 years it has failed to agree even one single binding measure to control greenhouse gas emissions.

There will need to be a global co-operative approach for the aviation sector, with collaboration between all nations to reduce emissions in international airspace. It is doubtful if emissions can be tackled without managing the demand for aviation through fiscal measures: an effective, tightly-controlled emissions trading scheme; and the imposition of a ticket tax, with the money being used for mitigation and adaptation purposes in developing countries.

But one simple move could provide an important step forward:
that would be for the Copenhagen Conference to agree to instigate a universal international levy on aviation fuel – starting at 10p a litre. Remember UK motorists currently pay over 70p tax per litre. At present aviation fuel is tax-free.

This briefing sheet has been produced by AirportWatch.

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¹ http://www.icao.int/Act_Global/Aviation_Emissions-in-Context.pdf

² <http://aef.org.uk/?p=479>

³ <http://bit.ly/4Fumni>

⁴ <http://hmccc.s3.amazonaws.com/CCCAviationLetterSoS%2009.09.09.pdf>

⁵ http://assets.panda.org/downloads/ngo_treaty_bunker_briefing_fully_final.pdf

⁶ <http://www.iata.org/pressroom/pr/2009-09-22-01.htm>

