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The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
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15 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Open letter re 'jet zero' Council

We noted with interest your announcement on Friday that the Government will create a 'jet zero' council charged with making net zero emissions possible for future flights. As the UK's only NGO dedicated to making the case for policy action on aviation environmental impacts, we welcome this ambition.

We are pleased that the aviation industry has indicated to you its desire for a greener restart, something that environmental NGOs and unions have also called for. The scale of the challenge involved in tackling the emissions from aviation must not, however, be underestimated. As you noted on Friday transport is currently the UK's biggest greenhouse gas emitter when international aviation is included. Aviation is almost completely dependent on fossil fuels and is anticipated to be the single largest source of emissions in the UK in 2050. For the 'jet zero' council to be a worthwhile initiative it will be essential to ensure that it does not simply provide good PR for airlines and airports about a future aspiration while allowing emissions from the existing fleet to grow unhindered.

In order to meet the objective recently set out by your department for the decarbonisation of all transport modes, the Government should, we suggest, urgently address the following questions in relation to the role of the 'jet zero' council.

- 1. How does it fit with the need for measures to ensure rapid decarbonisation of the entire aviation sector by 2050?** At present, the Government has no climate policy in place for aviation, and the timetable for developing one remains unclear after various delays to the expected consultation on the climate update to the Aviation Strategy. AEF, together with a number of large environmental organisations, has set out the policy measures that are

required in order to build back better for aviation¹. A 'jet zero' council could help to progress delivery of the technology options considered under section 3 of that briefing. But the actions set out in sections 1 and 2 – on the need for the aviation sector to be held to account for its emissions in the context of the UK's economy-wide net zero law, and to pay a fair share towards delivering a green recovery – are essential for Government to deliver in parallel. There is currently little incentive for airlines to make the considerable investment that would be required to develop genuinely zero carbon technology or fuels, or to adopt them if available, for as long as kerosene remains a more affordable option. In the absence of meaningful policy to hold the industry to account, such as inclusion of its emissions in carbon budgets, the council risks looking like 'cover' for airlines to resume their former, unsustainable emissions trajectory.

- 2. How will you ensure that the work of the council is transparent and robust?** Your announcement indicated that the council would be composed of representatives from the aviation industry, government and environmental organisations. Early clarification is needed of the plans to include environmental groups on the Council as well as appropriate independent experts. It will be important to ensure transparency of the council's work, and if possible, to allow for external engagement given the wide interest it is likely to generate.
- 3. How will the council's work keep a 'whole economy' perspective?** Some technology options for aviation may look attractive to airlines or airports but fail to deliver the best use of resources at an economy-wide level. While some are arguing for incentives to increase the use of biofuels in aircraft, for example, the Committee on Climate Change has argued that because the supply of sustainable biomass is limited, it should be prioritised in sectors where it can be combined with carbon capture and storage. Making aircraft fuel from waste, meanwhile, reduces emissions from the waste sector but still produces CO₂ when burnt so cannot be 'net zero' from a whole-economy perspective.

A zero carbon flight across the Atlantic within a generation, the goal of the 'jet zero' council, will not be enough to meet the need for all flight to be net zero emissions within thirty years – the target to which the Government has effectively agreed in passing its net zero legislation. Nevertheless, a commitment to step up the development of new technologies is essential as one of the measures that the Government will need to put in place in order to ensure that we "build back better" for aviation. We hope that you will put in place the right measures both to ensure that the council is successful and to deliver effective policies for aviation in parallel.

We would be happy to discuss these issues with you.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Johnson
Director

¹ <https://www.aef.org.uk/2020/06/05/building-back-better-for-aviation-joint-ngo-briefing/>