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Robert Courts MP
Minister for Aviation and Maritime
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

18 May 2022

OPEN LETTER

Dear Minister

Your Government will shortly publish its Jet Zero strategy on how to decarbonise aviation, and while we welcome the intention of laying out a plan, we are concerned about the proposed approach. The technological solutions on which the Government is relying to deliver net zero aviation come with a high level of risk and are unable to deliver emissions reductions in the critical short term period between now and 2035. Expanding airports will increase the size of the problem. We urge you therefore to put a halt to airport expansion pending a review of both the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) for new runway infrastructure in the South-East of England, and the Making Best Use (MBU) policy for other airports.

The draft Jet Zero strategy is built around assumptions that increases in sustainable fuels and carbon removals will occur after 2030. There are also assumptions that improvements in efficiency will occur at a rate far faster than has been historically recorded. As proponents of climate action, we support the development of new technology to help in the decarbonisation of aviation. However, with no policy plan to ensure that the measures assumed in your modelling are delivered it is hard to have any confidence that they will be. While some policies are in the process of development, such as the SAF mandate proposal, it will clearly take time to establish many of them. Issues still to be addressed by way of policy include: delivering the level of carbon pricing assumed in the modelling; guaranteeing large-scale greenhouse gas removals; and increasing the rate of both aircraft and airspace efficiency improvements.

Meanwhile, many airports are bringing forward plans to expand their capacity and increase passenger numbers. Planning authorities have been left reliant on the Airports NPS and

MBU as statements of Government policy, both of which provide qualified support for expansion and indicate that carbon emissions should be considered at a national level. But these were written before the UK legislated for net zero and before the Government committed to include International Aviation and Shipping in the sixth carbon budget. Both the ANPS and MBU need to be reviewed.

As part of its sixth carbon budget advice, the Climate Change Committee said that “there should be no net expansion of UK airport capacity unless the sector is on track to sufficiently outperform its net emissions trajectory and can accommodate the additional demand.” Forcing local planning authorities to rely on out-of-date policies when making long-term infrastructure decisions is not compatible with either the nation’s net zero legal commitments or the Government’s Jet Zero aspirations.

The Government should not permit airport expansion until and unless aviation emissions are actually falling, and emissions are substantially below a 1.5C-compliant trajectory. Neither the Airports NPS nor MBU policies have yet been assessed for their compatibility with delivering net zero aviation by 2050, as committed to in the Transport Decarbonisation Plan of 2021 and in the Jet Zero Strategy of 2022, and these policies should be withdrawn until they are updated to become net-zero compliant.

We would welcome a meeting with you to discuss these issues, and our concerns, in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Clayton, Co-ordinator, AirportWatch
Cait Hewitt, Policy Director, Aviation Environment Federation
Dave Timms, Head of Political Affairs, Friends of the Earth
Roz Bulleid, Deputy Policy Director, Green Alliance
Doug Parr, Policy Director, Greenpeace UK
Leo Murray, Director of Innovation, Possible
Matt Finch, UK Policy Manager, Transport & Environment