

Better not bigger: a new era for airports policy?



<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/20/conservative-liberal-democrat-coalition-agreement-analysis>

In summer 2008, David Cameron announced that his party would oppose Heathrow expansion. There was a great deal of muttering about how he would inevitably change his mind if elected to power.

Nevertheless, the coalition government agreement contained even stronger wording - on Heathrow and on the other large London airports - than the Tories' manifesto. The government, it said, "will cancel the third runway at Heathrow" and "refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted."

AEF invited to join SE airports taskforce

To advance the 'better not bigger' agenda, a 13-member South East airports task force was assembled, with representatives from the CAA, various industry bodies, a consumer group, and AEF.

Chaired by aviation minister Theresa Villiers, the group aims to complete its work within a year and will focus very much on operational issues (reducing delays from immigration controls and improving the quality of rail terminals, for example), though AEF's request for the terms of reference to make explicit mention of local environmental impacts was upheld.

Regional airports policy uncertain

The picture on other UK airports is less clear. Any planning proposals for regional airports will need to be decided locally, the Department for Transport has told us, while government considers its policy. The Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), created under the 2008 Planning Act, will be abolished on the basis that planning decisions should not ultimately rest in the hands of

unelected officials. An announcement will be made shortly about whether we can still expect a National Policy Statement for major airports, due to have been drawn up this year to guide the IPC's decision-making. With runways at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted ruled out there are now, in any case, no qualifying projects in the pipeline.

And in the longer term? We'll be pushing for the current commitment on runways to be set in a more lasting framework. Given the limited scope for improvements in airspace and operational efficiencies (for example through the CAA's Future Airspace Strategy, which will be out for consultation in the autumn) the pressure for capacity increases on the ground seems likely to continue.

Noise and climate change

The framework for an environmentally sustainable aviation policy is still weak. The government is refusing to be drawn, for example, on whether it endorses the goal to stabilise emissions from UK aviation at 2005 levels - a sweetener accompanying Labour's policy on Heathrow expansion - and noise policy is similarly hazy.

DfT's review of noise action plans is, meanwhile, continuing, though they are unlikely to be given ministerial approval till the autumn. We'll be checking whether they're up to scratch.

Cait Weston

Economics round-up: aviation taxation, a review of aviation's economic benefits and a new airports bill

With the economy high on the political agenda, we thought it was time to catch up on some aviation economics.

Tax planes, not people

There has been talk of replacing APD (air passenger duty) with a per plane tax for a couple of years. Because APD is levied on passengers, tax on a half empty plane is much less than tax on a full plane, even though the environmental impact is much the same, while transfer passengers, business jets and freight are all exempt. Taxing planes rather than passengers would better reflect aviation's environmental impacts. And for the government, there is potentially more revenue to be had. Aviation remains under-taxed compared with most other goods and services, enjoying privileges worth about £10 billion per year.

Following pressure from NGOs including AEF, the previous government announced a proposal to switch to a per plane duty in 2008 but, fearful of causing further economic disruption, withdrew it at the end of that year during the banking crisis. The new government's coalition agreement then included support for this change but further action has been delayed till the autumn.

While the tax makes sense in principle, developing an appropriate banding system is complicated, since graduating it according to fuel consumption or

emissions performance could fall foul of international law that prevents the taxing of jet fuel. Even if alternative environmental indicators could be identified, there remains concern about 'leakage'. Higher taxes on long haul journeys could be evaded by UK passengers breaking their journey in another European country.

Parallel taxes covering other key European hubs could, of course, solve the problem. In June, Germany announced a new tax on departures, set to raise 1 billion Euros a year. France already has an air ticket tax (though the rates are low) and Holland withdrew its one-year old ticket tax only under intense industry lobbying during the economic crisis.

AEF met recently with the Treasury to discuss how to resolve the remaining barriers to a per plane tax. In these times of austerity and tax rises there is no excuse for aviation getting a free ride.

Costs and benefits of airport expansions

Meanwhile, the economic benefit of aviation was in the dock at a seminar for AEF members and associates to consider the recent report from the New Economics Foundation, *Grounded: a new approach to evaluating runway 3*. The last government claimed that building a third runway at Heathrow would benefit the UK by £5 billion, but by taking account of the social costs and benefits of the project using the Social Return On Investment tool, and updating the government's economic forecasts following the recession, NEF estimated that the third runway would in fact generate a £5 billion loss.

Although a third Heathrow runway is now off the agenda, the methodology has relevance for other airports.

Airports regulation bill

Finally, this year's Queen's speech announced an Airports Economic Regulation Bill. Large airports are regulated by the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority), to prevent exploitation by airport operators of their monopoly position. But the economic regulation functions of the CAA were specifically excluded from the proposal outlined in our Winter 09/10 newsletter to introduce a general environmental duty for the regulator.

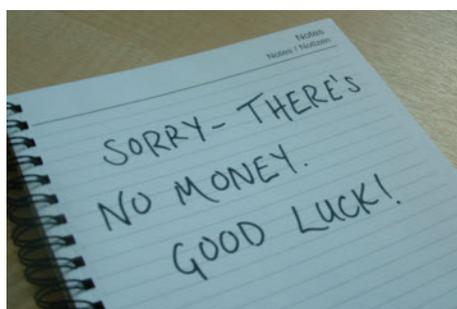
There will be a consultation on the proposed Airports Economic Regulation Bill in the autumn, though an announcement on 21st July indicated that the focus of the bill will be on airport competition and passenger needs. AEF will be arguing that making airports 'better not bigger' should mean better for everyone and not just for air passengers.

Nic Ferriday

First ever AEF maternity leave!

This edition of Flying Green is the last to be edited by AEF Deputy Director Cait Weston before she starts her maternity leave in mid-August. Cait's duties will be covered as far as possible by existing staff members during the six months she plans to take off, and Nic Ferriday and Roger Wood will each edit one edition of the newsletter.

Cait, who doesn't want to be outnumbered when joined by a new Hewitt at the end of August is finally giving up her maiden name and will return to work as Mrs Hewitt.



Soundscapes update: giving children a break



While adults debate policy on airport expansion, children at nearby schools wanting to play and learn outdoors may find they can't hear each other or their teacher. Earlier this year, AEF put together a project outline for children at schools affected by aircraft noise disruption to be able to visit quiet outdoor environmental educational settings. We partnered with the Colne Valley Park Centre, only a short bus ride away from many of the Hounslow candidate schools, but offering a very different soundscape with birdsong, insects in the long grass, falling and flowing water, normal speech communication,

even whispers to share exciting new findings.

Unfortunately, funding for a large scale pilot was turned down by Natural England on a technicality: while keen to promote local access to nature, they viewed the Colne Valley Park Centre as being outside the definition of "local", albeit that they acknowledged that local sites suffer the same noise pollution as the schools themselves. Our hope is now to run a smaller pilot scheme with one of the affected schools, Hounslow Heath Infant and Nursery School. With the third runway out of the picture, the headteacher remains concerned

about the restrictions on use of their school grounds due to relentless noise from landings and takeoffs.

The school has consistently been exemplary in its visible and verbal presence at many campaign events, latterly the High Court judgement, and on ITV News. The ash cloud break in air transport was an opportunity for the children of the school to state on national news bulletins what a difference it had made to their outdoor environment.

These children deserve better. The pilot will demonstrate that it is feasible to provide alternative outdoor learning environments. Long-term the industry must take responsibility for funding school trips to nature in quieter settings, as outlined in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper, and AEF plans to press Government to ensure that this happens at all schools affected by aircraft noise.

If you know of similar problems for schoolchildren near other airports and support the idea of trips out to quieter places, please contact us by email: info@aef.org.uk

**Julia Welchman
(AEF Executive Council)**

Some good news on AEF fundraising

The past 18 months have been difficult for AEF financially, with our main funder feeling the impact of the recession and substantially scaling back its financial support. A number of members made one-off donations or loans to help see us through this difficult time, and this has proved invaluable. At the same time, we have been actively seeking new sources of income.

We recently heard that we had successfully secured a substantial grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, whose members were so impressed by our work programme that they agreed to support a programme of core funding. Together with grants from Artists Project Earth and the Ashden Trust, this means that our balance sheet is looking healthier, and that we now have money in place to meet most of our costs this financial year.

Fundraising has now become an integral part of our schedule, and we will continue to work on broadening our income base.

AEF behind the scenes

- ❖ **Cait** met with the new transport Secretary, Phillip Hammond, and with Norman Baker, who has been given the newly created post within DfT of promoting alternatives to transport, such as videoconferencing. She also helped deliver a project for WWF on current UK airport capacities. The next phase of the work will set out how airport policy can be compatible with climate policy.
- ❖ **Tim J** spoke on three different panels at the UN ICAO Colloquium on Aviation and Climate Change, addressing the role of taxes in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from aircraft, and the challenges facing ICAO in developing a global strategy to tackle aviation emissions. He has also presented at Oxford University's Smith School and met with the Aviation Minister to discuss our priorities for the new government.
- ❖ **Tim T** has dealt with a number of helicopter noise inquiries, and with questions on aircraft noise from BAE Wharton and engine testing noise at Norwich Airport.
- ❖ **Nic** organised a seminar for AEF members and others to consider NEF's recent report on the economics of airport expansion (see page 2) and has written a number of items for the website, including on the EC's response to airlines seeking special treatment following the Iceland volcano and on the new government's views on South East runways and air taxes.
- ❖ **Jeff** - an Executive Council member - represented AEF at a meeting with the Treasury on the proposed per plane tax and met with the noise and transport representatives of the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen.
- ❖ **Roger** has been working on a new e-newsletter for AEF supporters and funders and on restoring the PayPal facility for making payments through the AEF website, and
- ❖ **Jason and Ben** - our most recent interns - have been helping to contact MPs to introduce AEF and our work, analysing some data from the Federal Aviation Administration on the forecast impact of US aviation on climate change, and working on a new set of useful facts and statistics for the website.

Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the Federation are as follows:

- to foster a climate of opinion which takes full account of the environmental issues arising from aircraft and aerodrome use;
- to promote a relationship between the environment and aviation in which the detrimental effects of aviation on quality of life and on the natural and man-made environment are kept to a minimum;
- to encourage wide discussion of the problems involved and to seek practical solutions;
- to consult and co-operate with local, national and international governments, the aviation industry, regulatory authorities, universities, professional institutions, research bodies, and any others for the purpose of reducing noise, disturbance and all forms of pollution by technical and operational means;
- to pursue these objectives with policy-making and legislative bodies - local, national and international - so that laws and policies include measures for effective environmental protection;
- to provide relevant advice and information to assist its members;
- to publicise and promote the viewpoint of the Federation through the media and through representation among bodies responsible for aviation matters as appropriate.

Helicopter Noise Coalition relaunches

Two years since its previous chair was forced to stand down from his post for health reasons, a new committee, including AEF members and others, formed in July to take on the running of the Helicopter Noise Coalition, an organisation set up to give advice and support to people around the UK affected by helicopter noise problems, and to campaign for more effective policy to tackle it.

HNC will meet three to four times per year at the AEF office, and will focus on providing information through its website - www.helicopter-noise.org.uk - to help people take action at a local level, feeding back to AEF any policy messages that we may be able to take up with government or regulators. An updated FAQs section is now online.

The committee is open to new members and welcomes any contributions that those with experience of the issues can make. To get in touch, visit the 'Contact us' page of the HNC website.

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