



Response to UK Government Jet Zero Consultation

September 2021

About us

Back Heathrow is a group of over 100,000 residents, businesses, and community groups who have come together to defend the jobs that rely on Heathrow Airport and campaign for its secure future. We are passionate about the positive role played by Heathrow in the lives of people in the communities that surround the airport and proud of the economic benefits it delivers for everyone in the UK.

Our supporters also care deeply about the environment. They understand the challenge of climate change and why the world needs to cut carbon emissions. We believe the key question for our government is how to address this huge issue whilst also protecting the nation's successful aviation industry, including the UK's only hub-airport, Heathrow. Back Heathrow is delighted that the UK government, in undertaking this Jet Zero Consultation, is demonstrating strong intent to finding an effective answer and there is much to commend here. However, we believe on specific issues it can go further and faster.

Serious ambition and honesty needed

Back Heathrow fully supports the UK government's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. This is a suitably ambitious target for the challenge of tackling climate change. As the nations of the world gather, under UK leadership, in November at COP26 in Glasgow we want this promise to be brought to life by securing international agreement on key issues. In doing so there must be an honest assessment of the role played by aviation. The fact is that aviation accounts for just 2% of global CO₂ emissions, but often it is painted as a carbon 'bogy man' when it is other industries that are the big polluters. Carbon is the enemy, not aviation.

We agree with the underlying theme of the consultation, that the challenge for aviation comes from how it successfully transitions from current modes of operation to a net-zero future, but it should be recognised that the industry, including Heathrow, is already making great strides on this journey. New operational practices are being adopted and innovative solutions developed that are available for use now. At the same time work on game-changing technology is taking place that will have a longer-term impact. Action is taking place.

SAFs – the bridge to net-zero

The new proposals detailed in this consultation for making the transition to net-zero are outlined within five measures. We make particular comment on the Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) measure, an area which has the potential to deliver significant, immediate gains in cutting carbon for the aviation industry.

Unlike other major industries who can transition more easily to net-zero practices, aviation faces deeper structural barriers. Getting large aircraft into the air and keeping them there demands a lot of power and currently this is produced from kerosene. The future for hydrogen-powered aircraft and electric planes is extremely promising, but their widespread use is years away. Action is needed now to help build a bridge between the current situation for aviation and this net-zero future. Thankfully, SAFs provide an immediate and available option.

SAFs, produced from sustainable feedstocks, such as cooking oil and agricultural, household, or industrial waste, can be easily added to an aircraft's fuel mix, replacing a proportion of the kerosene used. This practice is already in operation across the world and major carriers in the US and Europe are blending SAFs into their fuel for use on flights. This is a practice that can reduce lifecycle carbon emissions by up to 80%. Using SAFs at scale throughout aviation across the world would contribute hugely to the battle to cut carbon emissions, but this will not happen unless governments everywhere start taking action to mandate their use.

The UK government is signalling through this exercise and the consultation on the UK SAF Blending Mandate that it recognises action is needed here. Back Heathrow believes this is an opportunity for the UK to take the lead on SAFs by establishing strong measures for their use and their sourcing, and then secure agreement from nations across the world at COP26. We are arguing for:

- Aviation fuel to contain at least 10% SAF by 2030 – a 100-fold increase on today's level – and at least 50% SAF by 2050
- SAFs to be made from sustainable sources, such as waste products and captured carbon.

Putting SAFs in the mix will reduce the CO₂ produced by aviation, now. It will also provide valuable breathing space for longer term, carbon-free solutions to evolve, so that by 2050 aviation and the world can reach its net-zero destination.

The positives in using SAFs are not just environmental. They also have the potential to also deliver up to 11,000 new jobs for the UK, alongside an additional £1.6bn per annum in economic benefits. The government should embrace this opportunity to develop a powerful domestic industry that cuts carbon and also provides prosperity for our people.

Other measures

Back Heathrow is supportive of new proposals contained within System Efficiencies and, as the report correctly identifies, Heathrow is helping set the pace through the trialling of autonomous cargo pods and driverless shuttles, along with electric tugs being used for ground handling. This shows how changes to airport operations can have a sizeable effect on carbon emissions.

The Zero Emission Flight (ZEF) measure contains new proposals that move in the right direction. We are strong advocates of the environmental benefits provided by hydrogen-



powered and electric aircraft. These industries of the future have the capability to create tens of thousands of new jobs and such tangible economic positives will be warmly welcomed by our supporters for themselves and the next generation.

We welcome the recognition within Markets and Removals that there is a role to play for offsetting and green gas removal (GGR) schemes. Heathrow has long taken action in this area and in 2018 began a process of restoring peatlands that will keep carbon in the soil and prevent emissions. One such project in Little Woolden Moss, Lancashire is restoring 70 hectares of peatland that has up until now been used for extraction. According to DEFRA indicators, the restoration of this project area could lead to savings of 22,427 tonnes of CO₂ over 30 years – equivalent to nearly 64,000 passenger journeys from Heathrow to New York.

We also welcome the opening statement in Influencing Consumers that “flying is a social and economic good and one that we wholeheartedly support as a key part of building Global Britain”. Of course, demand has been hit by the pandemic, but the human desire to travel and connect with others is powerful and should not be inhibited by interventions that seek to prevent or limit this. The consultation states, “The approach we intend to set out in our Strategy will prioritise in-sector reductions through technological and operational improvements, then seek to address residual carbon emissions through robust, verifiable off-sets and additional greenhouse gas removals.” It is encouraging to hear this considered approach from the government, rather than crude attempts to limit passengers from travelling.

In summary

If left unchecked, climate change will severely damage life on our planet. It must be tackled, and this consultation is a great opportunity for the UK government to set the pace in achieving big reductions in carbon emissions from our aviation sector. There is much within the report to commend, including recognition of the challenges of achieving rapid transformation to zero-carbon operations. Quite simply, we need to move further and faster on deploying available carbon reduction measures in the time before longer-term solutions come on stream. It’s time for action. That’s why Back Heathrow is calling for meaningful action from the government on SAFs. We have the power to take a strong stand at home but also, through COP26, a unique opportunity to get international agreement on their production and use. It’s time to put SAFs in the mix.

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