

Bristol Airport Inquiry Statement

First, to introduce myself:

I'm an American, and permanent resident in the UK since the early 1970's. I have siblings and extended family in the USA.

My professional background is as a community artist, community mediator (mainly neighbour disputes) and creative producer.

Through my work in community arts, I travelled widely, in Europe, N America, Japan & NZ. I live in Bath, directly under the flight path to the airport.

As an artist and arts professional, I make no claims to understand all of the technical, financial or scientific information in this Inquiry, though I have read widely the subject.

There was a strong theme of community development in my professional life. How is this relevant to the Inquiry? I think as an artist I am able to add layers of meaning and interpretation to everyday experience in order to reflect different perspectives and increase the accessibility of ideas and experiences. My work, particularly as a mediator in many different community contexts, has taught me the value of listening to many voices and perspectives, and recognising peoples' different needs. My work in the theatre meant that I was able to have wide experience of different countries and different cultures and an understanding that, what may be taken for granted in one culture, might be creating harm to people in another culture.

As a member of a local community, I take certain things for granted, e.g. services like education, welfare, the NHS, etc. and local democratic process. It is important in a participatory democracy that people feel that their votes count, and that politicians can be trusted to implement policies that are in the interests of their local communities. We need to be able to trust that they will take decisions in our best interests, that will do no harm to future generations. North Somerset CI evaluated all the evidence against increasing flights and passenger numbers, and listened to their constituents and turned down the expansion plans. This is what a functioning democracy looks like.

However, BAL and Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan Fund seem to want to override local democratic process and impose an expansion of passenger numbers, flights, and carbon emissions on our community - because they can. They have the money to demand this Inquiry, to fund expensive public relations and greenwashing campaigns.

We are in a CLIMATE CRISIS. Climate change is real, it's caused by human activity, it's here, and it's going to get a lot worse. This is no longer opinion; it is fact, and every individual, corporation, or global industry must consider the long-term consequences of every decision they make. There is an urgent issue about the legacy we are leaving future generations: I have two beautiful granddaughters; I'm assuming that you have children and will have grandchildren. It is not just our children & grandchildren, but also the world's most vulnerable communities who are disproportionately affected by droughts, flooding, rising sea levels and violent storms.

The longer we take to reach net-zero, the higher the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere and the worse the impacts of climate change. I am obviously concerned about emissions because I live under the flight path.

We learned earlier this year that pollution from the combustion of fossil fuels is not only fuelling the climate crisis but was responsible for 8.7 million deaths globally in 2018: more than H.I.V., malaria, and tuberculosis combined. (Environmental Research, Vol 195, April 2021)

I believe it is the role of this Inquiry and all of us to encourage corporate and institutional responsibility by contesting decisions that demonstrate harm to future generations. Businesses and other institutions should be encouraged to limit their use of aviation and to publish environmental impacts before choosing to embark on projects that will increase CO2 emissions and other environmental impacts.

I am not against flying or regional airports. Flying is deeply embedded in contemporary life. But I believe this needs to change in the coming decades. Bristol Airport is big enough until such time as the technology for sustainably powered flights is available at scale and with zero emissions. All the research I have read indicates that this is a long way off, and certainly not attainable within this part of the century.

The fact is frequent flyers need to fly less because UK government statistics for England show that in 2017 just 1% people took 20% of all flights abroad, and 10% of people took 52% of all flights abroad.

Though I am not a frequent flyer, I will fly less, and I have already made that commitment. The IPCC report tells us that emissions have to fall dramatically next year, and the year after, and keep falling dramatically if we are to limit global warming to 2C.(quoting the report):

“The central conclusion from the overall linear increase in temperatures relative to emissions is that nothing short of a complete cessation of CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions will significantly stabilize the climate, and there is also a time delay of at least several decades after emissions cease before the climate can begin to stabilize.”

“The report points out that between 64 and 86 percent of carbon emissions are directly related to fossil fuel combustion, with estimates approaching 100 percent lying well within the statistical margin of error. Thus, there is no way to begin to reverse climate disruptions without an end to burning fossil fuels.”

<https://climateandcapitalism.com/>,

“IPCC Report: Key Findings & Radical Implications” by Brian Tokar Aug 19 2021

I am an artist, not a scientist, economist or law-maker, but it seems pretty obvious to me that this expansion proposal will mean that emissions will rise significantly, with implications for public health as well as a secure and stable future for our children and grandchildren. There is no way to fly long distances without causing massive carbon emissions. Not now, and not in any realistic vision of the next 50 years.

Whether we can act soon enough is now the critical issue. I would ask this Inquiry to demonstrate their willingness to address the transformations that are now required by all of us in order to protect life on this planet. Please reject this expansion proposal.

Notes:

Most flights abroad are taken by a minority of people. UK government statistics for England show that in 2017 just 1% people took 20% of all flights abroad, and 10% of people took 52% of all flights abroad.

*The 1% and 10% figures are based on National Travel Survey data for England. See table NTSQ08004 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ad-hoc-national-travel-survey-analysis#flights>

*People who fly more tend to have higher incomes: In 2016, the DfT found that “The proportion of people who took at least one international flight in the last 12 months increased with household income level, from 30% in the lowest quintile to 70% in the highest.” See page 26 of Department for Transport, “National Travel Survey: 2016 report”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2016>

As long as fuel for air travel is relatively cheap and untaxed, airlines have little incentive to innovate.

- We know that most carbon offset schemes don’t work.
- Synthetic fuels are as yet untested on the scale needed for aviation, and take massive amounts of energy to create.

The Government’s support for blue hydrogen is further subsidising carbon fuel companies while delivering only minimal gains for the environment and local communities. The infrastructure needed for a hydrogen economy would still be problematic in terms of its ecological footprint, and unsustainable. A peer-reviewed study from Cornell University found that ‘fugitive’ emissions were actually greater than traditional forms of extracting and burning gas. (“How Green is Blue Hydrogen?” 12 August 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ese3.956>)

- Support development of new technology, by all means, but don’t rely on it until it’s ready.

Annie Beardsley

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