

Appeal by Bristol Airport Limited Related to Bristol Airport, North Side Road and Bristol Airport Limited (Land at A38 and Downside Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 2020

Personal Testimony 16 September 2021. Weston-super-Mare

**Marcus Grant, CMLI FFPH
Environmental Stewardship for Health**

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this enquiry.

I want to provide the inquiry with a small personal account. I know the enquiry is hearing from a very large number of local people, from politicians, and also from many excellent expert witnesses.

I was moved to want to appear after hearing some of the early accounts of business and potential business trends in the region with respect to air travel. I am based in Bristol.

I provide an account of someone involved as a sole trader in a research consultancy providing support to the World Health Organisation Healthy Cities programme and United Nations Human Settlement Programme, UN Habitat, with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular human and planetary health. I was an associate professor for healthy urban environments and deputy director of a WHO Collaborating Centre until 2016, and now continue similar research and consultancy independently. I am Editor-in-Chief of a peer reviewed academic journal called Cities & Health.

- I will speak firstly to my own business trends in terms of international travel.
- Then reinforce messages I hope you have already heard about the threat to planetary and population health posed by the impact of aviation related carbon emissions.
- And conclude with brief observations from my attendance at COP15 (Copenhagen) and speaking at the COP21 event (Paris).

So firstly, as a research consultant I have the opportunity and am asked to attend many international project meetings, and conferences and also to provide education and training overseas. Over the past seven years or more, I can track a steep decline in the degree to which I undertake these commitments using flights. I have been year on year cutting down on air travel, due to the known impact on climate breakdown. Initially there used to be two prongs to this.

- Firstly, restricting long haul flights to one a year, from a previous two or even three.
- Secondly, across continental Europe, traveling one way by air and return, say, by train. As such for business I have travelled to, or come back, by train to Bristol from Coimbra in Portugal, from Barcelona, Freiburg, Rotterdam, Copenhagen, Berlin and even Vienna. The later in a single day, city centre to my home in Bristol.

More recently, with the experience of the pandemic and the rise in virtual and also hybrid conferences, I now intend to reduce further my air travel, probably to one long-haul flight every other year, if that. I intend all continental travel, business and leisure to undertaken by surface modes.

Threats to population and planetary health. My work involves engaging with the World Health Organisation as an expert advisor. So I accept that I am sensitised by their conclusions for health from climate breakdown. As we know from the IPCC, 'extreme heat thresholds relevant to ... health are projected to be exceeded more frequently at higher global warming levels ([with] *high confidence*)' (1p32)

- With regards to the WHO, there are many technical reports that I hope experts will present to this enquiry, but I chose this statement from WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus: *"The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet. Any efforts to make our world safer are doomed to fail unless they address the critical interface between people and pathogens, and the existential threat of climate change, that is making our Earth less habitable."* His address to the 73rd World Health Assembly last year (2). With health we are, of course, not just talking about direct health impacts from extreme weather: but worrying and unpredictable changes in patterns of human disease and disease vectors, fresh water distribution and access, crop patterns, crop disease patterns and ultimately mass population migration as parts of the earth become unable to support human health.
- And with regards to the UN, I simply remind the enquiry of these statements 'People are experiencing climate change in diverse ways. It affects our health, ability to grow food, housing, safety and work' and that however small: 'Every increase in global warming matters' (3).

But it is not only me, this knowledge and that individual commitment and action can make a difference is spreading, both in my professional circles, and ever wider circles all the time. Once I was in a minority as a business traveller making my way across continental Europe by train, now I regularly see social media accounts of similar journeys. And this sensitivity to the damage that air travel causes is now replicated in the main stream media, for example - questioning of a government minister flying whilst on climate focussed negotiations (4) and the coverage of a recent report saying that we had previously underestimated the social cost of carbon dioxide emissions - expressed as the 'real cost of flying' in the main stream media (5).

Finally to say, that having attended COP 15 (Copenhagen) and speaking at the COP 21 (Paris) event, it is evident to me that people in the UK and our societal decision-making systems, such as the planning system, are lagging in their ability to respond appropriately to this threat; which is already affecting millions worldwide.

Maybe COP 26 will help us all wake-up and catch-up? We need to step outside business-as-usual. An analogy is the glimpses we had back in Winter 2019 of what was happening in Wuhan seemingly so far far away. The lesson being that we need to take stock and act now before we are forced to act, too late in the day, and in a draconian and crisis riven manner.

As the WHO and UN-Habitat say in a recent joint report ‘If the purpose of planning is not for human and planetary health, then what is it for? (6 p.X)

Human health can be a material consideration at many levels of planning in England and Wales. The airline industry may say that regular flights to holiday destinations are good for an individual’s health; but climate breakdown is already diminishing the health, security and well-being of many communities at a population level, and this is only set to affect more people and with more intensity, unless those of us with capacity to act, act now and act beyond business-as-usual.

References

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3. UN. Climate Action Fast Facts. Undated. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/fastfacts-what-is-climate-change.pdf>
4. Guardian Friday 6 August 2021. 'Alok Sharma is trying to save the world. Should he be able to fly to do it?' https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/06/close-to-point-of-no-return-climate-scientists-to-stress-urgent-need-to-act?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
5. Kikstra, J. et al. 2021. The social cost of carbon dioxide under climate-economy feedbacks and temperature variability. Preprint at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350443280_The_social_cost_of_carbon_dioxide_under_climate-economy_feedbacks_and_temperature_variability
6. Integrating health in urban and territorial planning: a sourcebook. Geneva: UN-HABITAT and World Health Organization. 2020. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003170>