

AEF RESPONDS TO GOVERNMENT'S 'JET ZERO' STRATEGY

15th August, 2022

In July, the Government launched its [plans for delivering net zero aviation](#). According to Transport Minister Grant Shapps, the plans will allow for “guilt free flying” .

The ‘Jet Zero’ strategy sets out how the Government plans to meet its commitment that aviation emissions from the UK will, like those from every other sector, be brought down to net zero by 2050, with sub-targets to make domestic flights and airports net zero by 2040.

Prior to publication, AEF, Green Alliance, Friends of the Earth, Possible and Transport and Environment set out [five tests](#) for measuring the effectiveness of the strategy in meeting climate targets for 2035 and 2050. We said:

1. It should be published alongside detailed policy proposals on how its ambitions will be achieved, with specific policy mechanisms to create incentives for the development and deployment of zero emission aircraft and sustainable aviation fuel.
2. It should develop and adopt a decarbonisation pathway that has a significant reduction in emissions by 2035, compared to the pre-pandemic baseline
3. It should introduce a framework to manage emissions by reducing passenger demand, since technological solutions may not deliver emissions reductions at the rate necessary to meet the decarbonisation pathway, and no airport expansion should be permitted in the interim.
4. It must include specific policies to address the significant non-CO₂ climate impacts of aviation.
5. It must ensure the polluter pays principle is applied across all carbon emissions from flying, and the full costs of aviation decarbonisation measures should be borne by the aviation industry, not the taxpayer.

So how does the strategy measure up?

Things AEF likes:

- There is at least – at last – a strategy. Relying on the industry to deliver carbon reductions on its own hasn’t, historically, gone well. 2019 (pre-pandemic) saw the highest ever level of CO₂ emissions from aviation, both in the UK and globally.
- There is also a planned trajectory for aviation emissions to fall between now and 2050, with 2019 being regarded as the peak year. NGOs had criticized earlier plans to allow emissions to grow back post-pandemic before falling after 2030.
- There’s a commitment to reviews every five years to see if the industry’s on track to deliver planned emissions cuts.

Things AEF is less impressed by:

- The policy measures are minimal and flaky. Near-term policies are limited to strengthening the UK emissions trading system and introducing a mandate for sustainable aviation fuels.
- A target of net zero domestic flying by 2040 might sound ambitious, but domestic flights only account for 4% of total UK aviation emissions. Similarly, the target to make airports net zero by 2040 only applies to ground emissions from airport sources like heating and lighting requirements and on-site vehicles.
- A commitment to providing better consumer info about the CO₂ from flights is a good idea. But claiming at the same time that people can fly “guilt free” instantly undermines that idea of personal responsibility and agency.
- The pathway and reviews are only worth having if there’s some way to enforce them, but there are no penalties proposed for emissions which exceed the Government’s trajectory. It’s not clear what levers the Government will pull if emissions turn out to be higher than they hoped.
- The strategy supports what it calls ‘sustainable airport growth’, ignoring CCC recommendations to delay decisions on new capacity until it can be seen if the tech delivers fast enough. Element Energy (EE)’s [report for AEF](#) earlier this year concluded that a halt to airport capacity growth and demand reduction measures

pose a far less risky approach to hitting net zero aviation by 2050 and the 78% economy-wide emissions cut to which the Government has committed by 2035.

- Although the strategy agrees to increase understanding of non-CO2 effects and potential mitigation options, there is no commitment to address or reduce these impacts.
- When it comes to ensuring the polluter pays principle is applied, it’s looking like the taxpayer, rather than passengers or industry, will shoulder both the cost of decarbonisation technologies and the climate cost of the Government’s refusal to constrain demand.

Tim Johnson, AEF Director said on the day of publication:

“We welcome the Government’s commitment to hold the industry to account for delivering net zero aviation emissions, including a process to review progress and strengthen policy as required. The sector’s historic failure to cut the total emissions despite decades of talk is partly down to the absence of any real penalties for increasing their use of fossil fuels. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 2019 was a record year for aviation CO2 emissions.

“But ministers are not being honest about what it will take to achieve net zero flying. The strategy avoids answering the difficult questions like the need to fly less, and calling a halt to airport expansions.”

Cait Hewitt, Policy Director at AEF said:

“The Government is relying on technological breakthroughs from industry while allowing for continued growth. But some of these plans just don’t add up. For example, to make enough synthetic e-fuel to meet the existing jet fuel demand from the UK aviation sector would require an offshore wind farm the size of Northern Ireland.

“Despite the Government’s support for aviation growth post-pandemic, employment in the sector has become increasingly precarious and unattractive. Given the need to limit passenger demand in order to meet climate goals, the Government must outline how it intends to ensure a just transition to create green, sustainable and secure jobs.”

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