

FAO: Secretary of State for Transport

Department for Transport
33 Horseferry Road, London
SW1P 4DR

FAO: Chancellor of the Exchequer

HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road, London
SW1A 2HQ

First by email: Rt Hon Heidi Alexander; Rt Hon Rachel Reeves

Copied to: Rt Hon Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero; Mike Kane MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport; Ruth Cadbury MP, Transport Select Committee Chair; Toby Perkins MP, Environmental Audit Committee Chair

Dear Secretary of State and Chancellor,

Re: Expansion of Heathrow Airport, Gatwick Airport, and other UK airports

We are writing as economists, transport experts and academics concerned about recent government announcements encouraging further expansion of UK airports. The economic benefits are at best uncertain, and there are no indications that the environmental and health impacts of airport expansion can be adequately mitigated. The proposed review of the Airports National Policy Statement should not pre-judge the case for expansion and must involve a thorough and balanced impact assessment.

UK businesses already enjoy the economic, environmental and work-life balance benefits of online connectivity, with business flights down 20% on pre-COVID levels and not expected to return any time soon.¹ If government believes that business travel will expand in future, it might first explore lower cost options, including better utilisation of capacity in the Channel Tunnel, incentivising airlines to prioritise higher-productivity routes, and encouraging businesses to transport goods by rail and sea.

For households, the UK economy would benefit from more tourists holidaying at home. UK residents spend a net £40bn more on visits abroad than overseas residents spend on visits to the UK.² Policy should focus on bringing this outflow back to UK high streets by cutting the cost of public and active travel and regenerating the UK's held-back tourist destinations. This, combined with encouraging more sustainable trips, perhaps fewer in number but longer in duration, can deliver wins for the environment and economy and spread economic activity around the regions and nations.

UK residents' tourism emissions are the fifth highest in the world³ and net zero aviation remains a distant, costly prospect. According to the Royal Society, powering air travel with home-grown biofuels would require 30-68% of UK agricultural land, in conflict with food security, while hydrogen would require electricity equivalent to 68-95% of the UK's current generation, overstressing demand.⁴ Neither electric nor hydrogen-powered flight are anywhere near readiness, and the small operational efficiency gains in traditional aircraft made in the last few decades have been completely lost to increased passenger traffic. In addition,

¹ See: FT, 28 Feb. 2025. British Airways owner warns business travel will not return to pre-pandemic levels.

² See: ONS Travel Trends: 2023

³ See: Sun et al. (2024) Drivers of global tourism carbon emissions. Nature Communications, 15: 10384

⁴ See: Royal Society (2023) Net zero aviation fuels: resource requirements and environmental impacts.

worsening air quality and noise will bring costs to health services, businesses and society, with the impacts falling hardest on deprived communities.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Malcolm Sawyer, Professor (Emeritus) of Economics at University of Leeds
Professor Calvin Jones, Professor of Economics at Cardiff University
Professor Ozlem Onaran, Professor of Economics at University of Greenwich
Professor Annina Kaltenbrunner, Professor of Global Economics, University of Leeds
Professor Tim Jackson, Director, Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity, University of Surrey
Professor Justin Spinney, Professor of Sustainable Transport and Mobility, University of the West of England
Professor Elisa Van Waeyenberge, Professor of Development Economics, Dean of College at SOAS University of London
Professor Engelbert Stockhammer, Professor of Political Economy at King's College London
Professor Peter Bradley, Professor of Sustainable Economy, University of the West of England
Professor Andrew Tylecote, Professor (Emeritus) of the Economics and Management of Technological Change, University of Sheffield
Professor Chris Holden, Professor of Social and Public Policy at University of York
Professor Milena Büchs, Professor of Sustainable Welfare at University of Leeds
Professor David Metz, Professor (hon) Centre for Transport Studies, at University College London
Professor Grazia Ietto-Gillies, Professor (Emerita) of Applied Economics at London South Bank University
Dr Richard Bärnthaler, Assistant Professor in Ecological Economics, University of Leeds
Dr Peter Earl, Associate Professor in Economics, University of Queensland, Australia
Dr Alex Chapman, Senior Economist at the New Economics Foundation
Dr Gareth Dale, Reader in Political Economy at Brunel University
Dr Yannis Dafermos, Reader in Economics, SOAS University of London
Dr Anke Winchenbach, Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Transport at University of Surrey
Dr Sebastian Berger, Senior Lecturer in Economics at University of the West of England
Dr. Jennifer Churchill, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of the West of England
Dr Ian Smith, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of the West of England
Dr Neil Lancaster, Senior Lecturer in Economics at De Montfort University
Dr Andrew Jackson, Senior Research Fellow in Economics, University of Surrey
Dr Bianca Orsi, Lecturer in Economics, University of Leeds
Dr Thomas Lambert, Associate Professor in Economics at University of Louisville
Dr Noel Cass, Research Fellow, Institute for Transport Studies at University of Leeds
Dr Steve Melia, Visiting Fellow in Transport and Planning at University of the West of England

With support from academics in allied disciplines and early career researchers

Professor Neil Edwards, Professor of Earth System Science at The Open University
Professor Jennifer Mindell, Professor (Emerita) of Public Health at University College London
Professor Tom Shakespeare, Professor of Disability Research at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Professor James Dyke, Associate Professor of Earth System Science at University of Exeter
Professor Mark Everard, Visiting Professor of Ecosystem Services at University of Bournemouth
Professor Sue Atkinson, Visiting Professor of Public Health, at University College London
Professor (hon) Michael Edwards, at UCL Bartlett School of Planning
Dr Adam Barrett, Associate Professor in Machine Learning and Data Science at University of Sussex
Dr Adam Povey, Assistant Professor of Earth Observation at University of Leicester
Dr Michael Joffe, Reader (Emeritus) at Imperial College London
Dr Stephen John Watkins, Co-chair, Transport and Health Science Group
Dr Jemima Stockton, Research Associate, University College London
Dr Lake Sagaris, Associate Adjunct Professor in Transport, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Dr Ursula Balderson, Research Fellow on Just Transition, University of Leeds
Dr Jonathan Busch, Lecturer in sustainability, University of Leeds
Dr Alice Damiano, Teaching Fellow in Ecological Economics, University of Leeds
Josh Moos, Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University
Dr Andrew L. Fanning, at Doughnut Economics Action Lab
Manu Teague-Sharpe, Postgraduate researcher, University of Bristol
Rose Meadows, University of Leicester
Rhidian Thomas, Research Scientist at University of Reading
Tom Youngman, Research Fellow at University of the West of England
Shannon Kennedy, MFPH, Public Health Specialty Registrar, School of Public Health, Yorkshire and the Humber
Mads Hoefer, Doctoral Student, University of Oxford
Eleanor Roaf MSc FFPH, Deputy Chair, FPH Climate and Health Committee, Faculty of Public Health
Harrie Mort, Postgraduate researcher, University of Leeds
Sam Betts-Davies, Postgraduate Researcher, University of Leeds
Yik Hang Ngai, MFPH, Public Health Specialty Registrar, School of Public Health, London