

Breaking the holding pattern

A new approach to aviation policymaking in the UK

Executive summary



Sustainable
Development Commission

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UK aviation delivers multiple benefits – supporting economic growth and employment, and increasing social welfare through expanding opportunities, improving long-distance links, widening experience, and through cultural exchange. However, these benefits have associated costs – particularly greenhouse gas emissions, and negative impacts on the communities around aviation facilities.

Projections for large increases in aviation volumes, as outlined in the 2003 UK Air Transport White Paper, have prompted vigorous debate about the contribution of aviation to sustainable development.

Consequently in 2007 and early 2008, to inform its advice to government, the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC), with the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), ran a Stakeholder Assessment on aviation. This unlocked a range of views, from businesses, industry representatives, governments, academia, citizens' groups and NGOs. Key aspects of this Assessment – methodology, commissioning partners and summary of transcripts follow at the back of this report. The full transcripts of the Stakeholder Assessment can be downloaded from the SDC website at www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/aviation.html.

The conclusions and recommendations in this report, though informed by the Stakeholder Assessment referred to hereafter, represent the opinion of SDC and IPPR. However, we have undertaken extensive consultations about our own report with participants of the Assessment.

During the Assessment, we heard of frustration and confusion about the lack of agreed data and transparency in the debate on UK aviation, and that much basic evidence on which current and future policy is based, is in dispute.

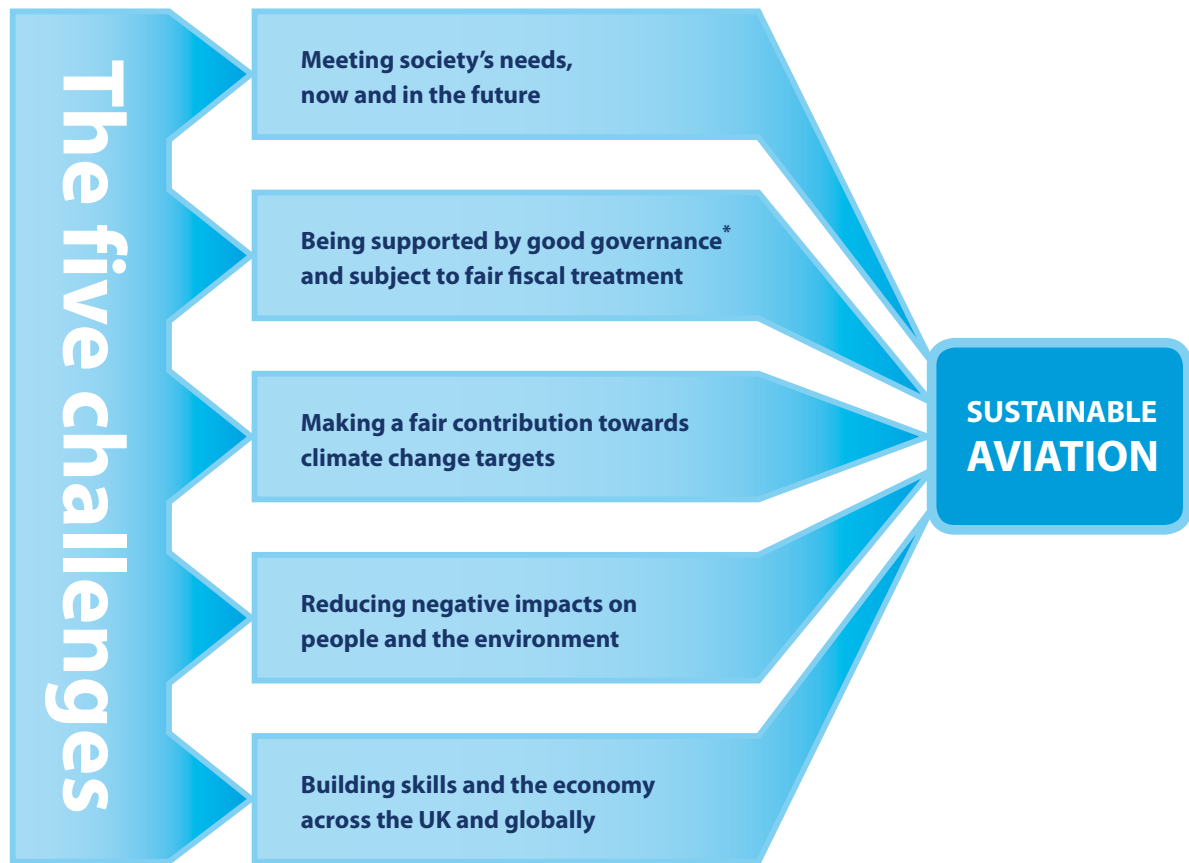
The SDC and IPPR believe that this conflict is not in the interest of government, the public, or the aviation industry. It undermines government plans for aviation, delays decision-making, and diverts the efforts of government and industry to mitigate the environmental impacts of aviation.

Yet the Assessment also found enthusiasm within industry, citizens' groups, academics and NGOs for on-going constructive dialogue, and unanimity in the desire for more sustainable air transport policies. There is consensus about the need for accurate and impartial information, and the importance of tackling climate change. There is some enthusiasm for collaborative action where there are common interests, such as in the potential for technology.

We recommend that Government acts to embrace this goodwill. It should update its aviation policies to build UK skills and the economy, set tough emission and noise reduction targets, and develop a fair fiscal climate for aviation. This requires a Special Commission charged with undertaking major independent review of UK aviation policy and a Government commitment to revise the Air Transport White Paper by 2010/11, informed by the findings and recommendations of the Commission.

We believe that such a process is best jointly commissioned by a mixed stakeholder steering group from government, business, NGOs and citizens' groups, and convened by a trusted and independent chair. It should develop an agreed evidence base drawing on the latest scientific and expert opinion, and initiate a public and stakeholder dialogue on the future of aviation in the UK.

The Special Commission should structure its work around the five key challenges identified in the Stakeholder Assessment, and in the context of the government's own sustainable development principles, ensuring a strong, healthy and just society whilst living within environmental limits, underpinned by sound science, good governance and a sustainable economy.¹



* Defined in the Governments SD strategy as: Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people's creativity, energy and diversity.

To conclude, the SDC and IPPR recommend that the Special Commission should look to involve four stages:

- 1 Create an updated evidence base on the key aspects of the economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of UK aviation, seeking maximum consensus among stakeholders.**
- 2 Undertake a deliberative dialogue with the public and key stakeholders on the future of aviation in the UK, setting out policy options to stimulate a national debate.**
- 3 Coordinate and support immediate action in areas where broad agreement exists between stakeholders, such as on integrated transport, technological innovation, and business travel.**
- 4 Make recommendations to Government for revising the Air Transport White Paper and developing the national policy statement on aviation, using the agreed data and results of the dialogue.**

The Sciencewise Centre, based in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, has the necessary skills and would be well placed to help carry out this review.

The Special Commission should begin work in the autumn of 2008 (so that it fits the proposed timetable of the ATWP progress report and National Policy Statement on aviation), and be strategic, UK-wide, independent and separately evaluated.

We recommend that the Government should commit to revise the Air Transport White Paper informed by this Special Commission and its recommendations

Airport expansion

During the Stakeholder Assessment we did not discuss specific airport expansion proposals – including those at Heathrow or Stansted. The proposals were felt to be so controversial that they would have distracted from the wider debate on UK aviation. For the same reason, **the SDC and IPPR believe government should consider major airport expansion only after receiving recommendations from the Special Commission and the subsequent revision of**

the Air Transport White Paper. We recognise the pressure for decisive action, and the preparation within government and industry for early decisions. But while the evidence informing these decisions is so widely contested, and the outcomes of important political decisions on addressing aviation's climate impacts remain uncertain, we believe the risks of decisions in favour of expansion outweigh the possible benefits.

Glossary of abbreviations

ATWP	Air Transport White Paper 2003
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDC	Sustainable Development Commission