



Bristol Airport expansion consultation - Safe Landing response

This is Safe Landing's response to [the public consultation](#) on expanding Bristol Airport to 15 million passengers per annum (15mppa), compared to its current capacity of 10-12 mppa.

Introduction

Safe Landing is a global community of aviation workers and enthusiasts who care about the future of our industry and our planet. We want to live in a world where aviation flourishes in harmony with nature, and the beauty of flying can be enjoyed by all for generations to come. Our community includes pilots, cabin crew, air traffic controllers, aerospace engineers, airline, airport and factory workers. Our network is global, but many of us are UK-based.

We love flying and want a sustainable future for air travel that can bring social and economic prosperity. We invite Bristol Airport to reconsider their current expansion plans and instead commit to build the infrastructure needed to pioneer zero-carbon & hybrid-powered aircraft.

We believe aviation will continue to play an important role in connecting people, businesses and regions. However, our long-term success depends upon embracing the transition to cleaner aircraft and ensuring that investment today supports the air travel of tomorrow.

We therefore oppose Bristol Airport's proposed expansion to 15 million passengers per year.

Our objection is not based on opposition to flying itself. Rather, we believe the proposal would lock Bristol Airport into decades of dependence on conventional fossil fuel-powered aircraft at precisely the moment when we are beginning a transition towards cleaner flight.

Instead of pursuing conventional expansion, we believe Bristol has an extraordinary opportunity to become Europe's leading regional hub for zero-carbon and hybrid-powered aircraft. This alternative economic strategy would create a more resilient local economy, support highly-skilled employment, strengthen the UK's aerospace leadership and improve quality of life for both workers and communities surrounding the airport.

The question facing Bristol is therefore not whether aviation should grow.

It is what kind of aviation Bristol should grow.

Bristol has always led aviation innovation

Few places have contributed more to aviation than Bristol.

The city helped pioneer one of aviation's greatest engineering achievements through Concorde, demonstrating that the city has never been content to simply follow others.

Today, Bristol remains one of Europe's leading aerospace clusters. The region is home to world-leading aerospace manufacturers, airframe design, propulsion specialists, advanced

composites expertise and an emerging generation of companies developing zero-carbon aircraft technologies.

These include established organisations such as Airbus, Rolls-Royce and GKN Aerospace alongside innovative companies developing the next generation of aircraft and propulsion systems, including Vertical Aerospace, Sora and nearby Electron, Evolito and ZeroAvia.

This unique concentration of expertise gives Bristol an opportunity that very few regions anywhere in the world possess.

Rather than competing to become another larger conventional airport, Bristol could become the world's leading demonstration hub for zero-carbon regional aviation.

If the last century made Bristol famous for supersonic flight, this century could make it internationally recognised for sustainable flight.

Conventional airport expansion is not the fastest route to economic growth

The consultation presents airport expansion as a driver of economic growth.

We agree that aviation should support economic prosperity. However, we question whether expanding conventional airport infrastructure is the best way to achieve that objective.

Expanding an airport takes years and primarily increases capacity for today's aircraft.

Developing a zero-carbon aviation ecosystem creates an entirely new industrial sector.

Conventional expansion largely generates employment associated with passenger growth: terminal operations, retail, parking, security, baggage handling and aircraft servicing.

These jobs are important. However, a strategy centred on zero-carbon aviation creates all of these jobs while also supporting high-value employment across aerospace research, aircraft design, manufacturing, systems integration, battery technology, electric propulsion, certification, testing, maintenance, digital systems and export industries.

In other words, conventional expansion increases passenger numbers and air miles.

Innovation-led growth increases industrial capability.

This distinction matters because the United Kingdom continues to possess world-leading aerospace expertise. While Europe has lost industrial leadership in sectors such as battery manufacturing and electric vehicles, aerospace remains an area where Europe and the UK retains genuine competitive advantages - and is trusted in performance, quality and safety.

Bristol is exceptionally well placed to capitalise on that advantage.

Instead of investing scarce resources into expanding infrastructure designed around conventional aircraft, Bristol should position itself as the place where the world's next generation of aircraft is designed, built, tested and flown.

A regional airport is the right place to pioneer zero-carbon flight

The first generation of zero-carbon aircraft is expected to enter service on shorter regional routes before progressively serving longer journeys as technology develops.

These smaller aircraft will not initially replace today's largest long-haul aircraft.

They will instead reshape regional aviation.

This creates an opportunity for airports such as Bristol.

Rather than attempting to emulate major international hub airports whose growth depends upon increasingly large conventional aircraft, Bristol can specialise in becoming one of Europe's first airports built around the next generation of regional aviation.

This would strengthen Bristol's competitiveness rather than weaken it.

Being among the first airports to develop expertise in zero-carbon operations, charging infrastructure, maintenance, pilot training and airline partnerships would establish capabilities that can subsequently be exported around the world.

Leadership in aviation will not come from simply building larger terminals.

It will come from embracing the next technological revolution before others do.

A better outcome for workers and local communities

Airport expansion is often framed as a choice between economic growth and environmental protection.

We see this as a false dichotomy.

The transition towards zero-carbon and hybrid-powered aircraft offers an opportunity to improve both economic prosperity, environmental outcomes and quality of life.

These aircraft are our ticket to greener, cleaner, quieter flight. The reduced air pollution would improve working conditions for airport employees while also enhancing the health and wellbeing of surrounding communities.

This is particularly important to us because aviation workers are among those most directly exposed to aircraft emissions. We often spend our entire careers operating close to aircraft.

Flight crew and ground crew such as baggage handlers, ramp agents, mechanics and aircraft fuelling technicians are exposed to aircraft noise and air pollution every working day.

Communities living around airports similarly experience these impacts over many years.

Economic development should improve people's lives. This aircraft innovation offers Bristol the opportunity to do exactly that.

Bristol can build a new identity for aviation

Bristol is a city that is known for thinking differently: Aardman, Banksy, Massive Attack.

Its creative industries, engineering excellence and environmental ambition have become defining characteristics.

What better expression of that identity than becoming the city where visitors arrive on the world's cleanest commercial aircraft?

Rather than being seen simply as another expanding airport, Bristol could become internationally recognised as the home of zero-carbon regional aviation.

Such leadership would attract investment, skilled workers, research partnerships and international attention while reinforcing Bristol's reputation as one of Europe's leading centres of aerospace innovation.

This is an opportunity not merely to grow aviation, but to re-design and re-define it.

Public policy should accelerate the transition

We recognise that zero-carbon aviation will not emerge without supportive policy.

Planning decisions should therefore encourage the transition away from fossil fuels rather than reinforcing our long-term dependence upon it. The recent conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East have demonstrated that this is a massive security risk, as well as climate risk.

Future airport growth should increasingly be linked to environmental performance. We propose that Bristol Airport is given an airport-specific carbon budget (alongside other airports) before any expansion is approved.

As cleaner aircraft become commercially available, airports should be incentivised to accommodate these aircraft through differentiated charging structures, operational incentives and infrastructure investment.

Over time, planning policy should actively encourage airports that accelerate the deployment of lower-carbon aircraft while discouraging continued growth based on fossil fuel operations.

This approach would provide certainty for investors while ensuring that airport development aligns with the UK's climate commitments and industrial strategy.

Conclusion

Bristol faces a strategic choice.

One option is to expand today's airport for yesterday's aircraft.

The other is to invest in becoming the UK's leading hub for tomorrow's aviation.

We believe the second option offers far greater long-term social, economic, industrial and environmental benefits.

It would create high-skilled employment across aerospace manufacturing and engineering.

It would strengthen Britain's position as a global aerospace leader and technology exporter.

It would better distribute access to low-carbon air travel across the UK and improve quality of life for airport workers and neighbouring communities through quieter and cleaner aircraft.

And it would establish Bristol as the city leading one of the most significant transformations in aviation since the dawn of the jet age.

Bristol helped change aviation once before.

With the right vision, it can do so again.

For these reasons, Safe Landing urges Bristol Airport and decision-makers to reject conventional expansion to 15 million passengers per year and instead develop a long-term strategy to establish Bristol Airport as Europe's leading zero-carbon regional aviation hub.

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