

Aircraft Noise Action Group



Briefing: Newcastle – a carbon zero airport?

Newcastle Airport's recent Net Zero Carbon 2035 policy

(<https://www.newcastleairport.com/net-zero-carbon-2035/>)

makes a nice headline but, in our view, falls far short of being any use. Apart from being far too little too late, why is it so inadequate?

1. A commitment as important as tackling climate change needs to be underpinned by a detailed analysis and breakdown of the Airport's current carbon footprint as a baseline to inform targets. There is no such analysis.
2. It needs a phased plan spread over the 15 year period with milestones to show how a zero carbon footprint is to be achieved. As it stands there are no measurable targets in the policy against which to measure success and no indication of how any assessment will happen. There is no plan and there are no measurable targets and no accountability
3. There are omissions which would mean that, even in the unlikely event of the Airport company itself achieving carbon zero, the Airport overall probably won't. The Airport company is only part of the picture.
4. The most important of these omissions is the carbon generated by aircraft operating out of Newcastle. If the airlines, as separate businesses, don't have viable implemented carbon zero policies in place, then the overall impact of the Airport's activities will simply increase. It's no good just asking them to do better, they won't risk their business viability in a cutthroat market if they have a choice.
5. The second omission is of the Airport's real estate. Airline, tenants and concessionaires occupy large amount of real estate on the airport site. There are no specific details of how or if these tenants are to be committed to reduce the Airport's overall real estate carbon footprint to zero. In practice, the airport would lose out financially if the tenants reduce fuel or power usage as the airport sells these services (with a markup) to these tenants, hence less incentive to do this.
6. There are serious contradictions. The first of these is the airport's Masterplan 2035 which forecasts significant growth aspirations of around 50% over its 2018 figures. More flights equals more carbon and other emissions– jet engine efficiency gains will never balance out a 50% increase in traffic. The Airport is

ducking this aspect of carbon generation by deferring responsibility to the airlines who won't play unless they are forced to.

7. The second contradiction is the government's recent decision to save Flybe by giving a commitment to review Air Passenger Duty ("APD") on internal flights. This flies in the face of reducing carbon emissions by reducing the cost of flying which will stimulate demand. This will only generate more flights to serve routes that an improved rail network should be doing.
8. The third contradiction is around car use. More flights means more car journeys to the Airport means more car parking at the Airport This should be good news for Newcastle Airport since, like other airports, it depends on car parking revenue as a significant source of revenue. But more car journeys mean more CO₂. The UK's ban on the sales of new petrol and diesel powered cars won't kick in until 2035. The UK's private car fleet will stay primarily fossil fuel powered for a long time to come, long after 2035.
9. The Airport operates about 20/30% of the vehicles on site, the rest are owned and/or operated by tenants and contracted service providers. Even if the all the Airport's vehicles converted from the use of fossil fuels, there would still be the issue of the remaining 70/80% operated by companies that may not have fully implemented zero carbon policies or even no policies at all.
10. Some of the Airport's own vehicles are very specialized e.g.: fire tenders, snow blowers, runway deicing spreaders etc. and, given their specialist energy intensive functions, probably couldn't be converted to electric operation and remain effective. The Airport has provided no detail of how it will offset the carbon footprint of non-convertible vehicles or of how they might meet the significant cost of doing this over time.
11. The investment needed to purchase or upgrade vehicles to electric versions is very significant. Can the Airport afford this since the number of Air Traffic Movements has fallen by 26% from 2008 to 1018 and continues to drop? Can it afford this alongside its proposed extension to the runway? We think not though it needs to do this to have any chance of meeting its own minimal target.
12. Ground power for parked aircraft is needed for about 35 stands at the Airport. Around 4 of these take supplies from the Airport's power infrastructure, the rest are supplied by mobile diesel units owned by handling agents – a separate company. The investment required to upgrade the Airport's connection to the grid and upgrade its infrastructure provide all 35 with power from its own resources is very significant. Can a business with a falling turnover afford this? How will this sit with the handling agents who currently earn income from using their mobile diesel units to provide ground power to parked aircraft?
13. In order to "green" its use of electricity in the complex of Airport buildings and services to aircraft and meet its carbon zero aspirations, the Airport will have to

draw its supply from entirely renewable sources – it currently gets most of its supply from gas fired power stations – and there is no detail on how 100% renewable sourced power would be phased in.

- 14.** The Airport could look at a solar electricity farm but Government subsidies for these have all but disappeared, the cost of setting one these up on site would probably be prohibitive without a subsidy. If however it did this, then costly electrical control systems would have to be installed to ensure adequate and stable supplies are delivered when weather conditions reduce solar gain. Clearly, wind turbines are a non-starter. The Airport needs to demonstrate a rational plan for doing this and it hasn't done this so far.
- 15.** The Airport cites its membership of Sustainable Aviation (<https://www.sustainableaviation.co.uk/>) as if it were a badge of authenticity for its carbon zero aspirations. It isn't. Sustainable Aviation is an aviation industry association concerned primarily with promoting the expansion of air travel while blandly asserting that this can be done without contributing to global warming and damaging the environment.
- 16.** The Airport states that it will plant more trees to off-set carbon. New trees take at least 10 years to mature and unless they are planted in their tens of thousands make negligible impact on reducing carbon. They also require maintenance which will be another on cost and attract birds which would be a hazard to aircraft if planted anywhere near the Airport.