

Airport expansion will not tackle climate change

Sir, This month Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander will publish a progress report on the aviation White Paper. Since the paper was published in 2003 the evidence for the economic and environmental necessity of tackling climate change has become irrefutable.

Both the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research and work commissioned by the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University have shown how current and forecast levels of aviation growth are likely to make it impossible for the UK to meet its climate obligations. The recent Stern report has also shown how the economic impacts of climate change will far outweigh the costs of action to tackle it.

The Government and much of the aviation industry propose tackling aviation's climate impacts through including airlines in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. We now know that this will not happen until at least 2011 and even then its environmental benefits are, at best, uncertain. Technological gains, better air traffic management and other operational improvements will have a role to play, but will not be enough on their own.

The Government's policy of building four new runways to accommodate massive growth is short-sighted and cannot be reconciled with tackling climate change and environmental protection. If Douglas Alexander is serious about transport playing its full part in tackling climate change he must announce a fundamental rethink of aviation policy to bring it into line with current climate change targets.

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