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IS THE AVIATION POLICY PROGRESS REPORT GOING TO BE HONEST ENOUGH?

The Government has promised a Progress Report on the Aviation White Paper – due out any day now. Can we expect to be told everything is OK or will the Government be brave enough to give us the stark reality?

SASIG has polished its crystal ball and can reveal our early vision of the Progress Report, with a commentary about what might really be happening on a few important topics.

Passenger Growth The White Paper was based on forecast growth from 160 mppa (million passengers per annum) in 1998 to a mid point forecast of 500 mppa by 2030 – passing through 230 mppa in 2005. Great news. There were 229 mppa in 2005 so the Progress Report will tell us that the forecasts are on track. **BUT** will it tell us that in six out of the last eight years the percentage growth was double the forecast growth? Will it tell us that the only reason the 2005 out-turn figures look right is that passenger numbers dropped in the London area in 2001? Will it tell us that if the average growth rate of the last 3 years continues then there will be 500 mppa by 2021 – some nine years earlier than the policy anticipated?

Climate Change The Progress Report will tell us of negotiations in Europe on carbon trading, international discussions on improved engine technology and, more recently, the doubling of Air Passenger Duty as a response to the Stern Report's warning of the need to take urgent action. **BUT** what difference will any of this make? Surely no-one is going to be put off flying with a small increase in the cost when measured against the cost of their total trip. And if we all keep flying, and keep flying more, then the aviation industry will just keep buying more carbon permits. What we really need are some demanding targets for improved fuel efficiency that the aviation industry must reach sooner rather than later.

Airport Master Plans All airports were told to produce Master Plans by the end of 2004. The Progress Report will tell us that Master Plans have been a success. **BUT** a quick search of airport operator's websites reveals they want to grow their airports more rapidly and to a greater extent than proposed in the White Paper. How is this disparity with national policy to be resolved? Many Master Plans have yet to be finalised – two whole years after the deadline.

A new runway at Stansted The White Paper suggested this should be open by 2011 or 2012 and the Progress Report is likely to say that is still possible on the basis of good progress with all the studies needed before the planning application can be made. **BUT** in reality the local authority has just turned down the planning application for more intensive use of the existing runway and BAA will now have to mount an appeal. It could be some time before a decision is made, and no one can expect progress on the proposals for another runway with the role of the existing one still in contention. A new runway may also have to go to Public Inquiry and, even if granted consent, now seems impossible before 2015.

Air Pollution at Heathrow The White Paper promised another runway at Heathrow, providing levels of air pollution could be kept within legal limits. The good news in the Progress Report will be that intensive work over the last two years has resulted in an understanding of how to measure and model future pollution. **BUT** after all this time no one has produced the results and no one has published figures to guarantee that aircraft engine technology can be improved enough to satisfy the legal pollution limits. In any case, when and how will the Government

address the issue that much of the air pollution is from cars and lorries going about their daily work in the area – is someone going to tell us we can't use our cars near the airport? Will the Progress Report tell us when the much-delayed consultation on air pollution and mixed mode use of the existing runways will take place? How will the Progress Report deal with the pressure from British Airways and others for the new runway at Heathrow to be built before the one at Stansted?

Growth at Regional Airports Great news for the Progress Report to record rapid growth at most regional airports, unless of course you are adversely affected by that growth or feel that its contribution to global warming needs to be under tighter control.

SASIG believes that a Progress Report is an inadequate response to all the changes there have been over the last three years. That is why SASIG published its own commentary last month – 'The 2003 Aviation White Paper: Did the Government get it right?' The 60 local authorities across the UK which make up the Local Government Association's Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group highlighted the need to give aviation policy a reality check.

In a stark warning today, Councillor Richard Worrall, Chairman of SASIG, said: "We accept that the UK economy and its people have much to gain from a successful aviation industry. The Aviation White Paper may only be three years old, but it is already self evident that its forecasts of future demand for air travel, which underpin the Government's aviation policies, have seriously underestimated future demand."

"I recognise that this is a complex issue. But the Government need to direct policy and invest finances to enable travellers to make more sustainable choices. It is not tenable for the Government simply to produce a Progress Report on the White Paper's implementation, which is all they plan to do. The world has moved on substantially since 2003 and we must have a fundamental review of our aviation policies aimed at identifying how to accommodate an acceptable level of growth."

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information please contact:
Anna Mahoney, Assistant Director of SASIG
PO Box 1308
Kingston upon Thames
KT1 2WF
Tel: (020) 8541 9459 or 07968 832 687
Email: info@sasig.org
or Jim Bailey, Director of SASIG on
07711 088218.



Cllr Richard Worrall, Chairman of SASIG

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For a copy of this press release; our report 'The 2003 Aviation White Paper: Did the Government get it right?' (see Technical Reports page); and further information about SASIG, please visit our website (www.sasig.org).

SASIG has a broad national membership of local authorities but does not speak on behalf of the Local Government Association as a whole.