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AVIATION POLICY NEEDS A REALITY CHECK

The recent Stern Report on 'The Economics of Climate Change' highlighted the damaging and growing impact of carbon emissions from the aviation industry. The Government's own watchdog, the Environmental Audit Committee, has clearly called for the Government to undertake a fundamental rethink of its airport expansion policy.

These challenges to the Government are detailed in a paper released today by SASIG – '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 are highlighting the need to give aviation policy a reality check.

Launching the report, 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. But there is universal recognition that the aviation industry is one of the fastest growing contributors to global warming. The Government's own Stern report is a stark reminder to us all of the consequences of not taking action now to address the issues. 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. In six out of the last eight years passenger growth has exceeded Government forecasts. If this is allowed to continue then additional capacity above the White Paper proposals will be required. SASIG does not believe the impact of this growth is sustainable and this is why a full review is now essential."

"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."

Richard Worrall concluded: "The Government must recognise that these issues will not go away. They won't. Indeed, they will only get more serious if we do not now have an open and wide-ranging debate about our approach to aviation – with our partners in Europe and the rest of the world. As Stern has reminded us, the issues are simply too serious to ignore."

NOTES TO EDITORS

The SASIG discussion document – 'The 2003 Aviation White Paper: Did the Government get it right?' identifies that a serious debate about long-term aviation policies needs to take place. It suggests that there is a range of options such as:

- To identify a sustainable level of growth, possibly closer to 2% than the current average growth of around 5% per annum, and introduce fiscal or infrastructure policies to impose a constraint on the freedom to travel by air.

- To do little or nothing about constraining demand and to give the aviation industry permission to build new terminals and runways wherever and whenever they are wanted so as to meet demand within broad parameters set by the Government.
- To introduce a range of economic and infrastructure policies at an international and local level to ensure that the 'polluter pays principle' is imposed on the aviation industry. This option would also be strengthened by rail services being improved so as to be more competitive over distances of up to 700 miles or those journeys where the flying time is less than 2 hours.
- To do little or nothing about constraining demand but to accept that many airports are so located that their growth should slow down or stop, in favour of planning the growth at a smaller number of airports throughout the UK, including the possibility of at least one new one, where high levels of growth could be acceptable and economically beneficial to the UK.



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For a copy of the discussion document and further information about SASIG, please visit the Technical Reports page on our web site (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.