

Aircraft Noise

Over 2.5 million people in the UK are extremely disturbed by aircraft noise, with 31% of the population bothered to some extent (1).

When aircraft noise disturbs, it can really disturb.

The World Health Organisation has found people start to get annoyed by aircraft noise at lower levels than either road or rail noise. This is partly down to the high-level of low-frequency present in aircraft noise.

https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/383921/noise-guidelines-eng.pdf



Of course not everybody is disturbed by noise from planes flying over them. The statistics show that, even at high noise volumes, a lot of people are not worried but, nevertheless, the numbers disturbed remain high. If you are driven to despair by the noise, you can become very angry with the airport. But that anger can blind us to the good aviation can and does do.

Not 'anti-aviation' but 'anti-noise'

Aircraft are the work-horses of the globalised economy which has over the last few decades facilitated the trade which has lifted millions of people out of poverty.

Warren East, the chief executive of Rolls Royce, put it like this:

“For thousands of years, the exchange of culture, ideas, goods and services has been the powerhouse of human progress. Aviation has accelerated that exchange across continents, making a huge contribution to humanity and the global economy. International trade is responsible for much of the development and prosperity of the modern world”.

Daily Telegraph (4/2/20)

He is correct. The 'degrowth' philosophy that some aviation campaigners put forward will bring a halt to the growing prosperity across the globe. Aviation – and the growth of aviation – has a key role to play in enabling that prosperity. This is not to say that it would not be better if a lot of shorter journeys could be made by rail or to argue aviation shouldn't pay more tax. It should. It is under-taxed. It pays no tax on airline fuel and there is no VAT on tickets. But we mustn't kill off aviation. The focus should be on dealing with its downsides.

So, how to we deal with aircraft noise?

1. Research and development into quieter aircraft

Aircraft are a lot less noisy than they were 40 years ago. But in the coming years an annual reduction of only 0.1% is expected in noise from aircraft coming on-stream. The technology is not on the horizon for planes to get significantly quieter anytime soon. Meaningful resources need to be put into research and development into quieter planes by both the industry and governments.

2. Build new airports well away from centres of population

It is interesting there are few noise complaints about the main airports in the Scandinavian countries. They are located well outside the towns and cities. It is not always possible to relocate existing airports but there are lessons here for the emerging economies as they build new airports.

3. Encourage quieter alternatives to air travel where feasible

Aviation does long-distance journeys well but, if rail became more viable for shorter journeys, it opens up the possibility of managing or even reducing flight numbers over many communities (which is what they want above all else).

4. Share the noise around

Except for areas under the final approach to a runway, it is possible to use the new satellite-based technology to create rotating flight paths to give residents a break from the noise each day. In my experience, communities are much less interested in how many runways an airport has than in how many planes fly over their homes. These days it is the volume of aircraft passing overhead rather than the noise of each plane that is the biggest cause of disturbance.

5. Impose a numbers cap or a noise cap

The industry favours a noise cap because it can incentivise airlines to use less noisy planes. Communities like a cap on the number of flights. If a cap (on noise or numbers) is imposed, it would be most effective as a cap over particular communities, not one covering the airport as a whole, for what is critical to people is the impact on their community.

6. Limit night flights

The European Union published a report which showed that, world-wide, most night flights are operated for the convenience of the airlines, rather than because they are essential (22). Night flying should become the exception.

7. Provide generous compensation and mitigation

Communities under flight paths should expect money to pay for effective sound insulation measures. People who lose their homes or who see them devalued in price should be properly compensated. Wherever a new airport is built people who lose their homes or land should be generously compensated.

8. Ensure best operational procedures are followed

The steepness of the descent or ascent is important for communities as are measures such as the point aircraft coming into land lower their landing gear.

These measures would quite noticeably lower the impact of noise without harming an important industry.

References:

(1). file:///C:/Users/Dell/Downloads/12378_SummaryReportV1.0.pdf

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