

14th Florence Air Forum

The Role of Airports in the European Green Deal

20 November 2020

Online event

organised by FSR-Transport, EUI and DG MOVE, European Commission

Introduction

The [European Green Deal](#) reaffirms the European Commission's commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and calls for significant transformations across all sectors of the economy. Despite the current Covid-19 impact on aviation emissions, this ambition still places a particular responsibility on aviation, whose emissions in Europe have increased by 10% between 2014 and 2017, and which were expected to grow by a further 21% by 2040. In addition to calling for a reduction of the sector's climate footprint, the Green Deal communication stresses the importance of "improving air quality near airports by tackling the emissions of pollutants by airplanes and airport operations". Though important advances have been made in mitigating noise pollution from aircraft, noise levels continue to pose a serious health risk for communities living close to airports and, thus, also need to be further addressed.

A number of legislative revisions are already underway, whereas, the Commission is notably set to adopt a sustainable aviation fuels strategy in the fourth quarter of 2020. **Against this backdrop, the 14th Florence Air Forum will examine the contribution of European airports and the wider aviation ecosystem, through both technological and regulatory measures, in supporting the attainment of the European Green Deal and Climate Law objectives.**

Aviation in Europe accounts for 28% of global passenger traffic. It directly and indirectly provides more than 12 million jobs and makes a [€700+ billion contribution to the economy](#). The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), however, [has found](#) that if greenhouse gas emissions continue on a business-as-usual trajectory, this could result in a global sea-level rise of one meter by end of the century. This, in turn, could entail particularly high risks for airports, many of which are located near large bodies of water and built on large, flat, open-spaces, making them particularly vulnerable to changes in sea level. In fact, according to [data from the World Resources Institute](#), 80 airports worldwide could be underwater if current emission trends continue. It goes without saying that such a scenario would have detrimental socio-economic and connectivity implications, thus underlining the need for climate-resilient policies and regulations in the sector.

On a positive note, the European airport industry, represented by ACI Europe, has shown firm [commitment to becoming net zero for carbon emissions](#) by no later than 2050. To achieve this goal, airports have pledged to reduce absolute emissions to the furthest extent possible and to address any remaining emissions through investment in carbon removal and storage. Importantly, offsetting measures will not be used in the achievement of the mid-century target, which the airport industry acknowledges as a merely 'temporary' measure, and which will have to be replaced by direct in-sector reductions.

When it comes to technological solutions, the electrification of aircraft during taxiing, as well as that of ground handling machinery, shuttle buses and other vehicles transporting passengers to-, from- and within the airport premises are increasingly examined. This, of course, also touches on the wider debate of accelerating the clean energy transition to ensure that airports can switch to zero carbon energy under competitive conditions.

The broader aviation ecosystem

Airports, however, do not operate in isolation, thus, any regulatory measures aimed at improving their environmental performance, will have to take into account the broader aviation ecosystem, including airlines and air traffic management (ATM). In this regard, supporting the implementation of the Single European Sky (another commitment under the Green Deal), and incentivising the introduction of disruptive ATM technologies, such as virtual centers, hold significant untapped potential for enhancing aviation efficiency and reducing CO₂ emissions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused EU leaders to temporarily suspend the ‘use-it-or-lose it’ rules under the [Slot Regulation](#), thereby enabling airlines to retain rights over their slots without having to run ‘ghost flights’ and unnecessarily waste jet fuel. The evaluation of the Slot Regulation could, furthermore, be used to prioritise slots for quieter aircraft and/or aircraft running on Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAFs). What is more, a modulation of airport charges on the basis of environmental criteria, by means of reforming the [Airport Charges Directive](#), could help in encouraging the uptake of SAFs while alleviating congestion at airports.

The uptake of SAFs in Europe, will necessitate incentives for their production and deployment. This, in turn, would entail overcoming regulatory as well as technological barriers. Here, the upcoming recast of the [Energy Taxation Directive](#) could be an opportunity to close existing loopholes (i.e. current tax exemptions for aviation fuels) with a view to ensuring more efficient pricing of air travel and fostering a level playing field.

Last but not least, empowering consumers to factor in environmental criteria into their travel decisions and putting in place measures to promote multi-modality will be decisive in stirring the shift towards sustainable aviation practices. As already acknowledged by a number of national governments, short haul flights can be substituted by rail trips, and the provision of multi-modal travel information would therefore be instrumental in encouraging consumers to make these choices.

The forum will seek to critically discuss the following three questions:

1. *What are the various technological options involving aircraft ground movements, airside operations and groundhandling solutions to accelerate the achievement of net zero carbon European airports by 2050?*
2. *Greening airports: from construction to electricity generation, availability of sustainable aviation fuels and transit to the airport. How to build and operate airports in a sustainable way?*
3. *What are the various regulatory options (e.g. Airport Charges- and Slot Regulation) supporting the shift towards greener airports? What are the funding possibilities to enable greening of airports? Private funding, funding through operations (e.g. charges), public funding?*

Programme

Setting the Scene

- 10.00 - 10.20 **Matthias Finger** | Director, FSR Transport, EUI
Filip Cornelis | Director Aviation Policy, DG MOVE, European Commission
Marina Bylinsky | Head of Sustainability, ACI Europe
Andrew Murphy | Aviation Manager, Transport & Environment

Session A - Aircraft Ground Movements: Airside and Groundhandling

- 10.20 - 11.05 *What are the various technological options involving aircraft ground movements, airside operations and groundhandling solutions to accelerate the achievement of net zero carbon European airports by 2050?*

Three input presentations:

Denise Pronk | Programme Manager Corporate Responsibility, Royal Schiphol Group
Fabio Gamba | Chair and Director General, Airport Services Association
Florian Guillermet | Executive Director, SESAR JU

Open discussion & Q&A

- 11.05 - 11.10 Coffee/Technical break

Session B - Construction and Operation of Airports

- 11.10 - 11.55 *Greening airports: from construction to electricity generation, availability of sustainable aviation fuels and transit to the airport. How to build and operate airports in a sustainable way?*

Three input presentations:

Marina Bylinsky | Head of Sustainability, ACI EUROPE
Andrew Murphy | Aviation Manager, Transport & Environment
Ana Salazar López-Pedraza | Head of Sustainability Division, AENA
Udo Bradersen | Environmental Officer, Hamburg Airport

Open discussion & Q&A

- 11.55 - 12.00 Coffee/Technical break

Session C - Regulatory Framework and Financing

- 12.00 - 12.45 *What are the various regulatory options (e.g. Airport Charges- and Slot Regulation) supporting the shift towards greener airports? What are the funding possibilities to enable greening of airports? Private funding, funding through operations (e.g. charges), public funding?*

Three input presentations:

André Schneider | CEO, Geneva Airport
François Delabre | Head of Institutional Affairs, Air France
Jorge Grazina | Innovation and Research, DG MOVE, European Commission

Open discussion & Q&A

Concluding session

12.45 - 13.00 **Juan Montero** | Part-time Professor at FSR-Transport, EUI/ UNED
Matthias Finger | Director, FSR Transport, EUI
Filip Cornelis | Director Aviation Policy, DG MOVE, European Commission

Closing remarks