



European Federation for
TRANSPORT and ENVIRONMENT

NEWS RELEASE

REPORT SHOWS FIFTY-YEAR FAILURE OF AVIATION INDUSTRY TO IMPROVE FUEL EFFICIENCY

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(International Civil Aviation Day – Theme: The Greening of Flight)

Brussels - Today's commercial passenger planes are no more fuel-efficient than their equivalents of fifty years ago and aviation industry claims of a 70% improvement in fuel-efficiency are false. These are the main conclusions of a report by the Dutch National Aerospace Laboratory (NLR) published today by the European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E) and released on this year's environment-themed International Civil Aviation Day.

The new report was commissioned to investigate the claims of key industry groups such as the International Air Transport Association (IATA) who say, "Aircraft entering today's fleets are 70% more fuel efficient than they were 40 years ago." (1)

The NLR, a world-leading aerospace research institute, found that the original source of the 70% figure, the 1999 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Aviation and the Global Atmosphere (2), only examined improvements made during the jet era and ignored propeller-based planes of the 1950s. The report shows that the focus on speed that led to the introduction of jet engines in the 1960s caused a massive initial reduction in fuel-efficiency that is only now being recovered. For example, the Lockheed Super Constellation of the mid 1950s was at least twice as fuel efficient as the first jets, and as efficient as today's aircraft.

The study also shows that even the efficiency gains made over the jet era have been exaggerated. The first reference point of the IPCC study was the most gas-guzzling passenger jet plane ever produced, the De Havilland Comet 4 which consumed much more fuel than other early jets. The second reference point, however, was the most fuel-efficient passenger aircraft produced to date.

Significantly, the report also casts doubt on industry forecasts of future fuel efficiency improvements saying "many studies on predicted gains in the future tend to be rather optimistic."

Jos Dings, Director of T&E said, "The industry has deliberately misled the public to cover up its failure to improve efficiency. There is no reason to believe they will prioritise efficiency in the future unless governments step in with serious incentives to cut emissions."

T&E published the report's findings on this year's environment-themed International Civil Aviation Day to highlight the failure of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the organisers of the event, to take action on reducing emissions - a responsibility they were given when the Kyoto Protocol was signed in 1997. (3) The last general assembly of ICAO in October 2004 effectively prohibited states from introducing emissions-related charges in a resolution that "urges contracting states to refrain from unilateral implementation of greenhouse gas emissions charges [before] the next regular session of the assembly in 2007".

T&E cautiously welcomed the recent EU proposal to include emissions from aviation into the European Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS) after 2009 but warns that trading alone will not provide enough of an incentive to cut emissions to the required degree. (4) In addition to

emissions trading, T&E is calling for a package of additional measures including fuel taxes and en-route emissions charges.

“With no VAT paid on international tickets, no taxes on fuel and billions of Euros in aid given to Airbus and Boeing, the aviation sector still operates in a parallel universe where direct and indirect subsidies are handed out with abandon. In the absence of international action, the EU must follow-up on its proposal to introduce emissions trading as soon as possible and also put forward a package of additional measures to bring about meaningful cuts in emissions” said Dings.

- ENDS -

The full NLR / Peeters Advies report including summary and conclusions can be downloaded from the T&E website:

http://www.t-e.nu/docs/Publications/2005pubs/2005-12_nlr_aviation_fuel_efficiency.pdf

The image below is cleared for European media use for 7-14 December 2005:

Caption: A Lockheed Super Constellation (circa 1955), as fuel-efficient as today's passenger aircraft

Credit: Hulton Archive / Getty Images

High resolution image download from:

http://www.t-e.nu/images/content/2005_12_07_constellation_hultonarchive_gettyimages.jpg



(1) See IATA Environmental Review 2004 - <http://www.iata.org/ps/publications/9486.htm>

(2) For the full text of the 1999 IPCC report see: <http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc/aviation/index.htm>

(3) The international aviation sector (along with international shipping) was excluded from the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. Under the Kyoto agreement, responsibility for cutting emissions was handed to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) <http://www.icao.int/>, a United Nations body. So far there has been no action whatsoever in spite of the fact that CO2 emissions from the sector are growing at 4% per year – faster than every other transport mode.

(4) The European Commission proposed in September that the aviation sector should be brought into the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS). This is unlikely to happen before 2009 and would require the approval of national governments and the European Parliament before such measures could be introduced.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/climat/aviation_en.htm

The real impact of emissions trading depends on how the system is designed. T&E is calling for measures that would result in maximum emissions reductions:

- All flights departing from and arriving at EU airports should be covered. Not just intra-EU flights.

- The system should account for the full climate impact of aviation. CO2 accounts for just 25-50% of greenhouse gas emissions from aircraft.
- Emissions reduction targets should be in line with current Kyoto targets for other sectors
- Emissions permits should be sold by auction, not given away to existing operators

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About T&E

T&E is Europe's principal environmental organisation campaigning specifically on transport.

Members are drawn from NGOs in nearly every European country, all of whom promote a more environmentally sound approach to transport. www.t-e.eu