

Aviation growth not good for climate

As the number of flights – and airports – around the world increases, airlines in Europe are being encouraged to join the European Union (EU) emissions trading scheme to help the environment by minimising carbon dioxide (CO²) emissions.

The EU Environment Commissioner, Stavros Dimas, said fellow commissioners had approved this plan, which will be finalised into a decree at the end of 2006. Emissions trading essentially limits CO² emissions per company and businesses can buy more rights to pollute or sell their rights if they do not use up their quota. To achieve this aim, airlines might increase ticket prices by up to nine euros, said Dimas. “The boom in flying is bringing with it a rapid rise in greenhouse gas emissions,” he underlined.

In the UK, the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has warned that the UK government’s target of reducing CO² emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 did not take into account the growing aviation sector in its initial report. To avoid drastic climate change, it says aviation sector growth must be curbed. At present, UK air passenger numbers, for example, are forecast to rise from 180 million today to 475 million by 2030. The aviation industry is regarded as particularly polluting because of the large amounts of fuel used at high altitude.

“We will be pressing, at the next environment ministers council, for European aviation to be included within the emissions trading scheme,” said Kevin Anderson, who led the research. He also called for acceleration towards using new-generation aircraft, which use less fuel.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, a tax on airline tickets of between US\$6.5 and US\$13 has been announced to encourage environmentally-friendly energy use. The tax will be applied from May 2006. Airlines SAS Sweden, Fly Nordic, Skyways and Malmo Aviation wrote to a local newspaper expressing disappointment at the move. ●

New airports around world

IN DUBLIN, IRELAND, a site for the second international terminal has been unveiled south of the current airport. The new terminal will be ready for business in 2009 and will have a capacity of up to 15 million passengers a year, boosting current capacity from 18 million to 32 million passengers annually. Since Ireland’s economic boom in the 1990s, the existing terminal has struggled to cope with passenger levels, according to a Reuters news source.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, Bangkok’s new international airport has been officially opened, despite not being ready for business until at least June 2006. Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, had promised it would be ready by 29 September and so the opening was held anyway, despite half-finished buildings in evidence. The multi-billion Suvarnabhumi Airport is seen as Thailand’s answer to rival world-class airports in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Thailand wants to be the aviation hub of Southeast Asia.

In the UK, the government has announced it will take a new approach to international aviation deals, allowing more airlines to use regional airports in exchange for reciprocal air rights. “The move will potentially mean more services and a greater choice of connections for passengers outside the southeast of England,” said UK Aviation Minister, Karen Buck. It will also mean less strain on the busy London airport hubs.

An estimated US\$55 billion is being invested in airport infrastructure over the next 20 years, but major European airports are still expected to suffer overcrowding, reports Reuters. ●

US – Mexico boost flight links

AIR TRAFFIC BETWEEN the USA and Mexico is set to expand, after a deal was reached between the two countries to boost reciprocal traffic. Instead of two airlines from each country, three airlines from each country may now fly between any US city and any of 14 Mexican cities, including all the major resort destinations.

In addition, carriers are now free to negotiate code-share agreements with airlines from other countries to supplement their service. No date was given for when the new agreement comes into effect at the time of going to press. ●

Travel Update

- The President of Chile has announced plans to introduce a **tax on air tickets** from January that will be used to fight global hunger and poverty. An extra charge of US\$2 will be added to the cost of all seats on outgoing flights. Brazil is reported to be considering a similar move.

- The Chief Executive of Singapore’s low-cost airline, **Tiger Airways**, has announced that the airline plans to be the “Ryanair of Asia”; as projected passenger numbers for next year reached three million due to the launch of new routes. Tony Davis added that the airline was looking for joint venture partners to help it set up in markets outside Singapore.

- European airline, **Air France-KLM**, saw passenger traffic rise by 8.1 per cent in August, while capacity increased by 5.1 per cent. A spokesperson for the airline said, “Air France-KLM continued to experience a strong increase in activity levels and traffic revenues, confirming the positive trend of recent months and bookings for the forthcoming months.”

- Low-cost carrier **Easyjet** is to introduce three new routes from its base in Basel in the next few months and increase capacity on current routes to Berlin and Hamburg. A twice-daily service to Paris commenced in October this year, while daily services to Amsterdam, Lisbon and Prague are due to start from March.

- Brazilian airline, **Varig**, has launched a recovery plan, which saw the dismissal of 13 per cent of its employees earlier this year in an attempt to get rid of debts and attract new investors. The airline is to form a new company by the end of 2006 in efforts to avoid bankruptcy. Under the plan, Varig will reactivate 14 aircraft that have been idle due to lack of funds and renew half its fleet in the next two years.

- Two of the USA’s largest carriers declared bankruptcy earlier this year, blaming the pressures of soaring oil prices and low-cost competition. The announcement by **Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines**, the third and fourth largest airlines in the USA, means that four of the seven largest US airlines are currently operating under federal bankruptcy protection.

- Passenger traffic on low-cost airline **Ryanair** grew by 27 per cent in August this year compared with the same period last year, to reach 3.26 million and overtaking British Airways (BA) for the first time. The airline said that it had carried 156,000 more passengers on its 250 European routes than BA had on its entire worldwide network, and highlighted its policy of not adding fuel surcharges.

- **Cardiff**, the capital city of Wales, has been named as the most user-friendly city in the UK, according to readers of *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine. Richard Jones, General Manager of the Cardiff Initiative, said, “This is further cause for celebration in Cardiff’s centenary year.”