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The Airports Commission Report: Carbon Emissions, Air Quality and Noise

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 2016 seeking clarity on carbon emissions from international aviation and my Department's further work on air quality.

On carbon, it is important to note that the UK does not have a legally-binding target for international aviation emissions due to uncertainties around how to allocate these emissions to individual countries. However, the Climate Change Act (2008) requires these emissions to be 'taken into account' when setting carbon budgets. Emissions from UK domestic aviation are already included under the existing five carbon budgets.

In advising on carbon budget levels, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has made an allowance for the level of UK international aviation emissions in 2050 (its 'planning assumption'). The CCC has used this to provide advice on the level of emissions reductions that are required from other sectors in order to achieve the 2050 economy-wide target. The Government has accepted the CCC's advice on the levels of the five carbon budgets set to date and, as you rightly note, Parliament has legislated on that basis.

Given the uncertainty surrounding international aviation carbon emissions, in its work the Airports Commission (AC) considered two possible policy scenarios for the future treatment of emissions from international aviation. The first of these was a 'carbon-capped' scenario in which emissions from UK aviation are capped in line with the CCC's planning assumption for 2050. The second was a 'carbon-traded' scenario in which a future global carbon market

would allow emissions reductions to be made where they are most efficient across the global economy.

To address your first question, the Government remains committed to meeting our Climate Change Act target of an at least 80% emissions reduction below 1990 levels by 2050. However the Government has not taken a view on whether to accept the CCC's planning assumption. The Government remains open to considering all feasible measures to ensure that the aviation sector contributes fairly to UK emissions reductions.

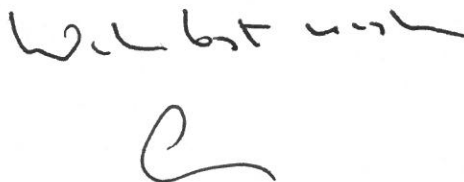
In answer to your second and third questions, and as Caroline Low noted on 30 November, the AC also demonstrated, through its Carbon Policy Sensitivity Test, that measures are available to allow the planning assumption to be met even with higher demand growth than 60%. This would not require any other sectors within the UK economy to make greater reductions to compensate for higher emissions from the international aviation sector.

As I outlined in my oral evidence on 30 November, we have begun work on an Aviation Strategy to replace the 2013 Aviation Policy Framework and this will include a more detailed consideration of available policy measures to address the climate change impacts of aviation. We look forward to publishing a series of green papers this year as part of this process.

Turning to air quality, we have been very clear that final development consent will only be granted if we are satisfied that, with mitigation, the scheme is compliant with our legal obligations on air quality.

Air quality is a relevant consideration for planning decisions, particularly in zones such as Greater London with existing air quality issues. The Government remains determined to meet its air quality obligations and to do so in the shortest time possible. We have accepted the recent High Court judgment that more needs to be done to improve our nation's air quality and will produce a revised air quality plan by 31 July 2017.

I trust this addresses the points raised in your letter.



Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT