

## PACTS

PARLIAMENTARY ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR TRANSPORT SAFETY

---

### Parliamentary Briefing: Aviation Safety

( [click here for link](#) to House of Commons Debate 16th December 1999 ) This briefing focuses primarily on issues which the UK government should be pursuing at the UK level. However, it also includes information on European and International developments which should be pursued in the longer term. Aviation has a good safety record in the UK, indeed it is one of the best in the world. However, as the recent transport sub-committee report highlighted, we cannot afford to be complacent and we need to ensure that any changes which take place in the coming years are not to the detriment of our safety record. Safety must remain the number one priority for aviation and we must look at ways in which our safety record can be improved even further. In recent years there has been a huge growth in air traffic over the skies of Britain, linked in particular to the introduction of new low-cost airlines. The growth in traffic, increasing at a rate of 7% per annum in 1998, has been predominant in the South East of England where there has been a 40% increase since 1995. This growth is projected to continue, and even greater effort will therefore be needed to maintain and improve standards. Main areas of concern PACTS believes that Members of Parliament should be aware that there are a number of areas of concern related to aviation safety in the UK at the present time, each of which pose a threat to the stability of the current safety record. This is particularly true in the light of increases in the volume of air traffic. If these concerns are not addressed then the risk to both passengers and those living in and around airports will increase. In addition, the public perception of risk may heighten and their confidence in air as a safe mode of travel will be undermined. PACTS would like to highlight three main areas of current concern:

- Maintenance of the 'Safety Culture'
- Training and Recruitment of Engineers, Air Traffic Controllers and Pilots
- Implications of Integrated Transport

What the government should be doing at the UK level (i) *Safety Culture* The UK government should ensure that the 'Safety Culture' within the aviation industry is maintained and should ensure that any proposals to change existing systems are research based. The main areas of concern where the government could act relate to:

- Safety vs. Capacity. There are concerns over the recent reduction in the vortex rate at Heathrow, from 3 to 2.5 miles, and whether this may have been eroded too far (raised by the Guild of Air Traffic Control Officers). Therefore, the government should make sure that research is carried out to assess what the optimum distance should be, and furthermore ensure that these results are published.
- Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) Recommendations. The government should act to ensure that the AAIB keeps closer scrutiny of its own recommendations. PACTS recommends that the AAIB should publish its own annual report on their progress in response to the actions of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

- Partial Privatisation (PPP) of National Air Traffic Services (NATS). PACTS believes that it is imperative that safety remains the number one priority if/when PPP takes place. At the present time there is no guarantee that profit motivation will not erode the safety culture of NATS, or public confidence, in the future. The UK government should ensure that there is a full and proper assessment of evidence relating to how safety records have been affected in countries where air traffic control operations have been amended (including Canada and the USA). The government should therefore make sure that international research has been fully reviewed and validated.
- Air Rage. PACTS would support recent moves by the CAA to collect data relating to incidences of 'air rage' including the problem of passengers who refuse to switch off their mobile phones and laptop computers. The government should ensure that the research findings of this research are acted on, and a stronger message needs to be sent to passengers that these are serious offences. Therefore, PACTS believes that the government should introduce legislation to increase penalties for offenders.

*(ii) Training and Recruitment* Training and recruitment of staff are critical to safety and PACTS would emphasise the importance of maintaining high levels of competence. A stronger sense that the government is committed to improving the standard of training and competence assurance of engineers, air traffic controllers and pilots is needed. The main areas of concern where the government could act relate to:

- Potential staff shortages. There is concern in the UK aviation industry over future staffing, particularly from a potential shortage of engineers. The government can play a strong role in ensuring that this problem is addressed. PACTS suggests that greater tax incentives for training courses would help. In relation to air traffic controllers, the government should act to ensure that a partially-privatised NATS continues to provide training programmes which meet future needs.
- Quality of staff. There is also concern over the potential quality of staff in the future, and the government should act to ensure staff of the highest possible quality. Although the Aviation Training Association would like to see 'competence assurance', this is not demanded by the CAA at present. The UK government should therefore assess whether this would improve standards and safety.

*(iii) Integrated Transport* Aviation is still trapped within the 'predict and provide' model of reacting to the growth in car traffic, a similar stage to how the government viewed car traffic growth in the mid-1960s (introducing a large programme of road building). The same mistakes may be being made for air traffic now that were made for car use in the mid-1960s. The growth in car traffic has proved to be unsustainable, and road building has in fact helped to fuel the problem of road congestion. The UK government must therefore act to ensure the same problem does not reoccur for air traffic. There are several other areas of concern in which the government could act:

- Improved public transport. The government should see that public transport to and from airports is maintained at a high level. Both passengers and staff should be discouraged to travel to/from the airport by car, as the likelihood of being killed/injured in a car accident on the way to/from the airport is much higher than the likelihood of being killed/injured on the actual flight itself. The risk of death/injury in a car incident is likely to be increased further by the effects of jet-lag and drink driving. There is a need

for further research in this area in order to examine the extent of these particular problems.

- Land use planning. The government should act to ensure that developments in and around airports, such as hotels and shopping malls, do not increase the risk for pilots on take-off and landing by effecting patterns of air movements and causing additional problems of turbulence. This will become increasingly important with the development of larger more susceptible aircraft (super-jumbos). Further research is required, using a 'risk assessment' approach, and the government should act where necessary to impose certain restrictions on land-use planning.
- Third Party Risk. The risk from aviation is much greater for residents living in and around airports than it is for passengers. As the volume of air traffic, and frequency of flights, increase in the coming years, so do the risks for residents living in and around airports. Therefore, the government should act to reduce third-party risk in and around airports. Research should examine whether land use planning can play a role in reducing the risk, including possible restrictions on future home building.

European and International Issues In addition there are a number of issues at the European and International levels. These are more difficult to act upon in the short-term, but are important to pursue, as they will bring longer-term benefits. The most important issues PACTS would highlight relate to:

- The Joint Aviation Authority (JAA). As more decisions are being taken at the European level, the UK government should look at how it can ensure the political accountability of the JAA and parliamentary scrutiny of European developments. There are moves towards creating a European Aviation Safety Authority (EASA), in which the CAA would be a major player. The key question for the UK government to look at should therefore be, how to monitor and assess what the EASA is proposing, and how to make sure safety remains the number one priority.
- Flight-time Regulations on Pilots. Human error is generally regarded to be the cause of most air accidents. There is a need to focus research on when accidents take place, particularly shared experiences across the modes. The main problems within aviation relate to problems pilots experience from long flying hours and crossing time zones. Therefore, results from this research need to feed into European/International agreements on 'flight time limitations'.
- Survivability of Accidents. At the International level there are calls to ensure a higher level of training and competence for cabin crew related to safety. The International Transport Workers Federation has argued that there should be a Cabin Crew Qualification, with safety as a strong component. The UK government should assess whether this would bring any additional benefits for safety benefits and, if so, act to ensure its introduction.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The UK government should act to make sure that the international standards set by the ICAO match those deemed acceptable by the CAA. In addition, the UK government should look at whether we are able to act as a provider of technical expertise and advice within the developing world, and hence promote a 'safety culture' across the world.

[PACTS Homepage](#) | [Contact Us](#)