



The Value of Air Transport for Europe

When you think 'air transport', you probably think holidays, business trips, visits to family and friends – the possibility to connect to the world, to people, to new horizons. However, there is much more to air transport than its obvious benefits.

Air transport's contribution to a healthy Europe



In Europe alone, more than 7.5 million jobs depend on air transport – through what is called direct, indirect, induced and catalytic impacts. Not only does air transport create jobs – it also provides access to otherwise isolated regions, providing them with new business and employment opportunities. 25% of all companies' sales depend on air transport, and almost 60% of them state that air transport has a very important impact on their business. Efficient air connections, in other words, boost productivity and employment, attract investments and act as a spur to innovation.

Air transport also sustains the viability of regions that rely on tourism for their living, and this is especially true of remote and island destinations. Tourism generates important revenues for the retailing, catering and hotel businesses – and also has a positive impact on other industries, such as agriculture, fishing, construction and craft. Tourism, investment and standards of living are closely linked, as the tourism potential of a country attracts investment, boosting economic growth and improving the living conditions of the population.

Air transport is also essential to the integration of an enlarged Europe, where air connections are relied upon to connect regions with one another, with Europe's political centres, and with the rest of the world, thereby strengthening Europe's cohesion, prosperity and political importance.

Far from enjoying tax privileges, air transport entirely finances its infrastructure costs through user charges and taxes to national treasuries. Frequently, air transport provides a net contribution to public funding. In Germany, for example, aviation infrastructure costs represent € 93 per 1,000 revenue-km (rkm), while user charges and taxes generate € 103, thus resulting in a net surplus of € 10 per 1,000 rkm. Conversely, revenues from German rail users represent € 34 per 1,000 rkm, while infrastructure costs amount to € 88, thus resulting in a public subsidy of € 54 per 1,000 rkm – a cost borne by the taxpayer.

Air transport contributes around 8% of the European GDP. It has been recognised by the European Union as an indispensable instrument for Europe's growth, now and in the years to come.

¹ The 'direct impact of air transport' represents the employment and activities within the air transport industry. The 'indirect impact' consists in employment and activities linked to supplying the air transport industry. The 'induced impact' refers to employment and activities supported by the spending of air transport employees, and 'catalytic impact' consists in industries that are outside air transport, such as the tourism industry. (Source: ATAG).

Safety



Aviation is by far the safest mean of transport. Millions of people are working daily to enable this – from the airplane mechanic to the pilot, from the aviation regulatory authorities to the air traffic controller.

Flying has never been more reliable. According to the FAA, flying is 40 times safer than driving to the airport. In 2005 there was one accident in 1.3 million flights.

One accident, of course, is always one accident too many – and the whole air transport industry is committed to improving even further on its safety record. Aircraft maintenance meets very stringent standards, with the strictest servicing practices in the hangar combining with ever-improving technology. If flying is exceptionally safe today, it is becoming more so every day.

Behind the scenes: air transport's contribution to quality of life



Some benefits cannot be quantified or translated into statistics. However, those benefits are usually the ones that can be most palpably felt by all citizens – whether they fly frequently or not.

Air travel has become increasingly essential in an age where professional mobility multiplies employment possibilities, where many students explore the world in their gap-year or take their degree abroad on educational exchange programmes. As air transport becomes more and more affordable, it develops the potential of transforming our societies, by increasing our understanding of other cultures and facilitating closer international integration.

Providing access to remote areas can do even more than promoting goodwill – it is essential when it comes to humanitarian aid. Air connections play an irreplaceable role in assistance to countries facing natural disasters, famine or war – through cargo deliveries, transport of medical teams, refugee transfers or any intervention with communities otherwise cut off from the rest of the world.

Regardless of the distance travelled, air transport offers another important advantage – it is the only mode of transport that is fully accessible to passengers with reduced mobility and unaccompanied children.

On a more mundane level, air transport also widens our choice as consumers. Our food comes from all over the world, seasonal fruit and vegetables are available all year round, daily newspapers are delivered on our doorstep from other continents – the examples abound, and we usually take them for granted. By allowing businesses to serve a bigger market, air transport benefits consumers in yet another way: as competition strives, prices are invariably pushed down and products often improve in quality.

Air transport and the environment



Air transport is an innovative industry that drives economic and social progress. It is also committed to meeting its customers' growing demand in a sustainable manner, by striking a healthy balance between economic progress and environmental responsibility.

In 2003 flights departing from the EU accounted for 3.4% of total CO₂ emissions in the EU25. In other words, if all European fleet were grounded, emissions of CO₂ in the world would only decrease by 0.5% annually.

Fuel efficiency, direct routings and new technology are all part of efforts that have realised a 70% reduction in aircraft emissions over the last 30 years. Besides technological progress (the industry devotes up to 14% of its turnover to research), improvements in Air Traffic Management and other operational procedures, avoiding flying circuitous routings and holding patterns over airports, could further reduce fuel burn by between 8 and 18%. The proliferation of national air traffic authorities in Europe leads to a 7% inefficiency when just a 1% saving could save up to 500,000 tonnes of fuel a year, according to Eurocontrol, the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation.

Eurocontrol forecast an increase of between 2.3% and 3.4% per annum in the number of flights over the next 20 years. Technological and operational progress has made it possible to decouple aviation growth from fuel consumption increase. The "Operational opportunities to minimize fuel use and reduce emissions", a set of recommendations formalised by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), have been implemented by aircraft operators, airports, ATC and service providers for decades without any regulatory obligation.

Noise is another area that the industry has been making progress on. Today's aircraft are typically 75% quieter (minus 20 decibels (dB)) than the first jets in the 1960s. Research efforts in Europe target further overall reductions of 6 dB by 2008-2010. A longer-term goal of a 10 dB reduction per aircraft operation is expected for 2020.

The aviation industry has reduced its environmental impact in recent decades through the development of new technology and the adoption of specific operating methods. Aviation noise and emission levels are relatively modest – when considering the long distances covered.

When considering the total European population affected by noise due to all modes of transport, 7% live around airports, while 14% reside along rail tracks and 79% along roads.

Balancing the protection of the environment with people's need or desire to travel will remain a priority for all of us. It will require efforts from all the parties involved in the aviation chain. European airlines are committed to the sustainable growth of air transport – in other words, they are committed to meeting their customers' demand for travel, but in a way that maintains an optimal balance between economic progress, social development and environmental responsibility.

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