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Green Groups Dismayed As Flights Soar To Record High

by Michael McCarthy

Aviation growth is soaring to an all-time high, raising the prospect of a huge increase in the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

For the first time, more than 2.5 million commercial flights will be made around the world in a single month, with 2.51 million scheduled for May, says the flight information company OAG. This beats the previous record of 2.49 million flights last August.

The figure marks year-on-year global growth in flight numbers of 5 per cent, which translates as an extra 114,000 flights and 17.7 million extra passenger seats compared with May last year.



The growth rate, green campaigners said yesterday, would considerably outstrip any improvements the airlines could make in engine fuel efficiency or traffic management to bring down emissions. Aviation is the fastest-growing source of carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas, and also the origin of other greenhouse gases including nitrous oxide and water vapor.

The new figures highlight not only the remorseless upward trend in global aviation, now greatly

boosted by the cheap flights sector, but also astonishing increases in some individual countries. China's domestic flights as a whole are up by 18 per cent year on year, and international flights to and from the country have risen by 17 per cent.

Flights to and from Russia are up by 16 per cent since this time last year, while flight numbers to and from the two new EU member states, Romania and Bulgaria, are up by 14 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Flights in and out of Britain are up by 7 per cent over the year - an extra 8,000 trips and an increase of 1.9 million, or 10 per cent, in seat numbers. The increases are even more remarkable in the low-cost sector. Cheap flights to and from Spain are up 68 per cent in a year, with seat numbers up by 77 per cent - an increase of 2.5 million.

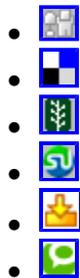
OAG's managing director, Duncan Alexander, said: "We are witnessing a step change in the way airlines are differentiating their product. This is great news from a traveler's viewpoint, with much more competition and choice." But green groups took a different view. "The binge-flying culture is taking off worldwide, and the price will be paid by the victims of climate change," said John Sauven, executive director of Greenpeace. "If Gordon Brown becomes prime minister he should tax aviation fuel and call a halt to airport expansion."

According to aviation industry figures to be published next month, obtained by the Aviation Environment Federation (AEF), global CO2 emissions are likely to rise from between 500 to 600m tonnes in 2005 to between 1,200 and nearly 1,500m tonnes in 2025. Britain's total CO2 emissions are less than 600m tonnes.

"The point is, these growth rates just render air travel completely unsustainable," said the AEF's Jeff Gazzard, "And whatever you think about carbon offsetting or emissions trading, the only thing that will really bring them under control is flying less."

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11 Comments so far

1. [mheat](#) May 9th, 2007 1:55 pm

Don't forget the 2.7 multiplier on the greenhouse effect from the fact that you are also emitting water vapour into the upper atmosphere when you fly (according to George Monbiot)

Better to drive a Hummer than to fly. Absolutely nobody wants to hear this.

This is where the rubber hits the road - modifying your own lifestyle.

2. [Alex Osmand](#) May 9th, 2007 1:58 pm

The true cost of unregulated burning of aviation fuel may well be stratospheric. CO2 released in the upper atmosphere takes three times longer to equilibrate with the biosphere than CO2 released at sea level and a significant effect of contrails and other emissions on restricting radiative cooling and/or enhancing solar warming was found in the days after 9/11. While an extra gigatonne or so of CO2 in an atmosphere containing 750 Gt each year sounds trivial, between 2005 and 2025 perhaps 25 Gt will have been added in an effectively non-exchanging region for a 3% addition to atmospheric CO2 and an unknown increment in surface temperature.

Don't even drive your Hummer - stay at home and watch the Discovery channel, or better still, watch the birds and bees while they yet survive.

3. [Jefferson Thomas](#) May 9th, 2007 2:50 pm

Nationalize the railroads and upgrade them to carry private, competing, high speed trains. Trains are second only to bicycles in efficiency.

4. [Jaded Prole](#) May 9th, 2007 2:52 pm

We have to look at the reasons people fly and the alternatives. Families are more spread out, time is free limited, and we don't have high speed rail. People aren't going to stay home. We need alternatives, Rail is the best and that requires public funding. Unfortunately

pigs will fly before the money is invested in public transportation and high speed rail in this country.

5. ebishirl May 9th, 2007 4:04 pm

Alex: Watch which bees? Last I heard, they were disappearing in droves.

George Monbiot made an excellent case in "Heat" that air travel is currently unsustainable from a greenhouse gas-emitting point of view, and cannot be made sustainable with any combination of new efficiencies, technologies or fuels. We have to wean ourselves off of this "fly-to-Spain-for-the-weekend" mentality.

6. godlessrant May 9th, 2007 9:17 pm

i despise flying. yes it's fast and convenient but it's cramped, uncomfortable, expensive and in general unpleasant. i'd be glad to see it reduced to necessity only

7. godlessrant May 9th, 2007 9:18 pm

"Nationalize the railroads and upgrade them to carry private, competing, high speed trains. Trains are second only to bicycles in efficiency."

very true, and they are so much nicer to travel on

8. rtdrury May 9th, 2007 10:00 pm

From Wikipedia:

Travel by TGV[France's high-speed rail] has largely replaced air travel between connected cities, due to shorter travel times (especially for trips taking less than three hours), reduced check-in, security and boarding formalities, and the convenient location of stations in the hearts of cities.

TGV = 506 mpg per passenger
airplane = 78 mpg per passenger

9. arpedkedarki May 10th, 2007 12:09 am

why doesn't this article address the non-commercial flights that are crisscrossing the skies, day and night, spewing some sort of chemical that spreads out and covers normally blue

sky? it happens almost every day, all over the country and, from scenes captured on cameras, all over the globe.
what is it? it disturbs my psyche....and it's even more disturbing when groups like Greenpeace and AEF won't talk. Anyone?

10. willo May 10th, 2007 1:52 pm

Anybody ever heard of Chemtrails? We have all seen vapor trails when a jet go's through a cetain part of the atmosphere. They quickly dissapate, just water vapor I guess. Then we have something different, planes that spray patterns of something in the sky. I was skeptical for a long time till I saw it happening. Every now and then they spray stuff on us. Weather control? Fighting global warming? I don't know, but it's happening without any apparent discussion in the public news services. What is it?

11. Andrew Raff May 10th, 2007 7:21 pm

Here in Australia we have just heard from both our Major Political Parties for their "Budgets" for Austalias future. They both want to fix leaking water pipes and they both want to ensure our Economic future. Our environment has a serious "leak" and is draining away at an ever increasing rate. Yet, this issue, appears to be dropped like the proverbial Hot Cake. Our present Federal Government believes Nuclear Energy is necessary to curb Global Warming (which they are using as a guise for Big Business, overseas interest and profiteering at the expense of the tax payers. Nothing mentioned about curbing/reducing/eliminating emissions from Vehicles, Aircraft and Shipping. And NOTHING given to R & D of Solar Energy and other forms of "real" sustainable energy. We also have politicians that are actively promoting a much larger population for Australia by immigration and childbirths. I am curious about just what is between the ears of politicians. We WILL run out of Oil, Coal, Gas, Uranium and other natural earthly resources. Their will be future when Planes and Trains and Automobiles....and Ships will have none of these resources to operate, are our Governments looking to the future and planning the energy needs, or just the next election...but we all know the answer to that.

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