

Health impacts of aviation noise

Note for Heathrow's Noise and Airspace Community Forum

21 March 2024

The Independent Chair of Heathrow's Noise and Airspace Community Forum (NACF) has commissioned Frontier Economics to undertake a short economic scoping study, considering the health impacts of aviation noise. Frontier attended the NACF meeting on 20th March 2024 to provide an overview of the project and invite input from Members. This note to NACF Members provides some additional detail on the scope and timing of the project, and how Members can provide input.

About Frontier Economics

Frontier Economics is one of Europe's largest economic consultancy firms. Frontier provides **independent and objective advice** to clients across a range of sectors and issues. This piece of work is being **undertaken by our Public Policy practice, operating independently from our Aviation practice**, which has worked for Heathrow on topics including regulatory, commercial and public policy issues (but not on noise specifically). This will ensure that our analysis is **completely objective and independent**, giving equal weight to the perspectives and inputs from all stakeholders involved.

Background and objectives

An important area of discussion within the NACF is the **appropriate measurement of harms created due to noise, particularly due to night flights**.

The government's Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) sets out the current approach to measuring and valuing these harms. TAG Unit A3 provides the relevant guidance on environmental impact appraisal, including noise. There is concern that this guidance is too narrow, and leads to the exclusion of some relevant harms to local residents' health.

This **scoping study for the Independent Chair of the NACF will assesses the case for considering a wider set of harms from aviation noise**.

We note that the TAG guidance is based on high-quality published evidence, and that any proposed changes to the guidance would need to be supported by new evidence of this kind. We also note that any assessment of specific changes to aviation policy or regulation, or to Heathrow operations, would involve a full assessment of a wide set of costs and benefits.

Scope

This is a short project with limited scope. It is focused on:

- the existing TAG guidance for quantifying health impacts of aviation noise; and
- whether this guidance could potentially be improved by considering additional health impacts, or updating the treatment of those impacts which are already considered.

The following are therefore out-of-scope for this project:

- applying the TAG guidance to undertake any assessment or analysis of actual impacts;
- non-health impacts, including annoyance, although we note that to the extent annoyance leads to mental or physical health impacts, these are within scope;
- impacts of aviation which are not due to noise;
- measurement of aviation noise or measurement of populations affected by noise; and
- assessment of any other aspects of the TAG guidance or its application e.g. to inform policy and regulatory decisions.

Timing

We are aiming to complete this project by the end of April 2024.

Possible conclusions

We expect that the conclusions from this project will be recommendations to the Department for Transport (as owner of the TAG guidance) and relevant stakeholders, to consider reviewing elements of the TAG guidance.

In particular, we may identify health impacts which are not currently included but we believe could be included, and/or health impacts which are currently included but where new evidence suggests the level of impact may be higher or lower than previously thought.

Input from Members

We would be very pleased to receive input from NACF Members to inform this project. We are keen to be directed to all high-quality, relevant published evidence. We have so far focused on English-language evidence from the last 10 years, but are happy to consider wider evidence. We note that unpublished or anecdotal evidence would almost certainly not be considered by DfT or other stakeholders to be sufficiently robust to justify changes to TAG.

Please contact Nick Woolley (nicholas.woolley@frontier-economics.com) and Matt Parry (matthew.parry@frontier-economics.com).