



GALBA briefing - LBA's night flight expansion application and implications December 2025

Airlines need to make more round trips per plane per day to maximise profits, so they want to reduce flight restrictions, especially at night. The location of LBA means the only way it can significantly expand its operations is by increasing the number of flights at night, currently defined as 11pm-7am.

Section 73 planning application, seeking to completely change the night flight rules, expected soon

1. The s73 aims to do two key things: a) abolish the cap on the number of flights permitted at night, and replace it with a noise 'quota count' per year, with no separate limits for summer and winter; b) extend unrestricted daytime flying hours by 90 mins, to 6am-11.30pm
2. Annual noise quota count: every plane has a noise 'quota count' (QC) number, with lower numbers meaning planes are relatively quieter. Based on LBA's 2020 application, we expect the annual noise quota count to be set at 1,375 per year, allowing LBA to fly the following at night: 1,375 planes with a QC of 1, or 2,750 planes at QC 0.5, or 5,500 at QC 0.25, or 11,000 at QC 0.125, or any combination of these within the total quota count of 1,375.
3. Newer planes used at LBA are a mix of QC0.25 and QC0.125 so if there was a 50/50 split of these planes, LBA could make 8,250 flights at night per year. Of course, there's less demand for winter night flights (approx 1,000), so most of the 8,250 night flights would be in the summer. The current limit on summer night flights is 2,800 - that could rise to 7,250.
4. If the definition of unrestricted day time flying is increased by 90 minutes, to 6am-11.30pm, those 4,450 additional flights would be squeezed into a shorter nighttime period than at present, resulting in even more frequent noise disturbances for local people. It would also mean *no limit* on flights from 6am.
5. LBA has mentioned paying for improved noise insulation but has not said where or what kind of insulation. It would only benefit people who stay in their houses, with all the doors and windows closed, from April to November.

Implications of s73 proposals

6. While each individual newer plane is relatively quieter than older ones, there is still no such thing as a 'quiet' jet engine. The expected increase in the number of flights would more than wipe out any benefit from a marginal reduction in noise per single flight.
7. The same applies to emissions and air pollution. Newer planes are marginally cleaner and more fuel efficient but the increase in flight numbers would more than wipe out any overall reduction in emissions or air pollution from individual flights.
8. The only way the s73 application would result in an overall reduction in noise, emissions and air pollution is if the annual noise quota count is set at the equivalent of the current cap of 4,000 night flights per year, 2,800 in summer, 1,200 in winter. It would be extraordinary if that's what LBA requests.

9. LBA claims that the annual noise quota would incentivise airlines to use newer planes at LBA. However, airlines like Jet2 have already announced investment to upgrade their fleets, because: a) all planes have a 'shelf life', and b) newer planes save money on fuel, an airline's highest operating cost.
10. Increasing noise is a serious public health issue. Numerous studies have confirmed the link between noise disturbance and cardiovascular disease, mental health, impairment of cognitive performance in children, low birth weight, higher blood pressure, hypertension, ischemic heart disease, strokes, dementia and diabetes. Read more about the [impacts of noise on health](#), especially heart health.
11. Most important of all in respect of the s73 application, it is now recognised that it is the *frequency* of noise events, not just the overall noise average (ie an annual noise quota count), that has the biggest detrimental effect on health.
12. In a recent US study, researchers were able to provide a causal estimate linking high-level noise exposure to low birth weight. Professor Yang who led the study said: "*Our findings have important policy implications regarding the trade-off between flight pattern optimisation and human health. This is especially important given the long-term negative impact of low birth weight on a range of later-life outcomes such as lifetime earnings, educational achievement and long-term health.*"
13. LBA claims that expansion would benefit the economy but LBA's business is almost entirely devoted to transporting local people out of the region to spend their holiday money abroad. In 2017, international leisure travel accounted for 87% of all UK resident passengers using LBA. UK tourists spend twice as much abroad as foreign tourists spend in the UK. Added to the huge imbalance of outgoing and incoming tourists, this results in a big 'tourism deficit'.
14. The overwhelming reason that flying is meant to be good for growth is because of business travel. However, business travel at LBA declined by 41% from 2010 to 2017, when just 6% of all LBA's UK passengers were business people. Since 2019, business travel across the country, even at London airports, has fallen by nearly a third.
15. More flights means more environmental damage. There is no credible large scale alternative to fossil kerosene to fuel planes. LBA will host an eight month pilot project to produce genuinely low emission fuel but there are many obstacles to producing that fuel at the vast scale needed. So-called 'sustainable' aviation fuel, a liquid biofuel made from used cooking oil or black bin waste, faces the same obstacles to scaling up.
16. Evidence from the CAA shows that regional airport expansion drives new demand for flying, rather than simply responding to latent demand. This is partly because expansion makes it more convenient, as well as cheap, for people in the airport's catchment area.
17. In short, expansion is bad for the health of local residents, bad for the climate, bad for air quality and the claims of economic benefit are open to serious questions. To be clear, GALBA does not campaign for the airport to be closed down nor do we say people should never fly. We simply say LBA should not be allowed to expand.

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