



Aviation White Paper: Flight Path to the Future (or Disaster)?

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This is a guest post by Cameron Leckie of ASPO Australia

On 16th December 2009 the Honourable Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, released the long awaited [Aviation White Paper](#).



In what seems to be a recurring theme for the Australian Government, the declining availability of oil as a result of 'peak oil' has been conveniently forgotten. In a [previous post](#), I stated that:

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there is no mention of peak oil nor its impacts in the Green Paper.

Most disappointingly and despite a number of submissions to the Green Paper (see [Matt Mushalik's submission's](#) and [my submission](#)). A number of other submissions mentioned peak oil, but I can state:

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there is no mention of peak oil nor its impacts in the White Paper (nor the Green Paper before it).

The positives

It isn't all bad. The Aviation White Paper clearly stipulates that biofuels are unlikely to replace

The Australian Government recognises the importance of developing sustainable aviation fuels; however

At the present time there is great uncertainty over the availability, commercial viability and timing of introduction of these alternative aviation fuels.

Acknowledging that biofuels aren't a silver bullet is a good thing. But the importance of 'sustainable aviation fuels' is only cited relation to reducing the carbon footprint of aircraft operations. Nowhere does it refer to the problem that there is unlikely to be enough [aviation fuel](#) to meet future demand even with the significant efficiency increases the aviation industry is aiming for. Surely 'sustainability' must consider the cost and availability of supply as well as the climate aspects. The people who write these documents are not stupid. To omit such an obvious detail must be a deliberate, and no doubt politically motivated, decision. For example, prior to drafting my submission, I contacted the Aviation White Paper staff and asked why peak oil was not in the Green Paper. The staff member who took my call was aware of peak oil and basically stated that the White Paper 'couldn't cover everything'!

There are some other wins of course. Metal cutlery will be allowed on aircraft and at aircraft facilities and passengers will be able to carry low risk items such as nail files and knitting needles onto aircraft. The Government clearly has the big issues in hand.

Conclusion

Why is peak oil not considered in planning for the future of the Australian aviation industry? Maybe this is why:

The aviation industry relies for its long-term viability on the strength of the Australian economy and economies around the world. This means that aviation, like all sectors of the economy, is vulnerable to economic downturns. When economies weaken, all aspects of the aviation business are affected.

Acknowledging peak oil means acknowledging that our economies will weaken, perhaps permanently. Our political system is not geared towards telling voters that current living standards can't be maintained. So rather than acknowledge the problems that peak oil presents, it is ignored. The problem that this approach presents however is that it leaves us with very few options to respond to peak oil, meaning that the transition to a post peak oil economy and society is likely to be far harder than it necessarily should be. By failing to plan, the government is planning for the aviation industry to fail.



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