

DG Move
Adina Vălean
European Commissioner for Transport

Utrecht, The Netherlands, January 18, 2024

We want our sleep back!

Dear European Commissioner Vălean,

We are writing you on behalf of concerned airport communities and environmental organisations in anticipation of your advice concerning the Balanced Approach for the temporary reduction of the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol capacity to 452.500 flights a year.

We kindly ask the Dutch government and the EU to protect our health against excess aircraft noise. Since 2015 the Dutch government has allowed noise levels to exceed norms with the expectation that in time those noise levels would be reduced. This has not happened, and the effectiveness of measures taken by, and agreements reached with the aviation sector have been proven to be insufficient. The government finally decided to restore the legal situation for residents and protect their basic right to a healthy living environment. The reduction of flight levels at Schiphol as proposed is an absolute minimum requirement and not more restrictive than needed to reduce noise levels sufficiently. Studies have pointed out that other measures will not be sufficiently effective. We look forward to your support for the Dutch government's decision to restore the basic rights of residents and therefore to limit flight movements at Schiphol.

More and more residents suffer from air traffic

According to EASA¹, the number of people highly annoyed by aircraft noise was estimated at 4.0 million in 2019, and the number of people suffering from aircraft-induced major sleep disturbance was estimated to be 1.7 million. This is 24% and 31% more, respectively, than in 2005. With flight levels growing fast to 2019 levels, the number of highly annoyed and sleep disturbed residents will also grow fast to pre-COVID levels. Although accounting for around 2.5% of global CO₂ emissions, aviation was the fastest growing polluting mode of transport before the Covid-19 pandemic, with emissions rapidly increasing from 706 MtCO₂ in 2013 to 920 MtCO₂ in 2019². And NO_x emissions, ultra-fine particles and other hazardous substances impact local nature and residents.

It is therefore not strange that Member States such as France, Belgium, Italy and The Netherlands are concerned about the impact of the growing aviation sector on residents and nature and want to act. They want to cap the effects of airports on residents, the environment and to fight climate change. Despite measures taken to lower the impact on residents and the environment, the effects are wide-ranging and increasing with air traffic volumes.

1 [Noise | EASA Eco \(europa.eu\)](#)

2 Graver, B., Rutherford, D., & Zheng, S. (2020). CO₂ emissions from commercial aviation: 2013, 2018, and 2019. ICCT. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/3803497/co2-emissions-from-commercial-aviation/4609325/>

The Schiphol-case: what can DGMove offer residents and the climate?

The Environmental Noise Directive requires that Member States follow the Balanced Approach procedure when noise related limitations are introduced in the operations of their airports. The Dutch government sent their notification document to the European Commission on September 1st, 2023, explaining all the measures to reduce noise levels and the consequent decision that a reduction of flight movements is required to protect the overall public interest for a safe and healthy living environment. Studies³ show that measures like fleet renewal and insulation of houses are insufficient to bring noise levels within acceptable limits. The European Commission will give a recommendation on the measures and the way the Dutch Government has followed the Balanced Approach, in the first quarter of 2024.

Protect rights of residents

We encourage you to take the health of residents seriously, to listen to their concerns and to make their basic right for a healthy living environment one of your main concerns. We appeal to you to not let short-term economic interests of airlines prevail over the responsibility of the European Commission and Member States to protect the basic rights of residents for a healthy living environment.

We encourage you to recognise aviation's negative and growing impact on people, the environment and nature. The sector is a major and growing contributor to the climate crisis and local pollution. Given current growth trajectories, utter reliance on fossil fuels and a slow ramp up of alternatives, aviation is set to develop into one of the biggest contributors to climate change of the transport sector.

Empower Member States

Despite the EU's attempts to address aviation's negative impacts, Member States see that these measures are not far-reaching enough to address the sector's exponential growth and thus growing impact on climate, environment and residents. It is logical that Member States want to stop making the problem bigger, as is the case in the Netherlands.

Bring the illegal situation of Schiphol to an end

In case of the Netherlands, we all support the Dutch government's decision to finally choose for the protection of its residents against excess aircraft noise over the short-term economic interest of airlines. The Dutch Government has allowed Schiphol and the aviation sector to exceed the permissible standards since 2015, in the expectation that noise levels would reduce sufficiently. But despite attempts to reduce noise nuisance from 2006, the trend is still upwards. The use of quieter aircraft has not resulted in a decreased perception of severe nuisance, as various studies show⁴. The Dutch government at last decided to bring an end to this illegal situation and reduce the maximum number of flight movements at Schiphol as part of a larger package of noise related measures.

³ [Notificatiedocument Balanced Approach procedure Schiphol | Rapport | Luchtvaart in de toekomst](#)

⁴ The World Health Organization (WHO), and consequently also the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (hereinafter also "RIVM") and the Regional Medical Assistance Organisation (hereinafter also "GGD GHOR"), point to the negative effects on health of noise nuisance and disrupted sleep.

EU-regulation protects aviation

The formal goal of EU regulation 598/2014 is to improve the noise environment around EU airports to ensure greater compatibility between aviation activities and residential areas. In reality this regulation, together with the slot allocation rules, facilitates the growth of the aviation sector and complicates the reduction of airport capacity to limit noise levels and other emissions. Also, in this particular Dutch situation it sustains a clearly illegal situation.

There is increasing urgency to set clear and ambitious standards for preventing climate change and the protection of our environment and health which are under severe pressure. During COP 26 a declaration was signed to reduce aviation CO2 emissions at a rate consistent with efforts to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C.

The mentioned European regulations are foremost written with the aviation sector in mind. An update is urgently needed to reflect the fast-developing challenges of the climate crisis and need to better protect residents and thus allow member states to reduce their airport capacity for the sake of residents, our climate and nature.

Less aviation is good for welfare, only a minority benefits from growth

Socio economic studies show that growth of airports can lead to loss of welfare and reducing aviation can be beneficial for welfare⁵. It is a minority of the richest residents that benefit most from cheap flights⁶. Residents should not suffer for the pleasure and benefit of a minority. Not through health and not through cost increases while negative effects are still largely moved on to society.

Support Member States

We call upon you to facilitate Member States that need to reduce airport capacity as legal standards and agreements are exceeded and other measures have proven to be insufficiently effective. The Dutch government is the first Member State to reduce airport capacity due to excess noise levels and it requires your full support and positive advice.

We look forward to your reaction.

Yours Sincerely,

On behalf of all signatories,
Marjolein Demmers, Director Natuur & Milieu
(m.demmers@natuurenmilieu.nl)

PS. We will share this letter with Members of Parliament, DGEnv, DGSante, DGGreenDeal and DGClimate.

⁵ [Verdere groei Schiphol leidt tot welvaartsverlies in Nederland - CE Delft](#)

⁶ [CO2-uitstoot van Nederlanders bij recreatieve verplaatsingen | Notitie | Kennisinstituut voor Mobiliteitsbeleid \(kimnet.nl\)](#)

Airport Communities

- European Union Against Aircraft Nuisances (EUCNA)
- SchipholWatch
- Vlieghinder Nieuwkoop
- Beraad Vlieghinder Moet Minder (BVM2 - umbrella organization of local residents' organizations around the air base of Eindhoven/Eindhoven Airport)
- SOS Zaanstreek
- Vereniging BTV-Rotterdam Airport
- Comité Schone Lucht
- Krimpluchtvaart
- Werkgroep Geluidshinder Kaag en Braassem Noord
- Behoud Woongenot Aalsmeerbaan (BWA)
- Klankbordgroep Minder Hinder Gooise Meren
- SOS-Zaanstreek
- Omgeving Zonder Vlieghinder – regio Rijn en Bollenstreek
- Alliantie pleinAIR Maastricht

Environmental and Nature Organisations

- De Natuur en Milieufederaties
- Fossielvrij
- Greenpeace Nederland
- Milieudefensie
- Natuur & Milieu
- Natuur en Milieu Noord-Holland
- Natuur en Milieufederatie Zuid-Holland
- Urgenda