

ACI EUROPE Recommendations for Enhancing Sustainable Aviation through the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan (STIP)

ACI EUROPE, representing Europe's airports, proposed urgent recommendations for the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan (STIP). Our proposals emphasise essential financial support, non-financial mechanisms, and infrastructure adaptation to accelerate sustainable aviation, focusing on Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) and alternative energy sources.

Airports are ready to lead the decarbonisation of aviation. They are pivotal enablers for deploying low-emission aircraft technologies, expanding SAF availability and supply, and developing charging infrastructure for electrified operations. This collaborative approach is crucial to unlocking CO2 reduction opportunities and fast-tracking innovative solutions. Through our Net Zero Resolution¹, ACI EUROPE and its members reaffirm their commitment to driving these transformative changes to confront the climate crisis head-on.

A cornerstone of this commitment is the globally recognised *Airport Carbon Accreditation*² (ACA) programme proven to reduce carbon emissions effectively across airports. As of the latest 2023-2024 reporting period airports worldwide cut over 1 million tonnes of CO2, including 278,570 tonnes in Europe alone. Sixteen European airports have achieved the highest Level 5 accreditation, certifying net zero emissions for sources under their control and committing to full decarbonisation by 2050. Launched at COP28 in 2023, Level 5 sets a global benchmark for airport climate leadership and demonstrates the sector's readiness to meet its climate commitments.

The entire European aviation sector is committed to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Airports, airlines, air navigation service providers, and the civil aeronautics industry have jointly outlined urgent policy recommendations in the updated Destination 2050 roadmap—A Route to Net Zero European Aviation³. Achieving this goal requires immediate, substantial investments in sustainable fuels, infrastructure, and breakthrough technologies.

The STIP offers a critical opportunity to mobilise these investments. It must prioritise and accelerate support for SAF scale-up, infrastructure modernisation, and innovative decarbonisation technologies to ensure Europe remains a global leader in sustainable aviation. Delaying action risks losing competitiveness and jeopardises Europe's climate objectives. **The time to act is now!**

We urge the European Commission to act decisively and embed these industry-backed measures into the STIP. Only through bold, coordinated, and well-funded action can we secure a sustainable, competitive future for European aviation—and meet the urgent challenge of climate change.

¹ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.aci-europe.org/downloads/content/ACI%20EUROPE%20RESOLUTION%202024-1.pdf

² <https://www.airportcarbonaccreditation.org/>

³ <https://www.destination2050.eu/roadmap/>

Key Requests for Integration into STIP

1. Enhanced Funding for SAF Production and Infrastructure

Overall, there is a crucial need for dedicated Funding for SAF production and supply. It is necessary to allocate specific EU funds to develop SAF production facilities and related infrastructure across Europe, ensuring a robust supply chain.

- **Earmark ETS Revenues for Decarbonisation:** Require Member States to channel a larger share of ETS revenues into decarbonisation efforts, prioritising hard-to-abate sectors like aviation. This funding should support research, development, and deployment of clean technologies to enhance industry competitiveness.
- **Private Investment Incentives:** Introduce targeted grants, low-interest loans, and tax incentives to encourage private sector investment in SAF production and distribution, helping to close the cost gap with conventional jet fuels.
- **Increase EU ETS SAF Allowances:** Significantly raise the number of SAF allowances under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) and extend the scheme beyond 2030 to provide airlines with stronger financial support to adopt SAF.
- **Unlock Industrial Investment Tools:** Empower the European Investment Bank and other EU bodies to deploy repayable advance schemes and expand venture debt funding specifically for sustainable aviation projects.
- **Invest in Energy Efficiency and Clean Aviation Technologies:** Increase funding for Clean Aviation initiatives focusing on highly efficient aircraft designs, advanced propulsion systems, electrification, hybridisation, and alternative fuels (including hydrogen and SAF). Support collaborative R&D platforms to accelerate innovation.

2. Electrification and Renewable Energy Integration at Airports

Electrification of airports is essential for reducing carbon emissions and advancing sustainable aviation. Therefore, we request financial support to electrify both airside ground operations and landside infrastructure, including the deployment of electric vehicle charging stations.

- **Financial Support for Electrification:**
 1. Airside: Provide dedicated funding to electrify airport ground operations and integrate renewable energy sources, reducing emissions from airport infrastructure.
 2. Landside: Provide dedicated funding for deploying electric charging stations on the landside of airports, which are currently not eligible for CEF-AFIF calls. This initiative aims to support the growing demand for electric vehicles among airport users, including passengers, staff, and service providers.
- **Hydrogen Infrastructure Development:** Facilitate investments in hydrogen production (electrolysis, liquefaction), storage, pipeline networks, and refuelling infrastructure at airports. Accelerate permitting and authorisation

processes to fast-track deployment of this critical infrastructure needed for zero-emission aircraft.

- **Scale Deployment of New Aircraft Technologies:** Use STIP resources to support the large-scale introduction of electrified and hydrogen-powered aircraft technologies.

3. EU Budget Allocation and Simplification for Aviation Decarbonisation and Resilience

The EU must allocate dedicated funds and simplify procedures to accelerate aviation decarbonisation and climate adaptation, enabling airports to implement innovative green solutions and meet ambitious climate targets efficiently. Strengthening financial support and streamlining regulations are essential to ensuring a resilient, sustainable European aviation sector.

- **Increase Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Budget for Aviation:** Boost CEF funding to support airport decarbonisation projects and infrastructure upgrades that accommodate new energy sources on both airside and landside operations.
- **Simplify ETS Innovation Fund Access:** Streamline administrative procedures and improve selection criteria within the ETS Innovation Fund to better support e-SAF production and other sustainable aviation projects. Ensure airports have direct access to these innovation funds for R&D and infrastructure development in SAF, electric, hybrid-electric and hydrogen aircraft technologies.
- **Secure Joint EU Funding Beyond 2027:** Guarantee continued political and financial support for SESAR and other key research and innovation programmes beyond 2027. This will incentivise early adopters, accelerate technology development, and promote digitalisation and climate impact reduction across aviation.
- **Invest in Carbon Capture and Utilisation (CCU) R&D:** Allocate funds to advance research and development in CCU technologies as part of the broader decarbonisation strategy.
- **Increase funding dedicated to climate adaptation of aviation infrastructure:** This includes investments in resilient infrastructure, such as flood-proofed runways, heat-resistant materials, and upgraded drainage systems, to withstand extreme weather events like flooding, heatwaves, and storms. Additionally, supporting innovative design solutions and integrating climate resilience into new and existing assets will help safeguard airport operations, ensure service continuity, and reduce long-term costs associated with climate-related damages and repairs.

By integrating these requests into the STIP, the European Commission can significantly enhance the sustainability of European aviation, support the transition to net-zero emissions, and maintain Europe's competitiveness in the global aviation sector. ACI EUROPE looks forward to collaborating with the Commission to ensure these critical measures are implemented effectively.
