

SASIG AVIATION BULLETIN

Aviation News & Policy

September 2026



SASIG's monthly Aviation Bulletin provides LGA members, affiliates and associate members with focused insights into the parliamentary, policy and industry developments shaping the future direction of the aviation sector in the UK.

Editorial

September 2026 brought the resilience of the UK's air traffic management system to the top of the political agenda. Two unrelated NATS failures within thirteen days, alongside the Commons Second Reading of the Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill, led Parliament, the regulator and industry to question whether the country's core aviation infrastructure is fit for purpose. Meanwhile, the outlook for Heathrow expansion also became markedly less certain.

Air Traffic Control Resilience Under Scrutiny

On 8 September, a **software defect in the NATS flight data processing system at Swanwick** led to more than 2,000 cancellations. The Transport Secretary, Heidi Alexander, **commissioned an independent CAA review**, whose terms of reference, published on 25 September, extend to NATS' leadership, systems renewal and the CAA's own oversight. A second, unrelated fault at Prestwick on 21 September, which cut capacity in Scottish-controlled airspace by around 60%, has intensified calls for decisive action on resilience.

Heathrow: Climate Advice and a Revised Timetable

The consultation on the draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS) closed on 1 September. SASIG submitted a substantial response to the consultation. On 16 September, the **Climate Change Committee advised that expansion would make the UK's climate targets harder to achieve** unless the sector does substantially more to cut emissions. On 26 September, **Heathrow acknowledged that its third runway is unlikely to open before 2039**, and the Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, subsequently declined to endorse the scheme.

Legislation and Regional Investment

The Civil Aviation Bill will give the CAA direct consumer enforcement powers and now requires a **review of airport drop-off charges** — this provision is of direct interest to councils managing displaced parking around airports. Beyond London, **Edinburgh Airport launched a £500 million investment programme**, the largest in its history, and Stansted reported its busiest summer on record.

Action for Members

Authorities around Heathrow and those interested in how it can benefit the UK should prepare for **the airport's public consultation on its expansion proposals, running from 27 October to 22 December 2026**, while parliamentary scrutiny of the draft HENPS continues until 26 November. **Both Houses return on 12 October**, with the Commons Report Stage of the Civil Aviation Bill provisionally expected in the week commencing 26 October.

Chris Cain

Policy Director, SASIG

Monthly Highlights

Key stories from this month at a glance:

- **8 and 21 September 2026** — [NATS suffers two air traffic control failures in under two weeks](#) — a software defect at Swanwick caused more than 2,000 cancellations, followed 13 days later by an unrelated connectivity fault at Prestwick that disrupted flights across Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England.
- **9 September 2026** — [Civil Aviation Bill receives Commons Second Reading](#) — the Bill gives the CAA direct consumer enforcement powers and provides for a review of airport drop-off charges.
- **16 September 2026** — [Climate Change Committee advice on Heathrow expansion](#) — expansion would make climate targets harder to meet unless the sector does more to cut emissions.
- **16 September 2026** — [Stansted records its busiest summer](#) — a record August rounds off the airport's strongest summer to date.
- **21 September 2026** — [Edinburgh Airport unveils £500 million investment programme](#) — the largest programme in the airport's history will enlarge the terminal by 60%.
- **25 September 2026** — [CAA sets out scope of its independent review of NATS](#) — covering systems renewal, leadership and the CAA's own oversight.
- **26 September 2026** — [Heathrow third runway timetable slips to 2039](#) — the airport's own expansion consultation opens on 27 October.

Potential Actions for Local Authorities

- Prepare responses to Heathrow's public consultation on its expansion proposals ([27 October – 22 December 2026](#)), particularly on surface access, noise and air quality.
- Note that parliamentary scrutiny of the draft HENPS continues until 26 November 2026.
- Consider briefing local MPs on the Civil Aviation Bill's review of airport drop-off charges ahead of Commons Report Stage, provisionally expected in the week commencing 26 October.

SASIG Activities This Month

- SASIG's CAG meeting was held on 15th September 2026.
- SASIG's Policy Director, Chris Cain, spoke at the A.I.R. – Aviation Infrastructure Resilience Conference, ExCeL London, 29–30 September 2026.
- Next SASIG Members' Meeting: Tuesday 6th October 2026 (Online).

Events, Meetings & Consultations

SASIG Meetings

Note: SASIG meetings continue to be held predominantly online. Please confirm arrangements with the Secretariat before making travel plans.

Last SASIG Members' Meeting: Held: 17th June 2026 (Online)

Next SASIG Members' Meeting: Tuesday 6th October 2026 (Online)

Consultations

- **Closed 1 September 2026:** DfT — [Draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement \(HENPS\)](#) — the Government is reviewing responses (see Parliamentary Questions — Surface Access to Heathrow).
- **Opened 14 September 2026:** CAA — [Airspace Modernisation Strategy \(AMS\) Support Fund call for proposals](#) — funding for sponsors progressing airspace change proposals.

External Conferences & Events

29–30 September 2026: A.I.R. – Aviation Infrastructure Resilience Conference, ExCeL London, focusing on the infrastructure and future of the UK aviation sector. SASIG's Policy Director, Chris Cain, spoke at the event.

Parliamentary & Government News

Transport Questions: House of Commons

Both Houses returned from the summer recess on 1 September 2026. The Commons rose for the conference recess on 16 September and the Lords on 17 September; both return on 12 October 2026.

1 September 2026 — [Revised National Planning Policy Framework: Further Planning Reform](#) — Commons statement on further reform of national planning policy, relevant to local planning authorities.

7 September 2026 — [Local Government Reorganisation](#) — Commons statement updating on the reorganisation programme, also repeated in the Lords.

9 September 2026 — [Civil Aviation \(Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform\) Bill \[Lords\]: Second Reading](#) — the Transport Secretary announced the CAA's independent review of the NATS outage, and the Government signalled no objection to the Lords-inserted review of airport drop-off charges (see UK Aviation Policy — Land Use, Planning & Economic Impact).

10 September 2026 — [Air Traffic Control Disruption](#) — urgent question on the NATS outage; ministers confirmed NATS would report by 16 September and the CAA review within six months (see UK Aviation Policy — Airspace, ATM & Air Navigation).

15 September 2026 — [Grey Belt Land: Definition and Application](#) — Commons debate on how grey belt land is defined in planning policy.

Transport Questions: House of Lords

14 September 2026 — [Air Traffic Control Disruption](#) — Peers questioned the Government on the 8 September outage and the scope of the CAA review (see House of Commons, 10 September, above).

Parliamentary Questions

Q. Air Passenger Duty (Sarah Champion; Commons [Q.26027](#), 1 September): *Revenue from extending the higher rate of APD to all private jets.*

James Murray (answered 9 September): At present, only 36 per cent of private jet passengers pay the higher APD rate, while most pay the same as those on commercial flights, despite private jets offering a more premium service with far fewer passengers and significantly higher emissions per person than commercial flights. The Government does not believe this to be fair, which is why at Budget 2024 we announced that from April 2027, the Government will extend the scope of the higher rate of APD to cover all private jets over 5.7 tonnes. This change will mean that private jet passengers always pay higher rates of APD compared to commercial flyers and ensures fair and consistent taxation across private aviation. The measure is expected to raise £10m per year. These figures have been certified by the Office for Budget Responsibility and were published alongside Budget 2025.

Q. Traffic Distribution Rules 1991 (Richard Holden; Commons [Q.26160](#), 1 September): *Plans for the Rules following the CAA's review.*

Keir Mather (answered 21 September): The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is currently undertaking its review of the 1991 Traffic Distribution Rules after consulting stakeholders more widely. Once the review has concluded and the CAA has provided its advice, the government will give this careful consideration before determining next steps. (See also [Q.26631](#) and [Q.27702](#) below.)

Q. Surface Access to Heathrow (Shivani Raja; Commons [Q.26207](#), 1 September): *Merits of a senior reference group to coordinate Heathrow surface access.*

Keir Mather (answered 7 September): The draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement is clear that any promoter seeking development consent for Heathrow expansion will be required to set out a robust surface access strategy, demonstrating how sufficient surface access capacity would be developed and delivered to support an expanded Heathrow. Given the range of interests and interdependencies involved in the development and delivery of surface access infrastructure, promoters are expected to work with relevant stakeholders, including transport bodies and local authorities, in developing their surface access proposals. The Department will work with promoters and stakeholders to ensure effective engagement and support the development of deliverable plans.

Q. Surface Access to Heathrow (Shivani Raja; Commons [Q.26208](#), 1 September): *Whether rail applications must precede or accompany the Heathrow DCO application.*

Keir Mather (answered 24 September): The draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (HENPS) does not require that applications for any new rail infrastructure must be submitted before, or alongside, an application for development consent for Heathrow expansion. Instead, any promoter seeking development consent would be required to demonstrate clearly the rail enhancements it proposes to deliver and a credible plan for their delivery as part of a wider, credible and deliverable surface access strategy for an expanded Heathrow. The consultation on the draft HENPS has now closed and the Government will review responses before setting out next steps.

Q. Airport Planning (Rebecca Smith; Commons [Q.26803](#), 2 September): *Publication of a list of statutory requirements for airport planning and construction.*

Keir Mather (answered 7 September): The Government does not maintain, and does not plan to publish, a single consolidated list of all legislative and statutory requirements that apply to the planning and construction of airports. Doing so would be disproportionate and would duplicate information already available through legislation.gov.uk.

Q. Air Freight and Slots (Rebecca Smith; Commons [Q.26804](#), 2 September): *Adequacy of slot access for dedicated freight operators.*

Keir Mather (answered 7 September): The government recognises the crucial role air freight plays in transporting goods to and from the UK, which benefits consumers and businesses and facilitates growth in large parts of the economy beyond aviation. An independent slot coordinator is responsible for allocating slots at the UK's slot coordinated airports. The UK Government is not involved in slot allocation and has no power to intervene in this process. (See also [Q.27702](#) below and *Wider Industry News — Air Cargo & Freight*.)

Q. Traffic Distribution Rules 1991 (Greg Smith; Commons [Q.26631](#), 2 September): *Impact of revoking the Rules on passenger, freight and regional airport services.*

Keir Mather (answered 7 September): The Department for Transport has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available. (See also [Q.26160](#) above.)

Q. Domestic Flights and Emissions (Richard Holden; Commons [Q.27001](#), 3 September): *Publication of UK ETS price scenarios for domestic air fares to 2050.*

Michael Shanks (answered 8 September): The Department has not published and has no current plans to publish estimates of the impact of UK Emissions Trading Scheme allowance prices on the cost of UK domestic flights between 2026 and 2050. As set out in the answer previously provided to the hon. Member, the Department publishes traded carbon values for modelling purposes, which provide scenario-based projections of future carbon prices rather than forecasts. Owing to the uncertainty associated with long-term carbon price projections and emissions, any estimates of future impacts on air fares would be subject to significant uncertainty.

Q. UK Airspace Design Service (Richard Holden; Commons [Q.27000](#), 3 September): *When UKADS will be fully operational.*

Keir Mather (answered 11 September): The UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) provided by NATS En Route Ltd (NERL) is operational and has begun work to design airspace for the complex London region. The final process to establish the UKADS was the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) decision on modifications to the NERL licence, which was published in March 2026, and took effect on 6 May 2026. Staffing arrangements are a matter for NATS En Route Ltd.

Q. Airport Fees and Charges (Richard Holden; Commons [Q.26995](#), 3 September): *Modelling of the impact of surface access requirements on drop-off and parking charges.*

Keir Mather (answered 8 September): The Department for Transport has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available. (See also *House of Commons*, 9 September, above.)

Q. Heathrow Expansion (James Naish; Commons [Q.27285](#), 4 September): *Assessment of the economic and environmental impact of a third runway.*

Keir Mather (answered 11 September): As part of the recent consultation on the draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement (now closed) the Department conducted analysis to look at the potential impact of Heathrow Airport expansion on the economy, including the environmental and climate related costs. This analysis can be found in the Heathrow Expansion Appraisal Report (HEAR). The HEAR is supported by a further economic impact modelling document, and a further assessment of the impact of the scheme can be found in the Appraisal of Sustainability for the draft Heathrow Expansion National Policy Statement, all published on GOV.UK.

Q. Sustainable Aviation Fuel (Greg Smith; Commons [Q.27544](#), 7 September): *Timing of the Government's response on SAF.*

Keir Mather (answered 15 September): The update on SAF, including the Call for Evidence on SAF supply and industry certainty, was published on 16 June. The Call for Evidence closed on 28 July. Officials are currently reviewing the evidence provided by stakeholders across the industry. Our intention is to publish a government response in the Autumn, subject to the usual approval processes.

Q. Freight Slots (Joe Robertson; Commons [Q.27702](#), 7 September): *Changes to slot rules to protect freight access.*

Keir Mather (answered 10 September): The government recognises the crucial role air freight plays in transporting goods to and from the UK, which benefits consumers and businesses and facilitates growth in large parts of the economy beyond aviation. Airport Coordination Limited, the UK's independent slot coordinator is responsible for allocating slots at the UK's slot coordinated airports. The UK Government is not involved in slot allocation and has no power to intervene in this process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is currently undertaking its review of the 1991 Traffic Distribution Rules after consulting stakeholders more widely. Once the review has concluded and the CAA has provided its advice, the government will give this careful consideration before determining next steps. (See also [Q.26804](#) and [Q.26160](#) above.)

Q. Air Traffic Control Disruption (Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick; Lords [Q.HL3270](#), 8 September): *Assessment of the 8 September disruption.*

Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill (answered 22 September): The Government apologises to passengers across the United Kingdom who faced significant disruption as a result of the issues that impacted NATS' operation on 8 September, resulting in delays and cancellations for a large number of passengers, as well as the disruption that it has caused for industry. Let us be clear that disruption of this kind is absolutely unacceptable. Department for Transport officials worked closely with NATS, airports and airlines throughout the incident and recovery period to monitor impacts and provide support where necessary. The Department also provided night flight alleviations, where required, to assist airports in recovering operations. The Secretary of State asked NATS to provide a report by Wednesday 16 September setting out the cause of the incident and the actions taken in response and has also asked the CAA to conduct an independent review into this matter immediately. The Department will continue to work closely with NATS and the Civil Aviation Authority to ensure the root cause is fully understood, lessons are identified, and appropriate steps are taken to minimise the risk of similar disruption occurring in future. (See also [Q.28670](#) below and *UK Aviation Policy — Airspace, ATM & Air Navigation*.)

Q. Air Traffic Control Disruption (Graeme Downie; Commons [Q.28670](#), 9 September): *Economic cost of closing a major airport for an hour and a day.*

Keir Mather (answered 14 September): The recovery from the NATS disruption on 8 September is ongoing and it is therefore too soon to estimate the full economic cost to the UK economy. However, I am under no illusion that the economic cost of the recent incident is incredibly significant. Therefore, we need to learn the lessons from what has happened to ensure that we can minimise the chance of disruption of this kind happening again. Following the disruption, on 9 September NATS agreed to undertake a rapid review, reporting to us by 16 September, setting out the cause of the incident and the actions taken in response. We have also asked the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to undertake an independent review of the incident, which is expected to report within six months. (See also [Q.HL3270](#) above.)

Government Announcements & Publications

10 September 2026 — [Independent review into NATS disruption confirmed](#) — the Transport Secretary asks the CAA to investigate the 8 September outage and the resilience of UK air traffic control.

15 September 2026 — [CAA publishes updated Airspace Change Process \(CAP1616, version 6\)](#) — revised guidance for sponsors of airspace change proposals.

16 September 2026 — [Climate Change Committee publishes its advice on Heathrow expansion](#) — DfT will consider the advice alongside HENPS consultation responses (see *UK Aviation Policy — Sustainability, SAF & Decarbonisation*).

25 September 2026 — [CAA announces terms of reference for its independent review of the 8 September NATS incident \(CAP3315\)](#) — an initial report is due by the end of January 2027.

Parliamentary Committees

Transport Committee: scrutiny of the draft HENPS continues until 26 November; the Climate Change Committee is expected to give evidence on its Heathrow advice in October.

Environmental Audit Committee: 9 September — [Oral evidence: Progress on climate change mitigation](#) — the CCC was questioned on its Heathrow advice and the HENPS scrutiny process.

UK Aviation Policy

Airport Expansion & Capacity

3 September 2026 — [CILT calls for a clear, coordinated national airports strategy](#) — the Institute argues capacity should be planned nationally, not airport by airport.

15 September 2026 — [ACI World calls for modernisation of the global airport slot system](#) — current slot rules are said to stifle competition and cost passengers (see Parliamentary Questions — Air Freight and Slots).

27–28 September 2026 — [Prime Minister declines to back a third runway at Heathrow](#) — the Prime Minister described the scheme as principally a matter for London (see National & Regional Aviation News — Heathrow).

29 September 2026 — [ACI World urges governments to plan airport capacity now](#) — long lead times mean decisions on new capacity cannot be deferred.

Airspace, ATM & Air Navigation

8 September 2026 — [NATS flight data processing failure disrupts flights nationwide](#) — more than 2,000 flights were cancelled (see Monthly Highlights and Parliamentary & Government News).

9 September 2026 — [Ryanair and Wizz Air call for an overhaul of NATS](#) — airlines press for reform of the air traffic control provider.

14 September 2026 — [CAA opens the Airspace Modernisation Strategy Support Fund call for proposals](#) — funding for airspace change sponsors (see Events, Meetings & Consultations).

21 September 2026 — [Second NATS fault in two weeks hits flights in Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England](#) — an unrelated connectivity fault at Prestwick cut capacity in Scottish-controlled airspace by around 60%.

25 September 2026 — [CAA to assess NATS leadership as part of its independent review](#) — the review will also examine systems renewal and the CAA's own oversight (see Government Announcements & Publications).

Sustainability, SAF & Decarbonisation

3 September 2026 — [Friends of the Earth sets out how Heathrow expansion risks UK climate targets](#) — the campaign group argues a third runway would jeopardise UK carbon budgets.

16 September 2026 — [Climate Change Committee: Heathrow expansion would make climate targets harder to meet](#) — expansion should proceed only if the sector does more to cut emissions (see Government Announcements & Publications).

17 September 2026 — [EASA reports EU SAF supply exceeded the 2025 ReFuelEU Aviation target](#) — evidence of progress on SAF supply ahead of the UK Government's autumn response (see Parliamentary Questions — Sustainable Aviation Fuel).

Advanced Air Mobility, Drones & New Technology

No significant developments reported this month.

Land Use, Planning & Economic Impact

1 September 2026 — [East Midlands Airport argues the region needs its airport to thrive](#) — the airport sets out its importance to the regional economy.

10 September 2026 — [Government has no objection to a review of airport drop-off charges](#) — MPs raised concerns about passenger costs and vehicles displaced into neighbouring communities (see Parliamentary & Government News — House of Commons, 9 September, and National & Regional Aviation News — Midlands & East of England).

15 September 2026 — [Heathrow third runway programme targets 5,000 places for young people not in education, employment or training](#) — a skills commitment aimed at youth unemployment in west London.

National & Regional Aviation News — UK

London Airports

Heathrow

3 September 2026 — [Mayor of London ‘deeply concerned’ by Heathrow expansion plans](#) — the Mayor restates his opposition to expansion.

11 September 2026 — [Heathrow passenger numbers fall in the peak summer holiday month](#) — August traffic fell despite the peak holiday season.

26 September 2026 — [Third runway could be delayed by four years to 2039](#) — the previous 2035 target is no longer achievable; Heathrow’s consultation runs from 27 October to 22 December (see Monthly Highlights).

30 September 2026 — [Prime Minister says he will hear all sides on Heathrow](#) — while suggesting a preference for expanding Manchester Airport (see UK Aviation Policy — Airport Expansion & Capacity).

Gatwick

8 September 2026 — Departures were halted during the NATS outage (see UK Aviation Policy — Airspace, ATM & Air Navigation).

London City Airport

10 September 2026 — [Bombardier Global 8000 approved to operate at London City](#) — the business jet is cleared to use the airport’s short runway.

London Stansted & Luton

3 September 2026 — [Stansted Airport College expansion backed by £5 million](#) — with funding from Essex County Council to expand aviation training.

16 September 2026 — [Record-breaking August rounds off Stansted’s busiest summer](#) — the airport’s strongest summer to date (see Monthly Highlights).

London Southend

14 September 2026 — [London Southend tops the CAA’s UK airport punctuality rankings](#) — first for punctuality in the latest CAA data.

Midlands & East of England

10 September 2026 — [Direct rail service from Birmingham to Manchester Airport to run from 2027](#) — improved rail links between the Midlands and Manchester Airport.

16 September 2026 — [Aviation Minister hails East Midlands Airport as a powerhouse for UK trade](#) — the Minister highlights the UK’s largest dedicated air cargo hub (see Wider Industry News — Air Cargo & Freight).

28 September 2026 — [Drop-off charges to increase at East Midlands Airport](#) — charges of the kind covered by the Civil Aviation Bill’s proposed review (see UK Aviation Policy — Land Use, Planning & Economic Impact).

North of England

30 September 2026 — [Leeds Bradford Airport says planned night-time operating changes will not increase noise](#) — of interest to neighbouring communities.

Scotland

21 September 2026 — [Edinburgh Airport launches a £500 million investment programme](#) — including a £65 million terminal expansion to be delivered by Balfour Beatty (see Monthly Highlights).

29 September 2026 — [Ministers urged to intervene over Glasgow Prestwick London flights](#) — calls grow for support to restore London services.

Wales & South West England

9 September 2026 — [Winter hydrogen trial at Exeter Airport](#) — the trial strengthens the case for lower-carbon ground operations.

Channel Islands & Crown Dependencies

No significant developments reported this month.

Wider Industry News

Air Cargo & Freight

16 September 2026 — [UK airports show robust cargo activity in the first half of 2026](#) — UK cargo volumes held up well (see National & Regional Aviation News — Midlands & East of England).

Aerospace Manufacturing & Innovation

18 September 2026 — [Clean Aviation launches 19 projects mobilising €664 million of research](#) — EU funding for lower-emission aircraft technologies.

25 September 2026 — [Vertical Aerospace opens a new Valo assembly centre](#) — at Cotswold Airport, to build certification and early production electric aircraft.

Technology, AI & Airport Operations

10 September 2026 — [Former ACI chief warns airport technology investments may not pay off without clear procurement](#) — commentary on securing value from technology spending.

International Context

25 September 2026 — [ACI World reports global passenger traffic at an all-time high](#) — global passenger numbers reach a record level.

30 September 2026 — [Dutch Cabinet prepares to cut Schiphol flights by 4% and night flights by 10%](#) — measures to reduce the airport's impact on surrounding communities.

Library Additions

Key publications, reports and official documents added to the SASIG website library this month:

- SASIG Bulletin — August 2026 in **Newsletter & Bulletins**

Full library available in the SASIG members' area.

Contact & Membership

CONTACT

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MEMBERSHIP

SASIG membership is open to local authorities and other public bodies with a strategic interest in aviation.

For membership enquiries, please email the secretariat.

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