



Night Flights

the Economic Effect of Restrictions and Bans

Around 5% of all flights within the European Union land or take off at night. A new study claims that 360,000 jobs in Europe are dependent on night flights. But Assessing the Economic Costs of Night Flight Restrictions, published by the European Commission, is not a comprehensive study. It concentrates on the effect on the aviation industry if night flights were restricted. It makes no attempt to assess the effect (positive and negative) on the wider economy.

A job gives a person dignity. High employment levels give a region prosperity. That is why many places are reluctant to restrict or ban night flights. But no evidence has been produced to suggest that the overall economy will suffer if a Europe-wide restriction was to be introduced. The onus is on the aviation industry to make that case. So far, it has not done so.

Job claims are overestimates

The claim in the new EC study that 360,000 jobs are dependent on night flights is almost certainly an over-estimate, as:

- *Less than a third of these jobs are directly created by night flight operations*
- *Over two-thirds of them are 'indirect' or 'induced' jobs. These are jobs which, it is claimed, depend on night flights indirectly – for example, the job of a waiter in a late night café used by night airport workers*
- *What is really happening is that the report is double-counting jobs. All industries can claim they create 'induced' jobs – often all claiming to have created the same jobs! That is why most economists reject claims about 'induced' jobs*
- *The study also makes doubtful claims about the number of day jobs dependent on night flights.*

The effect on long-haul passenger flights

Long-haul passenger flights in Europe are nearly all arrivals – they tend to be concentrated at the hubs of the major network carriers – Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt and Schiphol.

The main economic justification for night flights is their attractiveness to business travellers of being able to arrive early enough in the morning to catch a connecting flight to their business meeting in another European city. This saves their firms time and money. It also contributes to the profits of the airlines. But, clearly, it does not follow that, if these long-haul flights were restricted or banned, it would necessarily harm the wider economy. Money would flow into the economy as travellers spent more nights in hotels, guesthouses and local restaurants and bars.

The effect on leisure and charter flights

The principal reason for leisure/charter flights at night is to enable operators to have one turn-around during the night in order to make full use of their fleet. There would clearly be an economic disadvantage to the operator if night flights were restricted or banned. It might well result in charter flight fares rising. This would impact on charter/leisure flight passengers, but that is very different from arguing that night flights are essential for the European economy.

The effect on scheduled short-haul and budget flights

Although there are a large number of these flights, they tend to be concentrated at certain times: arrivals between 23.00 and midnight and take-offs between 06.00-07.00. There is space for the late-evening arrivals to land before 23.00, but some airlines would lose out financially as the later arrival time means they can make more journeys

using fewer aircraft. Whether that would damage the overall economy is doubtful.

Most of the planes taking off between 06.00-07.00 are flying passengers to early-morning business appointments and intercontinental flights. If they were restricted, those passengers would need to fly to their destination the night before. That would cost their company money, but an overnight stay would benefit the hotel and catering trade.

The effect on express and mail freight

These flights operate a pattern of picking up goods at the end of the day for delivery the next morning. They often transfer the goods to lorries or another plane at a "freight hub" airport. Assessing the Economic Costs of Night Flight Restrictions, (EC 2005) argued that a ban on jets at Europe's airports at night would see some express freight transferred to turbo-prop aircraft, some of it re-scheduled and, "if the restrictions were introduced over a wide region or throughout a state (even the Community), so that all competing Express carriers were affected equally, a switch to slower surface transport could occur."

The easiest way, of course, to cut dependency on air deliveries is to introduce earlier collection times from customers – for example a 1pm deadline instead of 5pm – and/or later arrival times (e.g. guaranteed 12 noon delivery instead of 9am).

Mail freight tends to rely on regularly timetabled whole-aircraft operations, often flown using relatively small and/or turbo-prop aircraft.

The effect on scheduled and charter freight.

What scheduled and charter freight there is at night tends to be long-haul. At present there are arrivals and departures throughout the night at many airports. Faced with night flight restrictions or a ban, the industry would prefer to relocate to another airport rather than reschedule the flights, but there is no evidence to suggest that re-scheduling the flights to the day period would have an adverse effect on the European economy.

Night Flights and the Economy: the Conclusion

What becomes clear is that restrictions or a ban on night flights might result in reduced profits for the airlines and fewer jobs in the aviation industry. But this would be off-set by increased profits and more jobs in other sectors of the economy (for example, in the hotel and catering trade and in rail and road freight).

Are night flights necessary from an operation point of view?

"the argument for night flights seems likely to be basically commercially rather than operationally driven" (EC 2005)

Night flights are not inevitable. What is clear from the Commission's report that, if they are required to do so, the airlines can reschedule their flights to daytime.

At present, the aviation industry finds night flights operationally convenient because:

- *they often enable the airlines to get an extra journey out of the existing fleet of aircraft;*
- *they make it easier for the airlines to have their planes at the right airport for the first day-time flight – the reason why many night flights are not full of passenger is that the prime purpose of the flight is to move the plane, rather than the passengers, across the world;*
- *they can reduce the waiting times for interchanging passengers.*
- *The conclusion is that night flights are operationally convenient for the aviation industry, but not essential.*

It is equally clear that, from an operational point of view, a night flight restrictions in Europe need not be that the planes would be forced to leave their countries of origin – often poorer countries in the developing world – an unsocial hours.

"If the same restrictions apply to all the competing airlines flying the European long-haul routes, they do seem to be able to adapt their schedules and get over the slot availability, congestion, and connections, and fly by day." (EC 2004)

More information

Other briefing sheets on night flights produced by GreenSkies and UECNA:

- *Night Flights – a major problem across Europe*
- *Night Flights – an EU responsibility?*

The briefing sheets form a Night Flights Pack. If you would like the Pack or any of the briefing sheets, please contact GreenSkies or UECNA.

References

1. EC, 2005, Assessing the Economic Costs of Night Flight Restrictions, <http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/air/environment/doc/ecnf.pdf>

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