



# How green are the airline industry's environmental promises?

**Emissions growth will be carbon neutral by 2020, says airline trade body, but it rejected developing countries' call for a climate levy.**

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As one of the most visible targets of environmental campaigning and activism, the aviation industry is keen to show that it is taking action to cut its carbon emissions.

Speaking at the annual general meeting of the industry's trade body, IATA, its chief executive, Giovanni Bisignani, today said that emissions growth from airlines would be carbon neutral by 2020. And he reiterated the industry's previous green ambitions to cut absolute emissions by 50% by 2050, and improve average fuel efficiency 1.5% annually between now and 2020. But at the same meeting, he also said carriers were "absolutely against" a global tax on fares to raise money that would help developing countries adapt to climate change.

There is concern over how green the industry's environmental pledges really are. The 2020 carbon neutral growth goal, for example, only covers growth in airlines' emissions – not their existing emissions, which account for around 2% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. And it's unclear whether the carbon neutral growth from 2020 will be achieved through more efficient aircraft and operations, or carbon offsetting. If it proves to be the latter, it will leave airlines open to the criticisms levelled at offsetting, which range from doubts over its efficacy to concerns that it discourages direct CO<sub>2</sub> cuts.

The goal of directly cutting airlines' greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2050 is also under scrutiny. Some industry experts believe the target is hopelessly ambitious, while environmentalists point out that the aviation sector is set to grow rapidly in the next few decades. "There are massive issues around growth in air travel," said Andy Atkins, executive director of Friends of the Earth. "This announcement doesn't look like it'll do anything to address the problem."

IHS Jane's aviation analyst Chris Yates said the 2050 target would hinge on new technology breakthroughs: "The industry would like to collectively aspire to that goal [of 50% reductions], but much depends on advancements in new technology to drive that level of cuts." Yates added that IATA's goal of 1.5% annual improvements in fuel efficiency between 2009 and 2020 was conservative and slow. Although Bisignani rejected today's call by developing countries for a climate levy, the airline industry wants to be part of the Copenhagen climate negotiations taking place this December. The airlines hope the Copenhagen summit will see global aviation emissions capped, rather than aviation emissions levels set on a country-by-country level.

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