



Ofgem: Connections end-to-end review of the regulatory framework

January 2025

Introduction

About AirportsUK

This response is submitted on behalf of AirportsUK, the trade association representing the interests of airports across the UK. AirportsUK represents more than 50 airports and is the principal body engaging with the UK Government, Parliamentarians, and regulatory authorities on airport matters.

The UK Airport Sector

Airports are engines of growth and aviation contributes more than £92bn to the economy, supports a million jobs and provides more than £8 billion in tax revenues to the Exchequer. It is important to emphasise that aviation provides essential connectivity for exporters, inward investors and other business travellers. With 40% of the UK's trade and nearly three-quarters of all visitors to the UK travelling by air, the aviation sector is a key enabler for the wider UK economy.

Almost £96 billion of UK GVA is currently dependent on-air freight exports from UK airports across all sectors of the UK economy. This would represent 4.3% of national output.

Inbound tourists coming by air spent £27 billion during their stay in the UK.¹ 88% of travellers arrive in the UK by air² and that airports underpin at least half of tourism spending thereby creating 285,000 direct jobs and generating £8.2bn GVA for the economy.³

Response

AirportsUK is aware that this consultation proposes changes to the regulatory framework of electricity grid connections. It welcomes that the energy regulator Ofgem is looking to strengthen the incentives and obligations for DNOs to deliver timely connections, better customer service and more accessible grid connection data.

AirportsUK will raise some pertinent points as airports who are users and urgently need accessible grid connections for generation and demand projects.

AirportsUK wish to provide some high-level views to what our membership would require in terms of getting onto the connections queue and delivering timely connections.

¹ Steer Report 2024

² [Home Office statistics, Aug 2024](#)

³ Steer Report 2024



Network operators to get renewable, clean power and storage projects to the grid faster

The connection process to get viable projects connected to the grid takes far too long. We agree with the premise outlined by NESO in their recent *Connections Reform Consultation* regarding reforming the connections queue for a project by “readiness”.

As we understand it, this consultation goes further than the NESO proposals as it wishes to reduce the 722GW of projects in the connection queue by prioritising schemes that can be operational within 5 years. We agree with this approach but if this can be reduced further to 2-3 years so that the readiest schemes can be prioritised, this would be welcomed. Where airport projects contribute to the right mix of renewable generation types on the right location and the right voltage to meet the Government’s 2030 target, this should be very clearly prioritised in the connections queue.

We would note that the main issue for airports is connections for demand. For example, for airport operations decarbonisation includes investing in zero-emission heating and power systems, zero-emission vehicles and ground equipment, and charging for site, staff and public electric vehicles. This is separate and additional to the future need to support decarbonisation of aviation through possible fuel creation on or near site (power to liquid Sustainable Aviation Fuel, or hydrogen) and powering electric planes, which have the potential to create significant new demand within the near future. This will become a critical issue to the decarbonisation of aviation, the focus for the Government’s new Jet Zero Taskforce.

Airports have made great strides in decarbonising their operations, particularly energy consumption through electricity generation. This is predominantly solar photovoltaic energy generation, though some wind and energy-from-waste generation is also in use at UK airports. It is therefore vital for airports to obtain urgently grid connection agreement so they can increase export capacity to progress their net zero scheme.

Financial penalties and more restrictive licenses for operators not meeting deadlines and milestones

There does need to be a mechanism by which operators are accountable regarding delivering grid connections in a timely fashion. An effective service level agreement between the operator and the customer, so an awareness of what they need to do, targets are set, and a recourse is available if this has not been achieved.

The previous Government considered singling out airports for more aggressive and unflexible requirements on decarbonisation, compared to the rest of commercial/industrial sites (known as the Zero Emission Airport Target). When policies such as this are enacted there needs to be a mechanism to prioritise those sectors that have higher requirements placed upon them. There should in general be sector level prioritisation for hard to abate sectors, such as aviation, so its applications are prioritised over others to be able to maximise decarbonisation and thus achieve policy objectives. We would also note airports are Critical National Infrastructure, and there should be consideration to prioritise such assets over others.

Overall better communications with networks and airports



Airports have highlighted that the situation around network upgrades where the current system/equipment upgrades required for release of extra capacity in local area networks at multiple airports is not due until the end of the decade. Other airports report restrictions on the ability to export power to grid, limiting the size of solar farms that can be developed rather than further supporting the decarbonisation of grid power, and limiting the amount of energy that can be offset.

There needs to be better data tool that can provide airports why this is the case if it is simply a lack of capacity or other issues, so these are communicated at the earliest opportunity with a good flow of data and communication provided between the operator and the airports.