

Moving beyond 'sustainable aviation'

James Wood, Programme Manager, ECF

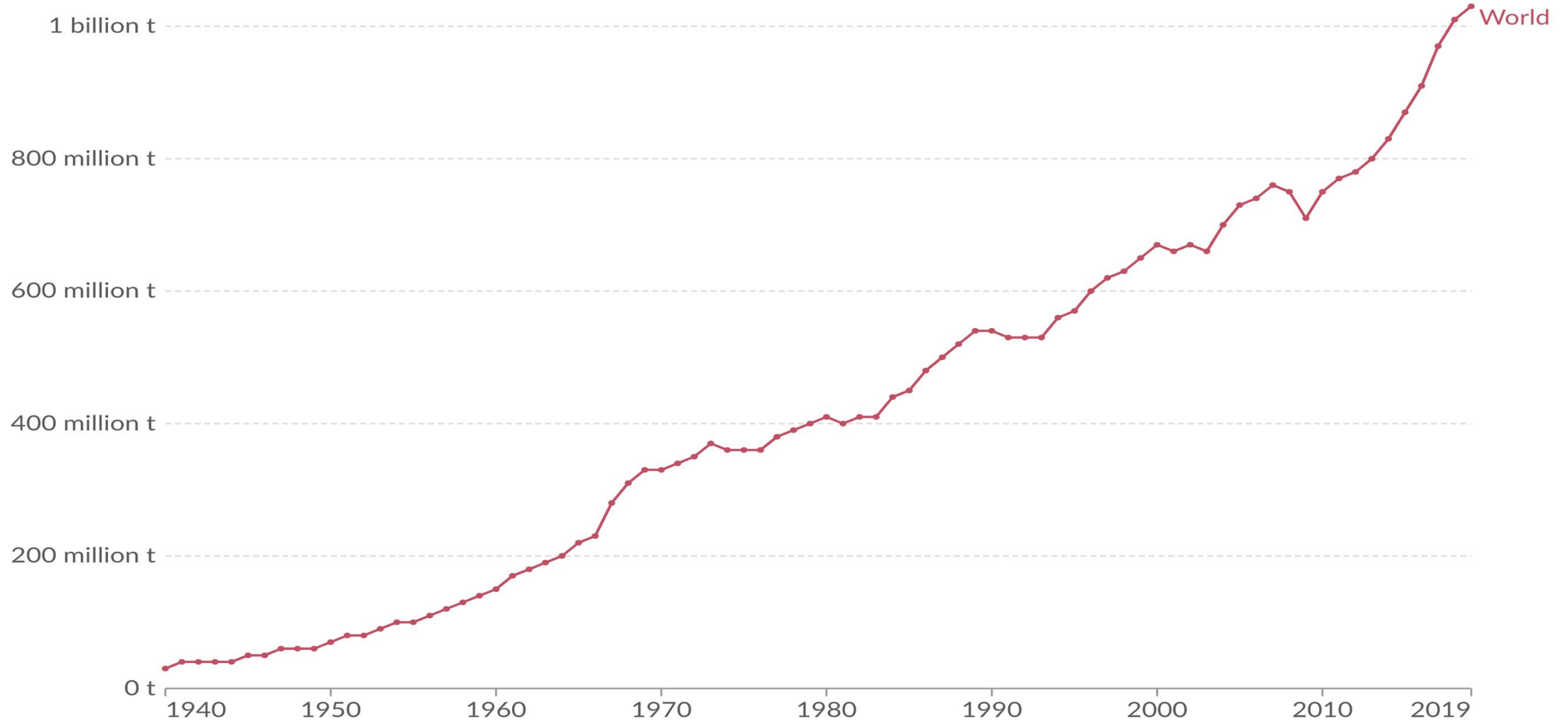
Impact Aviation Stocktake, 27 May 2026

Aviation is not (environmentally) sustainable



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Global CO₂ emissions from aviation, 1940 to 2019



Data source: Pre-1990 data from Lee et al. (2021); 1990 onwards from Bergero et al. (2023)

Note: Does not include non-CO₂ forcings, and additional warming impacts at altitude.

OurWorldInData.org/transport | CC BY

MAY 10, 2022

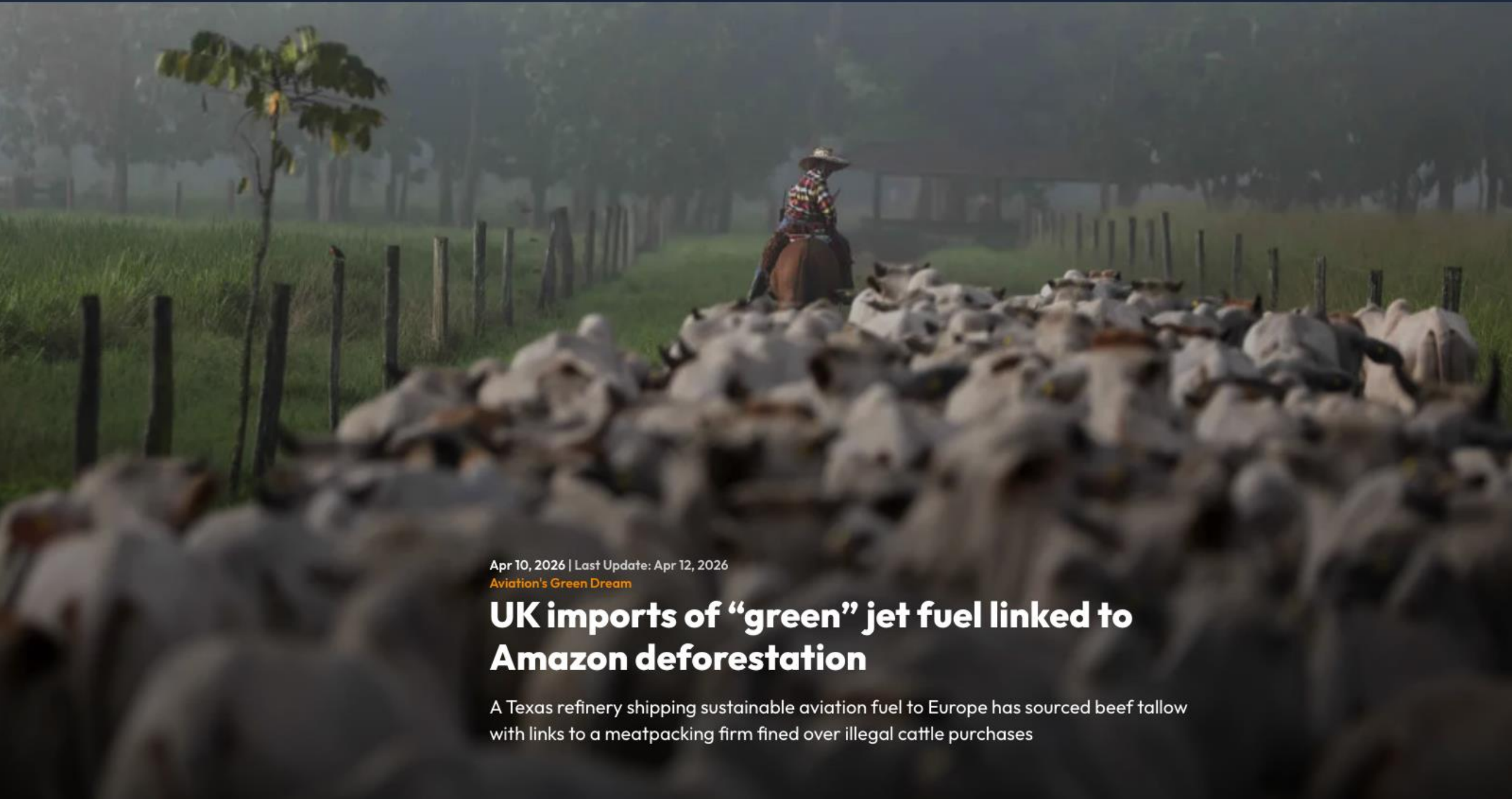
Aviation industry has missed all but one of 50 climate targets in the 21st century

A new report from climate charity Possible and Green Gumption, which assessed every public climate target which the international aviation industry set itself since 2000, has shown that all but one of over 50 separate climate targets has either been missed, abandoned or simply forgotten about.

Sustainable aviation fuel is (mostly) not sustainable



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Apr 10, 2026 | Last Update: Apr 12, 2026

[Aviation's Green Dream](#)

UK imports of “green” jet fuel linked to Amazon deforestation

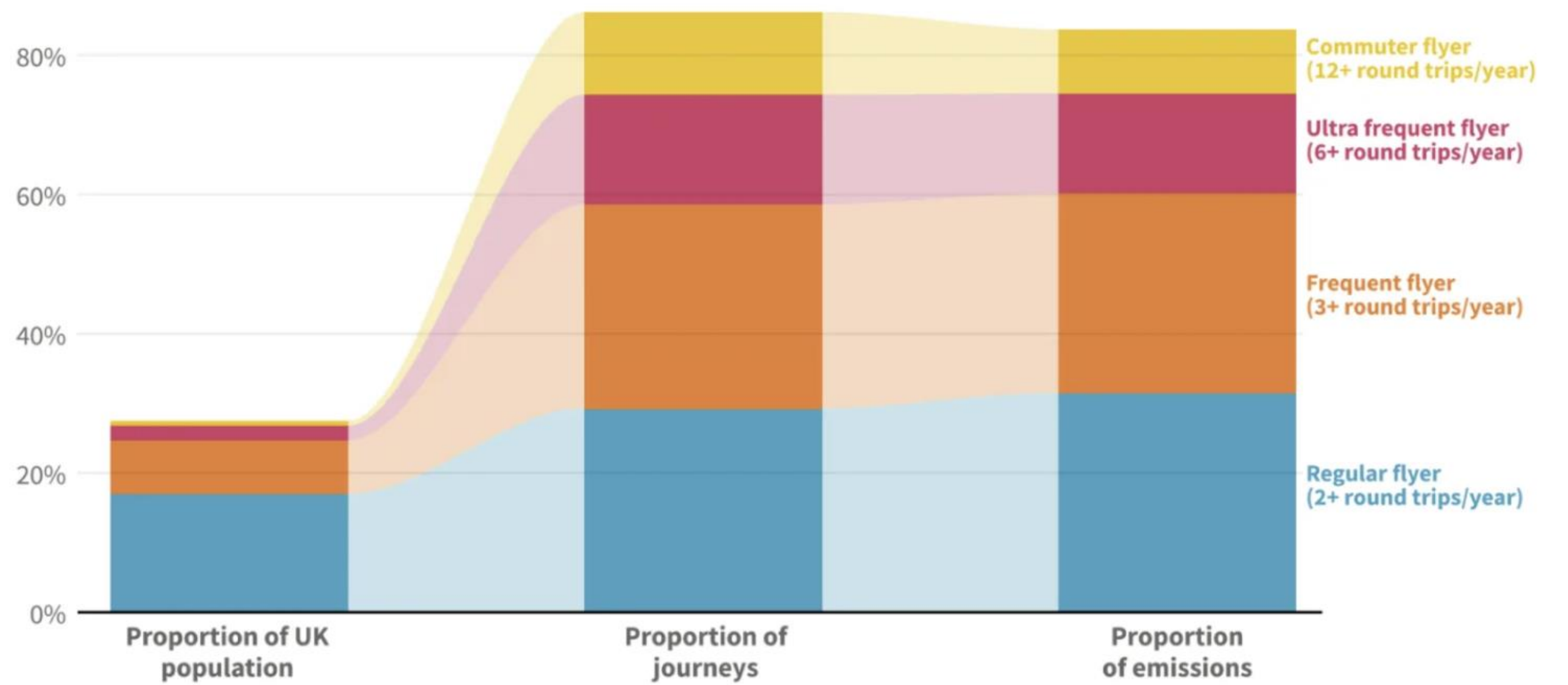
A Texas refinery shipping sustainable aviation fuel to Europe has sourced beef tallow with links to a meatpacking firm fined over illegal cattle purchases

Let's take a whole-economy approach



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UK-resident air passengers grouped by their flight frequency, share of journeys, and share of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019



Let's chart a course in-between the extreme positions



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REDUCING AIR TRAVEL IN A JUST WAY

REPORT

Degrowth of Aviation

Reducing Air Travel in a Just Way

What will enable net-zero aviation by 2050?

Aviation is a resilient industry. In 2025, air transport exceeded pre-Covid-19 traffic levels while continuing to make progress towards net zero carbon. Many of the required foundations are in place. Developments in modern fuel-efficient aircraft, propulsion systems and lightweight construction materials have enabled fuel and emissions savings, while operational improvements on the ground and in the air are also contributing to the industry's common goal.

SAF will play a crucial role in decarbonising air transport. It has the potential to reduce carbon lifecycle emissions by up to 80% compared to conventional jet fuel. However, while global SAF production output has approximately doubled each year since 2018, there has been slower-than-expected short-term progress in SAF deployment.

Urgent action is required to accelerate the scale-up and deployment of key measures to reduce carbon emissions. Net zero carbon by 2050 for aviation is an important and ambitious goal. It is very challenging but is still within reach if action is taken now. Each year of delay makes it harder and more costly for net zero to be achieved. Each missed opportunity for the right policy to be deployed pushes back progress.

There is a five-year window to accelerate work to:

- **Scale up the production of SAF globally to match demand:** SAF is the most important long-term lever for decarbonisation.
- **Reaffirm support for and continue to implement ICAO's [CORSIA](#):** A vital instrument for early action

“badly-designed net zero policy: it will cost consumers and businesses real money, divert that money to politically favoured solutions, drive inflation, achieve nothing, and play into the hands of populists.”

Michael Liebreich on SAF, June 2025

“Eliminating a few percent of the world’s warming is a big deal when the costs are so small. It seems insane to me that such a cheap solution is sitting there, completely untapped.”

Hannah Ritchie on contrail avoidance, October 2025

Let's prioritise solutions
that are scalable,
proven, high-benefit,
low-risk



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Contrail
avoidance

- Navigational approaches
- Fuels-based approaches

Electrify

- Electric high-speed rail
- Electric & hybrid aircraft

Hydrogen

- Hydrogen aircraft
- E-kerosene

Demand
management

- Premium & frequent flyer levies
- Distributionally sensitive carbon pricing

Biofuels &
CDR

- Ambivalent: Waste biofuels, carbon removals
- Excluded: Crop biofuels, fossil fuels (e.g. LCAF)



AVIATION CLIMATE ACTION



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	Sustainable aviation	Aviation climate action
Semantics	Stative, descriptive	Dynamic, active
Agency	Low	High
Status framing	Steady state	State of change
Connotation	Slow and steady	Urgent
Prosody & rhythm	Iamb + pyrrhic, trailing	Double trochee, percussive
Implied solution set	Sustainable aviation fuel	All solutions with high / near-term impact
Aggregate effect	Everything's fine, keep calm and carry on	Things have to change, and fast



Meme

Sustainable aviation



Aviation climate action



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The background of the slide features a photograph of a wind farm with several wind turbines visible against a blue sky with scattered white clouds. Overlaid on the right side of the image are several thin, white concentric circles that radiate from a point near the center of the frame, creating a ripple effect.

Thank you!

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