MISSION FOR AMERICA · CHAPTER 07 · AT A GLANCE

The National Mission for Clean Aviation

November 2026 · Beta v0.1.0

Published by New Consensus · newconsensus.com

Air travel is one of the fastest-growing sources of CO_2 emissions, producing about 3% of global emissions. As global incomes rise, more people are flying, and this trend could lead to a fivefold increase in air travel by 2050. Banning or limiting aviation is unlikely, so we need to either develop zero-emissions aviation technology or find ways to remove all greenhouse gases released by aircraft. Greenhouse gas drawdown at that scale is still highly uncertain.

For clean aviation, we advocate trying every reasonable approach simultaneously until the best long-term solutions emerge. This might involve investing in technologies that don't ultimately succeed, but that's part of how progress works. Even unsuccessful technologies can teach us valuable lessons and be repurposed to meet other needs.

Our national mission for aviation will:

- Support truly clean and sustainable jet fuel approaches. Most current so-called sustainable jet fuels are more harmful than helpful when their total life cycle emissions are counted, and/or hold no hope of scaling beyond small, highly-subsidized demonstration projects. Nevertheless, technological developments often surprise, and many different kinds of sustainable jet fuel approaches are currently being developed.
- Invest in electric aircraft: Electric planes are already in commercial use for short flights. While it's unlikely that battery technology will ever power long-haul flights due to fundamental limitations, advancements in this area are still worth pursuing.
- Develop hydrogen-powered jets: We are aware of how controversial this proposal is, but after carefully evaluating their potential, we are compelled to call for a moonshot-style partnership between the federal government, military, RFC, and U.S. aerospace industry to develop hydrogen-powered long-haul jets. Hydrogen-powered jets have flown as early as the 1950s, and small piloted hydrogen aircraft are flying today. The main challenge is engineering safe, energy efficient, large-scale storage of liquid hydrogen. Redesigning aircraft to a more efficient "flying wing" design is also necessary to make room for the fuel storage systems. This innovation in commercial aviation is needed regardless of the future of hydrogen as a fuel, will rejuvenate the U.S. aerospace industry, and give it an edge globally.

Producing hydrogen in sufficient quantities will require vast amounts of electricity, but transitioning to a clean electricity system is already necessary. Our national mission for clean electricity is designed to make it possible to scale clean electricity production by orders of magnitude.