

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT

Dé Céadaoin, 18 Márta 2026

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Grace Boland,	Lorraine Clifford-Lee,
Ann Graves,*	Joanne Collins,
Shane Moynihan,	Nessa Cosgrove.
Roderic O'Gorman,	
Louise O'Reilly.*	

* In éagmais / In the absence of Deputies Louis O'Hara and Pa Daly.

I láthair / In attendance: Deputies Robert O'Donoghue, Darren O'Rourke and Gillian Toole.

Teachta / Deputy Michael Murphy sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

The joint committee went into private session at 9.38 a.m. and resumed in public session at 10.05 a.m.

General Scheme of the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Bill 2026: Discussion (Resumed)

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome everyone to this morning's meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport. Today we resume our pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme of the Dublin Airport (passenger capacity) Bill 2026. Pre-legislative scrutiny is one of the most important functions of the committee. Our role is not simply to react to legislation after publication but to examine the proposals at an early stage, to test the policy rationale underpinning them, to identify legal practical and policy concerns and, where appropriate, to make representations before the Bill proceeds further through the legislative process. In this regard, the committee's task is to assess what is contained in the general scheme and what may be missing from it.

The proposed legislation is significant. There are substantial proposals with implications not only for aviation and connectivity but also for planning, environmental governance, climate obligations, noise regulation, public health, and the rights and interests of communities living in the vicinity of the airport. It is clear from the many detailed submissions received by the committee that this proposed legislation raises complex and strongly held concerns on a number of fronts. The committee has, therefore, scheduled a series of meetings over the coming weeks with a broad range of stakeholders. These hearings are intended to assist members in the testing of the evidence, in understanding the competing arguments, and in forming a considered view as to whether the general scheme is appropriately framed and what changes, if any, may be required.

It is appropriate that the first public hearing in the process is with residents and community groups. Whatever view one takes of the wider policy issues, it is important for the committee that the voices of those living with the day-to-day effects of airport operations are heard directly and respectfully by the committee at the outset of our scrutiny. Today the committee is pleased to welcome on behalf of Children's Rights Over Flights, Ms Louise O'Leary and Ms Angela Deegan; on behalf of the Ballyboughal community group, Mr. David Walton and Mr. William Dempsey; from the North Runway Technical Group, Mr Gareth O'Brien; and from St. Margaret's The Ward Residents Group, Mr Liam O'Gradaigh and Dr. Niamh Maher.

I will address some notes on privilege for our witnesses. Witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of that person or entity. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks and it is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members of the committee are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside of the Houses, or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

First, Ms O'Leary will make her opening statement on behalf of Children's Rights Over Flights. I will allow a small bit of discretion with opening statements, notwithstanding the submissions that have been received - five to six minutes, if that is okay. Thank you.

Ms Louise O'Leary: Good morning everyone and thank you all for having us. Children's Rights Over Flights is an all-volunteer, unfunded campaign group, formed directly in response to the campaign by vested interests to lift Dublin Airport's passenger cap to 40 million, which, we learned, would lead to flight traffic pollution increasing by 22% by 2031, even as climate change and the outlook for our kids worsen. We saw climate harm, pollution and children's rights repeatedly omitted from national conversation on the cap, so we undertook to change that through our own efforts as citizens. It is appalling to see a similar attempt to omit them from this Bill also.

We believe this Bill should be withdrawn and should never have been drafted in the first place. In the absence of national aviation policy aligned with best available science, it would remove a key guardrail to curb aviation fossil fuel pollution in Ireland, which is already at record-breaking levels. The increasing gravity of the State-declared climate emergency must be the primary context within which this Bill is considered. Experts warn that our children in Ireland - your children - as everywhere, are growing up to face appalling climate harms, malnutrition, food shortages, up to seven times more extreme weather events like Storm Éowyn, deadly heat, shorter life expectancy and increased risk of reaching catastrophic tipping points which would destroy our way of life in Ireland forever.

Fossil fuel pollution is a profound threat to children's fundamental right to grow and this Bill will lead to major increases in such pollution. Unbelievably, there is no evidence of evaluation of the impact this Bill could have on fossil fuel emissions and climate, despite its aim to remove the cap outright. As reinforced in February by the UN's special rapporteur on the right to a clean, healthy, sustainable environment, the proposal to lift the cap has yet to include an adequate, comprehensive, scientifically based assessment of environmental and climate impacts. In this light, how could this Bill be considered fit to proceed?

Head 5 does not appear to be evidence based in relation to purported economic factors. For example, there is no evidence of evaluation of the economic implications of outgoing tourism if the cap were removed. We have a major travel deficit whereby billions more euro leave Ireland with Irish tourists flying abroad than is brought in by visitors. Data for 2023 alone indicate this equals €5.1 billion, equating to 1% of GDP. How has this not been evaluated?

Reference to "serious harm" in the general scheme of the Bill cannot be deemed valid unless balanced consideration is given to the serious harm of increasing aviation pollution to climate, health, children's rights and welfare and related economic implications of all these. Similarly, no claims about the "public interest" can reasonably be made, given the absence of any evidence of consideration of the public interest in the context of climate change or children's best interests.

The extraordinary implication of head 12, whereby climate obligations set out under the climate Act would be disapplied, is wholly unacceptable and shocking to us as citizens. As adults rationally concerned about the climate harms facing our children and grandchildren, we are incredulous that their Government would attempt to disconnect this reality from a Bill that would directly enable major increases to fossil fuel emissions.

We respectfully ask the committee to call for this Bill to be withdrawn; for a comprehensive, independent, evidence-based review of the apparent assumptions underpinning the Bill and its implications for climate, human health and children's rights; and for a halt to the Government plan to remove the cap.

Aviation fossil fuel pollution is not magical. It contributes to worsening climate change and related harms, like all fossil fuel pollution. The State has a duty to protect children from climate harms, refrain from retrogressive measures that are less protective of them and prioritise rapid and effective emission reductions to protect their rights and welfare, as acknowledged by the Minister for Transport late last year. That the Government is seeking to wilfully enable increased fossil fuel pollution from Dublin Airport is clearly directly opposing this duty.

This is not hard to understand. Nor is it hard to understand it as fundamentally wrong. Children and young people understand. In the absence of their inclusion at any stage in the pursuit of this Bill, we believe it fitting to close with the views of a ten-year-old who wrote to his local TDs to say:

I don't want you to lift the passenger cap. These are my reasons:

If the cap is lifted it will release thousands of tonnes of pollution into the air. Pollution is bad for people all around the world but if you lift the cap it will only get worse, causing breathing problems and dirty air. Climate change is getting worse. When I grow up, I want to live a good and safe life. So please, please don't lift the passenger cap.

I again thank committee members for their time.

An Cathaoirleach: Thank you. I call Mr. Walton to make his opening statement on behalf of the Ballyboughal Community Council.

Mr. David Walton: I thank the committee members for the invitation. I am the spokesperson on aircraft noise pollution for Ballyboughal Community Council, a voluntary group first established in Ballyboughal in 1991. I am joined by William Dempsey, who is the vice chairman of our council.

On 7 October 2023, the then Minister for housing, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, stated in an interview that in his view, the airport is using flight paths that were not agreed. He was referring to the noise of overhead planes when he said "You can't go outdoors at the moment in some areas". He went on:

The concern that has been raised to me by a lot of constituents in affected areas is that the flight paths as are being operated are not as were granted ... That situation needs to be addressed, and I think can be addressed.

What has the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, done since becoming Minister for Transport? Staff from his Department, along with the Department for public expenditure, are members of the DAA board and therefore provide oversight and set policy, and are the sole controlling shareholders of the DAA. Has he instigated an investigation into the governance at the DAA, or why the DAA has breached several key planning conditions around the operation of the north runway? No. Not only has he done nothing to address these issues, but now, under the guidance of the Department of Transport, which oversaw these failings, he convinces the Cabinet and asks the Dáil to give him the power to remove the last safeguard, the passenger

cap, which could prevent matters being made even worse than they already are. If you cannot get the passenger cap lifted through the local government planning process, you simply seek to remove the planning process altogether. As far as the Department of Transport is concerned, this matter is too important for mere county councils and the common people of Fingal to have a say in what happens directly over their homes.

Of course, we all know about connectivity and know the airport is important national infrastructure, but let us take a closer look at the real economic flows. CSO figures tell us that inbound tourism in 2023 accounted for €7.3 billion and 6.9 million visitors, while outbound tourism accounted for €12.9 billion and 12 million trips, leaving a net tourism deficit of €5.6 billion. If we apply this to Dublin Airport at 85%, we find that Dublin Airport is responsible for sending €4.76 billion more revenue out of the country than it is bringing in. Why is nobody in the Government talking about this massive imbalance and leakage of revenue from our domestic economy?

Dublin Airport has among the cheapest landing slots in Europe for a capital city. We charge zero duty on aviation fuel and zero VAT on airline tickets, thereby subsidising our addiction to low-cost flights and an airline travel carbon footprint that is 54% higher *per capita* than the European average. We are an island, and nobody begrudges anyone a holiday in the sun, but we know these outbound figures - 12 million trips - include millions of short breaks that are priced excessively cheaply and are environmentally unsustainable. How can it be cheaper to fly to Barcelona and back for the weekend than to get a taxi home 30 km from Dublin city centre to Ballyboughal? Something is very wrong here.

Who are the real beneficiaries of this tourism deficit?

The Irish Exchequer certainly benefits from the DAA's profits from duty-free stores and car parks at Dublin Airport, but by far the biggest beneficiaries are the airlines and their institutional shareholders, most of whom are non-resident in Ireland. The airlines save on fuel by attracting outbound passengers in big numbers from the regions with low fares from Dublin. They would like to get an even larger and unlimited supply of passengers at Dublin Airport who make their own carbon footprint in the car from the regions and at their own expense. It is very lucrative.

An Cathaoirleach: I am sorry to cut across Mr. Walton. I have a copy of his opening statement and there is quite a bit more to follow. I would ask him to finish up in the next minute if that is okay.

Mr. David Walton: I appreciate and respect that-----

An Cathaoirleach: It is for all witnesses and members.

Mr. David Walton: We have been listening to the aircraft noise for the last four years, so maybe if the Chair gives me 60 seconds.

An Cathaoirleach: It is just a minute to finish up, if that is okay?

Mr. David Walton: Ryanair says visitors to Ireland want to travel to Dublin, but it conveniently ignores that more people want to travel from Dublin than come in. We also know that Ryanair built its model in Europe by flying low cost to regional airports to avoid the expensive landing slots in capital cities. If you land in Heathrow or London City you expect

to pay a premium for your flight where landing charges are a multiple of Dublin's. This Bill has very little to do with essential connectivity or national interest. It is about profits at the airlines and the DAA and their shareholders. It does not matter to them that the quality of our lives and the quiet enjoyment of our homes is inversely proportional to the quantity of passengers at Dublin Airport.

There has been no proper cost-benefit analysis of Dublin Airport by any respected, qualified or genuinely independent Irish body, such as the ESRI or the Central Bank of Ireland. The supposed independent report published by the DAA in 2023, and which the Minister for Transport recently quoted from, was in fact carried out by InterVISTAS, a Vancouver-based travel consultancy firm that specialises in creating reports and lobbying for the airline industry globally. It was paid for by the DAA and was specifically tailored to feed into the DAA's selective narrative and should be used in isolation to support critically important national policies. Not once does it mention the €12.9 billion in revenue outflows from outbound flights. This report would fail a basic leaving cert economics test, yet this report, with its one-sided data, has fed the myth about the imminent collapse of the national economy if the cap is not lifted.

On what basis is it suggested that the current cap poses any risk to existing jobs? After all, these jobs were there in 2023 before the cap was even reached.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Walton.

Mr. David Walton: Please. I beg the Cathaoirleach's indulgence. These are very important issues. I think it is unfair that we have been listening to aircraft noise for four years, using illegal flight paths. I think we deserve to be heard.

An Cathaoirleach: No, I know.

Mr. David Walton: I have literally another three paragraphs to read. If the Cathaoirleach could let me finish, I would really be grateful.

An Cathaoirleach: I am probably looking at seven or eight paragraphs in front of me. I will indulge Mr. Walton with another minute. That is all. I just want to be fair to the other witnesses as well.

Mr. David Walton: I understand.

An Cathaoirleach: And I want to be fair to the members who do want to ask questions and who do want to probe, if that is okay. I have to finish at 12 o'clock.

Mr. David Walton: I am most grateful. Has there been any consideration of the estimated fines of between €8 and €26 billion we will incur as a State when we will miss our carbon targets or the long-term and very low-ball €800 million estimate of the human health costs caused by cardiovascular diseases to the residents of Fingal as a direct result of aircraft noise? Who will pay these costs? The airlines? Ryanair is forecasted to make €2.6 billion profit this year. Will it be the DAA? No, it will be the Irish taxpayers. Farmers, who provide our food, have to reduce their carbon emissions by 30%, the ordinary citizen pays carbon taxes, duties and VAT every time he fills his car and heats his home, but whatever you do, do not tax anything to do with the sacred airline industry.

Increasing passenger numbers at Dublin Airport goes completely against balanced regional development as set out in Project Ireland 2040 and the national development plan. Removing any cap at Dublin Airport will ensure our national economy will be permanently lopsided and Fingal's already overheated economy continues to take a ridiculous 85% burden of the nation's aircraft noise pollution.

There is no objective economic, environmental or moral rationale for removing the cap.

There is not one jot of evidence to support the notion that a single job would be lost by keeping it in place and there are compelling arguments that it would be against the national interest to remove it.

A Pandora's box was opened on 22 August 2022 when flights that had no bearing to those in their planning application commenced and continue to operate to this day. What has come out of this box shows a failure of competence, governance and regulation in the management of Dublin Airport and facilitates an all-too-convenient conclusion that no individual or body is responsible for the greatest planning scandal since the foundation of the State. Neither the Minister nor the Department of Transport should be allowed to now move that box to one side and conveniently hide these facts, which have negatively impacted so many of our citizens in quiet enjoyment of their own homes.

This Bill adds insult to injury by bypassing, under false economic pretenses, the long-established democratic planning process at local government, thereby disenfranchising the citizens of Fingal, and gives abusable powers to a Department of Transport that has shown itself to be unworthy of the trust we, as citizens of this State, expect. We ask all conscientious Members of these Houses, across all parties, to reject this Bill in all its forms and demand that the Minister for Transport address the fundamental failings at the DAA, which he previously stated he believed should and could be addressed.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Walton. I now invite Mr. O'Brien to deliver his opening statement.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: I thank the Cathaoirleach and members of the committee for the invitation. I represent the North Runway Technical Group, which includes commercial pilots, a civil engineer, aviation safety specialists and affected residents. We are voluntary and unfunded. Our members depend on Dublin Airport. I am not here to argue against airport growth. Our objective here is to show the committee what happens when nobody in the system has the expertise to manage it.

The DAA's choice, as aerodrome operator, to abandon the north runway's unassessed route was not just some technical breach of an obscure condition. It removed the foundation for everything, including the grant of permission itself. Were this a private developer, the remedy would be obvious. Because it is a State-owned company operating a national asset, everyone looks away. We are not calling for the runway to be shut down. We are saying that the Oireachtas should understand the scale of what has gone wrong before this Bill removes the last remaining constraint.

ICAO document 9643 is the standard for parallel runway operations. Every major airport with parallel runways knows this, but for years no one on the north runway project applied it. In 2004, the DAA's environmental impact statement assumed north runway departures would

be the same as those on the south runway: straight ahead for 5 nautical miles, climbing 3,000 ft before any turn. The IAA agreed at the time that this was "a reasonable assumption at this stage."

Everything was built on that assumption: noise zones, development plans, local planning decisions and option 7b. An Bord Pleanála's own inspector recommended refusal on noise grounds and the board overruled her. In 2016, the DAA consulted on a 15° turn - the wrong number. That consultation was held exclusively in Fingal. Only three of 261 respondents were from Meath, where the flight path would actually go. The application was later withdrawn, making that consultation moot. Nothing further was consulted on.

During the final regulatory safety reviews before the north runway became operational, the 30° requirement from document 9643 finally emerged. The flight paths in the EIS were legally flyable, but needed co-ordination of traffic on the two runways. AirNav had multiple options, including delaying opening and redesigning the south runway missed approach to turn, like Heathrow, Amsterdam and countless others; using dependent mode operations; or turning all departures over 30,000 never-consulted residents on a never-assessed route and save embarrassment.

In August 2022, the runway opened. The DAA's interim CEO, who had then returned to being CFO, told this committee that the DAA was "greatly surprised" by the routes. The statutory body responsible for operating the airport, including the aerodrome, could not read its own flight procedure charts. This fast-track emergency Bill is to be enacted by the end of April to stop the European court from ruling on European law. This end-of-April deadline is not the Government's. It was set by Airlines for America. Passenger count is a near-perfect proxy for the environmental load of Dublin Airport. This Bill removes it permanently as a planning tool and asks the Oireachtas and the people to trust the system to manage the resulting unconstrained growth.

Who is behind the system we are supposed to trust? On 4 March, this committee asked who is responsible for the flight paths. The Department's assistant secretary said clearly that it was the DAA. However, the official continued, "That is the legal position. The DAA obviously does not have expertise in the design of flight paths". This was said as a neutral observation rather than as an admission of crisis or failure. It was just how things are. Despite the recommendations of the 2021 AAIU report into Rescue 116, the Department has confirmed that its staff have no aviation qualifications and no training. All 49 staff in the Department's aviation section are generalist civil servants. Despite the Minister claiming the Department "fully accepted" the recommendations, nothing changed. On 4 March, Ireland's most senior aviation official normalised the identical lack of necessary aviation expertise at the DAA because that requirement is merely "the legal position." Ireland has no oversight of aviation that is both competent and independent.

As well as aircraft noise, every passenger creates a load on the ESB network, the water supply, the sewage network and the already overloaded treatment plant at Ringsend, all of which are needed for new housing across the greater Dublin area. This Bill removes the only control on that load, giving the Members of the Oireachtas a choice. They may choose unlimited aviation or they may choose housing. This Bill puts these goals in direct conflict.

We ask that the Oireachtas does not abolish the cap but rather raises it as required and ties it to infrastructure. The Oireachtas should require that all environmental assessments be independent. The DAA has proved its word is worthless and that it cannot be trusted. It must not continue as the sole source of all data. We should wait for the European court ruling and not entrust unsupervised growth to a system that missed a basic safety requirement for years, consulted in the wrong county, opened a runway with flight paths it did not understand, and has spent three and a half years refusing to answer one question. We know it is not for safety, so why are the aircraft still required by the DAA to turn right at the end of the runway?

I thank the Cathaoirleach. I am happy to take questions.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. O'Brien. I now invite Mr. O'Gradaigh to make his opening statement.

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: I am here representing St. Margaret's The Ward Residents Group. I thank the Chair and members for the invitation to address the committee this morning. I am joined today by my colleague Dr. Niamh Maher, who is a medical consultant and our local expert on the health impacts of aircraft noise.

I grew up on our family farm, which has been in our family for three generations and predates the opening of Dublin Airport. We did not move to the noise; the noise moved to us. The area of St Margaret's and The Ward is subjected to both daytime and night-time flights, irrespective of wind direction. There is no getting away from the noise and air pollution. We want to be clear from the outset that we are not against airport expansion once it adheres to proper planning and sustainable development. However, we have totally lost trust in the DAA as, to date, it has breached the 32 million cap in 2019 and from 2023 to 2025, failed to adhere to a limit of 65 flights per night in accordance with planning condition 5 of 2007, and failed to comply with planning condition 1 of 2007 by not operating straight-out flight paths off the north runway. The aviation industry has been abusing the judicial review process to stall and delay these planning conditions, and our communities suffer the impacts.

Since 2019, DAA has handled 9.4 million more passengers than permitted by its planning permissions. This amounts to €213 million earned from unauthorised development. In stark contrast, DAA has spent just €23 million to date on required insulation and voluntary purchase schemes. A summary of the legal issues we raised during the public consultation phase can be found in appendix D.

What is missing from the Bill? The Bill fails to acknowledge or protect the residents and communities directly affected by aircraft noise. As confirmed by Ms Ethna Brogan, assistant secretary, the Bill contains no provisions for residents who must rely solely on the Aircraft Noise Competent Authority, ANCA, for mitigation measures. This omission is at odds with repeated statements in the media quoting the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, saying that the Bill would provide improved buyouts and insulation schemes. ANCA's annual review reports highlight that its noise abatement objective, NAO, has been breached continually since 2022. In 2024, the number of people exposed to dangerously high levels of noise above 55dB Lnight was 343% above the limit set in the NAO.

Planning condition 28 of the north runway's planning permission required the establishment of a community liaison group, CLG, to facilitate long-term engagement with affected communities. This was aligned with objective DAO9 in the Fingal development plan 2005–

11. To meet these obligations, the St. Margaret's-The Ward group initiated the "planning for real" process, facilitated by town planner Hendrik Van Der Kamp. This resulted in a strategic vision report for the future of the communities of St. Margaret's and The Ward. The top concerns raised in the strategic vision report relate to housing, the lack of walkways and cycleways, the need for more public transport, reduced traffic speeds and the impacts of divergent flight paths. In relation to housing, the strategic vision report recommends the preparation of local area plans for Coolquay and Rivermeade, an action plan for Thornton Hall, the provision of clusters of self-build in Coolquay, and the designation of sites for medium-density housing in Coolquay.

Despite DAA contributing significant funds to Fingal County Council for infrastructure, no funds have been allocated for housing development in Rivermeade, Coolquay or a potential relocation site at Thornton Hall. Both DAA and Fingal County Council have given their support to the strategic vision report. DAA has a business plan for expansion but there is no business plan to cater for the residential communities most impacted by the airport's operations. The Minister, Deputy O'Brien, is aware of the "planning for real" process. He requested that we meet with him in late summer last year when the process was complete. Regrettably, the Minister has since declined to meet with us.

Existing environmental planning conditions have not been enforced. We urge the committee to review the Railway Orders Regulations 2021, SI 743/2021, which empowers the Minister to enforce environmental conditions through penalties of up to €500,000 or imprisonment for up to three years. Comparable safeguards should be included in this Bill. We call on the transport committee to request the establishment of an international consultative board to oversee the allocation of funds and the implementation of the strategic vision report for St. Margaret's and The Ward. We call on the committee to ensure that any future airport expansion or aviation policy includes a business plan for the strategic vision report's implementation. We ask the committee to recommend that an oral hearing be required as part of the implementation of the Bill to ensure all issues are identified and rectified at the earliest opportunity. We call on the committee to add improved buyout and insulation schemes to the Bill and to request independent assessment of all flight paths and noise modelling, along with environmental safeguards and enforcement, similar to the railway orders. We request that the Minister and his Department engage with us constructively to implement these solutions.

We have solutions. We urge the committee to recommend these solutions and ensure that the Bill is rebalanced to protect communities, uphold environmental law and establish a credible, lawful framework that balances the rights of residents with future airport development. We extend an invitation to the committee to come out to our community and witness at first hand how our daily lives are impacted. I thank the committee members for their attention and welcome any questions.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. O'Gradaigh for his opening statement. I thank all the witnesses for their opening statements. Based on the number of members present and online, and the number of members who have indicated they will attend before the meeting concludes, we will do one round of questions at eight minutes each, if that is in order.

Deputy Louis O'Hara has indicated that Deputy Graves is attending on his behalf. I call Deputy Graves.

Deputy Ann Graves: I thank the witnesses for their detailed submissions. We are limited to eight minutes so I will keep it short and sharp. As they know, I am not on this committee but asked to be subbed in because it is an area of huge interest. I represent the people in the areas that are most affected by aircraft noise. I will start with Dr. Maher, if she does not mind. She will remember that during consideration of the development plan, I had a motion that was specific to the health and well-being of residents affected by aircraft noise. That was subsequently removed by ministerial order. Will Dr. Maher explain the health impacts of aviation noise and what impact the removal of the cap would have? Will she specifically address her own situation?

Dr. Niamh Maher: I have done a lot of research on the health impacts of aircraft noise over the last few years. I am directly impacted by the new north runway, which is why I became involved. Especially over the past couple of decades, there has been so much information about these health impacts. Most of the information relates to the cardiovascular impact of aircraft noise. This can include higher blood pressure, ischemic heart disease and stroke. For example, everyone probably knows at this stage about the WHO recommendations in 2018, which held that anything above an average level of 40 dB at night was detrimental to health, and during the daytime, over 45 dB. Since then, there have been five longitudinal studies related to the detrimental effects of aircraft noise on the cardiovascular system. For example, for every increase of 10 dB in noise, there is a 3% to 8% increase in the risk of ischemic heart disease. The louder that aircraft noise gets, the more likely it is to lead to a heart attack. This is according to just one study from Osborne in 2020.

Focusing on the cardiovascular effects, how does this actually cause these things to happen? Aircraft noise is unique among environmental noises because the effects that it has on the body are much more significant than are other types of environmental noise, like road traffic noise or railroad noise. When we hear a noise, it activates an area of our brain called the amygdala, which subsequently leads to activation of the sympathetic nervous system. This in turn can cause our arteries to narrow. Vasoconstriction leads to higher blood pressure, which can be associated with stroke as well as increased pressure in the vasculature and the brain. Long-term exposure to aircraft noise is associated with hypertension and increased risk of stroke. The situation of those who have pre-existing cardiovascular or medical issues can worsen as a result of exposure to aircraft noise. It is not even at very high levels of aircraft noise. It is at those lower levels, particularly going back to the WHO levels. It also depends on how susceptible the individual is to the noise.

Aircraft noise can also have health effects on children as they are developing. This is known from two significant studies, the road traffic and aircraft noise exposure and children's cognition and health, RANCH, study in 2006, and the noise-related annoyance cognition and health, NORAH, study in 2015. These were two huge studies in Europe that looked at the effects of aircraft noise on children and what it can do to their learning and ability to develop. It is recognised that it is associated with a reduced reading age and a delay in recognition memory for children. It is also associated with an increased incidence of depressive and anxiety disorders.

Sleep deprivation is an obvious health effect of aircraft noise. It is important to note that aircraft noise at night is worse than aircraft noise during the day. It interferes with sleep. That is the most obvious thing. Looking into that in more detail, you do not necessarily need to be

woken up for that effect to take place. This brings me on to the topic of awakenings and how we measure the effect of the damage of aircraft noise at night.

Awakenings are something that a particular specialist in this area, Mathias Basner, has looked into in detail. There is a lot of information in the literature out there at the moment. Periods of arousal that we have when we are asleep stop us from moving into our restorative stages of sleep, which are deeper sleep. This happens when we are hearing noise at night while we are asleep. As I have said before, when your body hears a noise even when you are asleep, it can activate the sympathetic nervous system. That sympathetic nervous system is associated with hypotension and high blood pressure, but it is also associated with activating other systems in your body such as your endocrine system, which means there is an associated higher incidence of diabetes, and also there is a higher incidence of obesity as well. On the sleep deprivation that occurs with awakenings, anything more than a non-physiological awakening at night is detrimental to your health, and that is recognised. This is something that really needs to be factored into how we are looking at the damaging effect of aircraft noise.

In relation to the health impacts that occur, it needs to be recognised that these are very real things that are happening right now. There is no benefit to looking retrospectively at this in 20 years' time, when the chronic effects of aircraft noise have become obvious, and asking forgiveness for the damage that has been done. We need to look at what is happening in real time at the moment and measure the effects of the noise that is happening on adults but also on children because it is damaging them and their future lives as well. We have observed that people have mentioned that the health impacts are not really being taken into proper consideration because they are so damaging. It is very realistic the impact that it can have. It is not a case of getting used to the noise. Even if you do not necessarily notice the noise any more, as I said your body recognises that noise and the damage is being done.

Deputy Ann Graves: Mr. O'Gradaigh mentioned that ANCA's noise abatement objective has been breached for a number of years. Can he explain what that means and who would be impacted?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: In appendix H in my appendices, there is a picture of the area most impacted by ANCA's noise abatement objective. Basically, there is a criterion there - 55 dB at night. We have noticed over the years that there has been a 343% breach of that criterion. Since ANCA has come into force, noise has escalated at night. We expect 2025 to be even higher than that.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Cosgrove has confirmed she is on site within Leinster House.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Yes. I thank the Cathaoirleach. I am sorry that I am not able to be there today in person. I thank all our guests for their opening addresses. They raised all the concerns I would have about the health impacts and the environmental impacts. The argument cited a lot is that lifting this cap will boost our economy. Would Ms O'Leary mind expanding on why she believes this is not the case?

Ms Louise O'Leary: I thank the Senator for the question. I will pass it to my colleague, Ms Deegan.

Ms Angela Deegan: I thank Senator Cosgrove for the question. As mentioned earlier, the major travel deficit, by which by billions more euro leave the Irish economy with Irish tourists

flying abroad than is brought in by visitors, is a huge issue. The data for 2023 alone indicate that this deficit equals over €5 billion, equating to 1% of GDP. Quite unbelievably, there has not been an evaluation of how much more money is likely to leave our economy if the cap is removed outright.

In fact, figures indicate incoming tourism is static, despite the cap having already been significantly surpassed last year by several million. There were 6.5 million overseas visitors to Ireland in 2004, and again in 2025. However, data from the CSO shows that in real terms these visitors spent less money last year.

Assumptions about economic benefits from airport expansion are challenged in recent independent reports. A 2025 research report by the New Economics Foundation finds that business travel is either saturated or in decline and suggests that GDP actually growth drives air travel demand rather than the other way around. Also, there is the huge economic costs of health and climate harms. For example, dealing with damage from storms, floods, sea level rise and unprecedented levels of polluting flight traffic have not been factored in. We are seeing more of these storms here in Ireland, with Storm Chandra most recently and Storm Éowyn which was directly proven to have been worse because of the climate crisis. These are some of the economic factors that have not been taken into account.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: That is great. I thank Ms Deegan for clearing that up. Mr. Walton spoke about illegal flight paths, not having faith in the DAA any more and oversight. This could be a question for Mr. O'Gradaigh as well. How does this need to be improved or where is the oversight falling short? Will the witnesses talk some more about their concerns in this area?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: On the Virgin Airways flight paths, we have sent enforcement complaints to Fingal County Council, which has opened an enforcement action on that but it has not closed the flight path. It has been open now since the runway opened and the council has stalled, so there is no action. If someone builds a house in the wrong place - as in a recent case in Meath - there would be actions to take it down or whatever. In this case, however, there is no enforcement or deadline and it is just ongoing. We are at our wits' end. Mr. O'Brien might be able to give some more background.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I cannot see the witnesses' names properly, sorry.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: I might talk a little about ANCA because it is the noise competent authority and is supposed to be the single body in charge of all of this, and I will compare it to France. Why France? The overriding regulation is EU Regulation 598/2014, and both Ireland and France are subject to that same regulation. The difference is France actually implemented it. France's aviation nuisance body is called, slightly awkwardly, ACNUSA. It had 665 prosecutions and 295 sanctions in 2024. It issued fines of €14.4 million in 2025. It has its own technical staff. It issues binding flight path restrictions and night curfews at 11 airports. Night curfews in Nantes halved in the first year of ACNUSA's operation. ANCA, on the other hand, had zero prosecutions, zero sanctions, zero fines, zero flight restrictions and zero curfew enforcement in five years. Fundamentally, ACNUSA exists to implement EU Regulation 598/2014, while ANCA exists to prevent its implementation. Our ask of the committee related to this is that the Bill should require implementation of this proven French model, an independent authority with mandatory sanctioning power and clearly defined responsibility

that it is required to use, not that it can optionally sit on, issue reports and do nothing. It must have its own technical expertise in-house and this should be in place before any power granted by the Bill may be used by the Minister.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: That is great. I thank Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. David Walton: If I may add to that, one of the aspects of the complaint that is a huge issue for residents is that the data of the complaints is collected and managed by the DAA. We and many residents across Fingal started complaining when the flight paths opened. We discovered that the data is collected by the DAA and that is the data provided to ANCA. The complaints process is such that if you want to complain about 250 flights going over your house on any particular day, you have to go onto the DAA website and complain about each individual flight. If you allow five minutes to get onto the website, state the relevant time and give the details of the flight, if you have the numbers from the tracking apps that many people now have, you would spend between eight and 12 hours a day complaining about the noise. The DAA takes great pleasure in identifying that one person is responsible for 75% of the complaints but he is the only person who is mad enough to spend 30 or 40 hours per week complaining about flights. It is designed to fail, as anyone who has tried it knows. Most people have given up and said it is going to end up in the courts. That information is used by the DAA. That is what ANCA relies on. I have worked in several different industries, including the financial and telecom industries, and I do not know of any single regulated industry where the regulator allows the offender to collect the data. It needs to be independent and accessible. That is one of the reasons there is so little qualitative information about the noise.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank the witnesses for coming here today and making such considered presentations. I have met them all and know intimately the problems they are facing. They have all made their cases very strongly. I acknowledge the presence of their colleagues and neighbours who are sitting in the Gallery. This matter is of considerable importance to the residents of north County Dublin. It has been reiterated by most of the witnesses that they are not against the airport. They acknowledge its economic and social importance. However, there are major problems that impact communities across north County Dublin. We need to get this right and put measures in place.

Mr. O'Brien outlined the issues with the north runway. People who never thought they would be under a flight path now are. We need to emphasise that point. People living in Coolquay, Oldtown, Ballyboughal and Lusk purposely bought houses away from flight paths or did due diligence and built houses away from flight paths. However, since the opening of the northern runway, they find themselves dealing with the issues that they specifically sought to avoid. If any other person or entity breached planning applications and, for example, they built a house in contravention of their planning permission, they would be ordered to take it down. We now have a situation where planning permission has been breached and is continuing to be breached but nothing is being done about it. That is an egregious breach that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families.

I could sit here all day and go through these issues, as I am sure all of the witnesses could, but I have limited time. I will turn to Mr. O'Gradaigh. An excellent document was prepared by the St. Margaret's The Ward Residents Group. It is an excellent report. It contains some very detailed and comprehensive suggestions while acknowledging the benefit of the airport to the area. Mr. O'Gradaigh clearly said in his opening address that the financial resources of the

airport are not being evenly distributed among the people directly impacted. Perhaps he would outline to the committee the proposals he is making in relation to the Rivermeade and Coolquay housing developments and their relocation to State-owned lands at Thornton Hall.

I would just make the point, before Mr. O'Gradaigh responds, that the insulation and buy-out schemes are falling way below what should be provided to the residents. The voluntary buy-out scheme has not been updated since 2016. I would like to put on record the fact that the scheme does not ensure that people who avail of it can actually replace what they have in the locality. It is often not financially possible for them to purchase in the locality and even if they do manage to purchase a site, there is no guarantee that they will be granted planning permission. There is a huge risk involved in availing of the buy-out scheme. Furthermore, the August 2026 deadline on the scheme needs to be pushed out.

I invite Mr. O'Gradaigh to talk about the vision for the area and specifically about housing provision.

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: I will tackle the buy-out scheme first. As Dr. Maher mentioned, night-time noise is now the biggest problem for residents and the research shows that but there is no voluntary buy-out scheme for night-time noise. There is only a day-time noise scheme that has been in place, as the Senator said, for over 20 years. Night-time noise has increased by 343%. What we are really concerned about is the fact that ANCA is currently undergoing a review and from the screening documents for the strategic environmental assessment, SEA, it looks like it wants to amend the criteria. It looks like it wants to remove the limit that is being breached, namely, the 55 dB night-time criterion. It looks like it wants to remove that from the noise abatement objective. The limit is being breached but rather than trying to fix that, the plan is to remove the limit all together. That is our biggest concern. The majority of affected residents are in south Portmarnock, at the train station. The planes land over south Portmarnock but those residents are not being looked after.

I will turn now to the vision statement. Mr. Hendrik Van Der Kamp is a renowned town planner. Through the community liaison group process, he drew up an independent vision report. I have some slides and pictures that I can share with the committee. Mr. Van Der Kamp had some very large maps of the area drawn up. Through a community-led process he went around the area asking people what they would like to see in the area. He took all of the inputs and wrote up a report. Like a lot of areas in Ireland, housing was the number one issue. Other issues included the diversion of flight paths, cycleways and pathways. Our area is unique. There is no planning permission. One cannot build houses in our area, and that is understandable in certain ways, but there has been no consideration of where housing could be built. We have looked at options, including Thornton Hall which is close by. It is just outside the areas of high noise levels. It is State-owned land and has been sitting there for so long. The Minister for justice wants to build a small prison but there is still ample land there to allow us to relocate people who avail of the voluntary buy-out scheme, enabling them to still reside in the community.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is Mr O'Gradaigh saying that some residents in that area would choose that as an option in order to stay in the locality?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: Yes, absolutely. The problem now is that if people get bought out, where do they move to? Some families have been in the area for generations. They have lived

on family farms, with family members and with the same neighbours beside them for years. Where do they move to? There are no sites anywhere, as everyone in Fingal knows. The idea is to ring-fence a certain amount of land for these people. I would draw an analogy with the Poulaphouca dam, when the ESB flooded the area for a hydroelectric station and relocated the people. We are in the same position. We cannot stop the development at Dublin Airport. We know that but because we are so close to it, we should be looked after. We want to move somewhere close by. We are very proud of our area. St. Margaret's GAA is the cornerstone of our community. We are very proud of our heritage. It was reported in the *Irish Examiner* that the first recorded flying of the tricolour on a building was at Dunsoghly Castle in 1832. We are very proud of our heritage and we want to continue that.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I ask Mr. O'Gradaigh to outline the proposals in relation housing developments at Rivermeade and Coolquay. What would that entail and would that satisfy other residents who would like to avail of that option?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: A planning application for an additional 200 houses in Rivermeade has been submitted but it has been stalled because of road access issues.

The council said that updates to the roads are needed. A couple of million euro would upgrade those roads. It is stalling 200 much needed houses in the area. When the airport is designing roads, even its own roads, it has not got cycle paths on them. If we look around the airport, there are no cycle paths yet when we want to build 200 houses, the council is saying we must have cycle paths. That is the imbalance.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: And Coolquay as well.

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: Coolquay, absolutely. That has been designated. The council started on a local area plan, LAP, just before Covid but when Covid and all that hit, it stopped. Absolutely, it is designated as a rural village and we would like to see some housing for the local community there.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank Mr. O'Gradaigh very much. I am very much aware of the impact the airport noise is having on the children in the area, particularly in Kilcoskan National School. We need to ensure when these children are at home that we mitigate against the noise, whether that is through improved buy-out, improved noise insulation, reduced night-time flight disturbance and, of course, the use of the north runway as it was designed to be used and for which it was granted planning permission. This is a really big issue. I would strongly like us to address that in our report.

Deputy Grace Boland: The witnesses are all very welcome. I was interested in what they had to say. I have been a little bit frustrated over the past couple of years in trying to understand what flight path was agreed, who was supposed to be enforcing it and how we can actually make sure that it is enforced. Mr O'Brien might be able to help me out a little bit on this. He referred to some of the comments I made at the Oireachtas committee.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: On the routes.

Deputy Grace Boland: Yes. What I am getting from the Department and what I got from the IAA officials when they came in last year is not very helpful to me or to any of the residents and neighbours affected. Could Mr. O'Brien please talk us through what route it is supposed to be adhering to and how that is not happening and where the responsibility lies?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: If we look at the charts, the two important charts are the green one and the blue one. The green one shows straight ahead for five miles and it shows 1.5 km either side of it. That is what is referred to in the industry - it is actually a term that was coined by the UK Department for Transport - as the noise preferential route. The way that works is that is what was what was submitted in 2005 and that is what was assessed. That was the basis of the entire environmental impact statement, EIS, and that is what was granted planning permission. That was the project.

Dublin Airport Authority's position is that it can fly anywhere it wants, over any neighbourhood it wants, and that flight paths have nothing to do with the planning permission. That is what it told this committee. The interim CEO told this committee, and DAA has made multiple public statements that there is no such thing as planning permission for flight paths. Part of the problem is that there is no such thing as flight paths. It is not a defined term. Therefore, when people ask about the flight paths and they mean the route, DAA answers about the very specific instrument flight procedure and the standard instrument departures, SIDs, and dives deeply into the process of the technical side of that. This is not as complex as it is made out to be. Recently, one of the councillors in Fingal described it by saying: "Hang on a second; this is about as complex as something Elmo would explain on "Sesame Street"." If it is not going straight ahead, it is not the same project.

In 2005, it went straight ahead, over farm land; it was chosen by the DAA and designed, consulted and permitted. In 2016 at public consultation, it was at the wrong angle, with a 15° turn, and it was only consulted in Fingal. There was no consultation in Meath despite that being where the majority of the low altitude noise is. That application was subsequently withdrawn rendering the entire consultation moot, but it is still routinely referenced by DAA that these flight paths it is using now are quite close to what it previously consulted in an application that was withdrawn. The runway opened in 2022. There are immediate turns at the end of the runway of 30° and 75°. There was outrage and confusion. A warning letter was issued by Fingal with nine criteria. Only two of those have ever been enforced. One led to a High Court stay on night flights and the other one has led to this legislation. In 2023, because of all of the outrage and chaos, within five months or maybe six months new SIDs were issued into the system and promulgated, and a 30° turn was retained.

Instead of a 75° turn, everybody goes out and makes an immediate 30° turn. They fly to the Meath border. The waypoint is quite literally on the Meath border, and then they start making their turns, at which point Fingal refused to further enforce the EIS breach, condition 1, and the 7B breach, which is condition 3. Let us talk a little bit about whether this is a breach of a planning condition. If you consulted, assessed, designed and got planning permission for the M1 motorway and nine years later you had a consultation because you thought you were going to change the route to the N2 but you hold a consultation in Fingal and you do not ask anybody in Meath where the N2 is, and then you build the M3, is that a breach of a planning condition, or is that building a completely different project with no valid planning permission? As a civil engineer and a pilot, my contention is this runway is not operating in breach of planning permission, the project as implemented does not have any valid planning permission. The enforcement, as the Deputy says, has been virtually non-existent. The Ombudsman has been dealing with Fingal for the past six or seven months and has told us-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Does Fingal have the competence to enforce this?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Its argument is that it does not. This is all terribly complex. It is about aviation. Every time it comes up, we wave around the big "S", safety. Who wants to be the politician who waded in and had something done and then there was an incident - oh, you messed with safety? Civil engineers build stuff and if it falls down, it is not good. We are not reckless. Pilots are strapped into the aeroplane. They are big fans of safety. The idea that anybody who queries this is anti-safety has been a very effective message and messaging has been key to DAA's response and to AirNav's response to this.

DAA does not have any expertise in flight path design. The assistant secretary pointed that out last week. Despite it being the legal position, they do not know how to do that. She continued to say that they brought in AirNav, which also does not have any design expertise and no engineers. They had never designed an aerodrome. They had never designed for parallel runways, which is completely different to just having a single-runway airport. We did not so much add a runway as fundamentally redesign Dublin Airport to be a parallel airport. AirNav had never even operated a parallel airport, never mind designed one. The design decisions were made by professional air traffic controllers - trained air traffic controllers - acting effectively as amateur designers. Those decisions were then transmitted finally to the experts in Bratislava but the instruction was that we have already made all the calls, so turn this into a procedure that we can submit to the IAA. The IAA does not have any authority to assess the quality of a submission. In fact, it is forbidden to. The regulator cannot be involved in designing the thing that it is passing or failing. The IAA's position is that it assessed what was sent to it and the only way it could reject it or intervene was if it were such a bad design as to fall below the legally mandated minimum safety standards. It asked directly of the IAA if it has a public interest mandate. The answer from the CEO and the COO of the IAA was a flat "No, absolutely not". It is not allowed to reject the submission simply because it is a bad design. Ultimately, cutting through all of the confusion the committee has seen and all of the circular discussion and the pass the buck, we would like that no power conferred by the Bill may be exercised unless an independent instrument flight procedure design company such as ASAP in Bratislava has certified that the route assessed in the 2007 EIS cannot be flown and that certification has been published. Has anybody read this onerous condition that we need to do away with? It says before you go past 32 million passengers, go get new planning permission. That is it. In 19 years, DAA has failed to do that.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. O'Brien and Deputy Boland. I express my gratitude to the witnesses for their opening statements, and in particular for the submissions received during the seven-day window, which raised issues for some. For a moment, I want to set aside the whole planning, environmental, regulatory effectiveness, climate obligations, public health and public accountability elements and focus on the lived experience of communities. I want to talk to Liam in particular and to David. Let us assume we are not talking about pre-legislative scrutiny here and Dublin Airport is compliant with the 2007 planning condition and operating under 32 million passengers a year. In terms of the lived experience of communities and reducing impact, are there two or three measures that they would like to see implemented that would make a difference to communities living near Dublin Airport? This has to be brief.

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: I will let Niamh respond because she is probably the best in that regard.

An Cathaoirleach: I am asking about changes that could be made.

Dr. Niamh Maher: I know the Chair said he does not want to refer to flight paths or anything like that.

An Cathaoirleach: Let us go back to a time when Dublin Airport was operating within the cap. I just want to understand what changes could be made to improve the lived experience and reduce the impact on communities.

Dr. Niamh Maher: I am affected by the north runway, so that is my lived experience at the moment. If we go back to a time before there were 32 million passengers, then we would be referring to a lot of the people who are affected by the night-time noise now, in terms of the landing routes. When you look at night flights, it is without question that there is an international movement about night flights at the moment, how damaging they are and the night curfews that occur in many European airports as well. The only way to get around the night flights issue is not quieter aircraft because the aircraft are going to be still substantially noisy when they are landing as they are at low altitude, it is by reducing the number of aircraft at night or not having any aircraft flying at certain times.

An Cathaoirleach: Could Dr. Maher remind this committee what the night curfew is in Dublin Airport at the moment?

Dr. Niamh Maher: There is no night curfew.

An Cathaoirleach: What about best practice in terms of European airports?

Dr. Niamh Maher: It varies. Different airports have different night-time curfews. They vary from 10.30 p.m. or 11 p.m. at night until 6 a.m. - those type of curfews. Essentially there are no aircraft. The airports all know the aeroplanes need to be in by a certain time or otherwise they cannot land.

An Cathaoirleach: I recall being on a runway in Frankfurt at 10.30 p.m. We were just about to take off and we were not allowed to take off.

Dr. Niamh Maher: That is it really for the night flights. There has been a movement, in particular with Dublin Airport over the past few years, where it is moving more and more flights into the night. We even see the argument with the 65-flight limit that was meant to come into effect once the north runway opened but that just has not happened. There has been a stay on that. During the busy summer period there are possibly 120 flights a night, mostly landing. That sort of thing should not be going on. If that is dealt with properly, then that will help those who are affected by those night-time flights.

An Cathaoirleach: For the benefit of people watching or listening in to this committee, on average, how many flights a day are there into or out of Dublin Airport?

Dr. Niamh Maher: Some three hundred.

An Cathaoirleach: How many of those flights are after 11 o'clock at night and before 6 o'clock in the morning?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Routinely, we have over 100. In midsummer, over 100 but at this time of year maybe 90.

An Cathaoirleach: Does David want to respond to my question?

Mr. David Walton: Sure. As members have seen in my pre-submission, we have been authorised to complain by 170 residents in Ballyboughal. We did a survey through our text alert, which has 450 people, but that represents usually one person per household. In round figures, we are probably talking about the guts of 170 houses which are impacted. We had no aircraft coming in over the village when I moved out there in 1998.

You might hear the odd tractor going out the road and maybe once a week you would have a missed flight where a plane had to take off and come around. In August 2022, we thought they were doing tests or something like that because they were flying over our village at 3,500 ft and 4,000 ft. The committee might recall the furore when one plane flew over the Aviva Stadium. There were letters to *The Irish Times* and people were in shock. They did not know what was happening and thought the world was going to end. That was one plane in Sandymount. In the peak summer period when the winds are blowing south westerly, westerly or north westerly, we are getting that 250 times a day. I love my garden, I keep bees and I have a few chickens out the back but this is not about me. There is a brand new estate just down the road from me and people paid good money for the houses there. The planes are coming up and banking directly over the village, very close to the national school. They weigh 200 tonnes and are at full throttle as they climb. People are asking what is going on. The committee will have seen the comments I put in. They are transcriptions of people who complained. They said they could not believe this was happening and asked how this was happening to them. Someone said they had kids with sensory problems and could not get them to sleep. It has affected a lot of people. Some people are not bothered by it and there are a lot of people who work in the airport, which we are conscious of, but I would say the vast majority of the residents are deeply upset.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay.

Mr. David Walton: They are deeply upset about the planning-----

An Cathaoirleach: If I could just come in, eight minutes is just not enough time for any of us as members. Does Mr. O'Brien think there is a national economic case for lifting the cap? If we do lift it, what are the key conditions that must accompany that?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: I would be inclined not so much to lift the cap as raise it, if that is what is required. It must be tied to suitable infrastructure to carry the load. When we talk about the economic impact, we should also talk about the extended impact. The sewage issue is incredibly important.

An Cathaoirleach: In Ringsend, yes.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: We have talked about that a little bit. Dublin Airport needs connections to water and to Ringsend for sewage. The greater Dublin drainage project is mired. It will be 2032 at least before that comes online. If we have unlimited growth of Dublin Airport, which is what this Bill will result in, then we are giving all of that capacity to the airport. What is the economic effect of not being able to build houses? Where are we going to house foreign direct investment, FDI, employees for a new and growing company? Where does Anthropic put 100 new staff every three months if we cannot build houses? The knock-on effect is more complex than just tourist dollars and tourist euro.

To go back to the question of the lived experience and the effect, I know it is very boring to do everything in numbers but the original flight paths would have seen 538 homes and families newly affected. The flight paths that are being used by the DAA see 8,050 homes newly affected by the north runway. That as is a 15-fold increase in the number of people. As Mr. Walton said, some of them are not bothered but some of them are getting hammered. It is just not right that we allow that to happen.

An Cathaoirleach: My time is just about over. Coming back to the infrastructural deficits, I accept what Mr. O'Brien is saying about Ringsend and the greater Dublin drainage projects, but what are the other key infrastructural deficits as far as he is concerned?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Swords is already stuck for electricity. The water pressure has been dropped in Swords to feed more water to the airport. Road infrastructure is the one that commonly comes up. The original condition was purely to just get some more planning. Everything I have said up to now is fact but this is personal opinion. The reason the DAA is so allergic to planning permission is that comes with a comprehensive environmental impact assessment of the entire airport, and there is an inability in the DAA to deliver that.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. O'Brien speaks about Ringsend in particular in his submission. Does he think that is the most critical piece of infrastructure?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Absolutely. The European Commission is already all over Ringsend. We are already getting fined. If we dump additional sewage into Ringsend, it will go into Dublin Bay untreated or partially treated.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. I am sorry but my time is gone. I think we all wish we had more time.

The Vice Chair, Deputy Moynihan, is next.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: I thank all of the witnesses and apologise for my late arrival. I am not familiar with the geography of that area of the country, but I wish to ask about the population of the immediate St. Margaret's The Ward and Ballyboughal areas. I do not know who is best placed to give me an answer. It is just so I can get a sense of the impact. I am very struck by Mr. O'Brien contrasting 538 and 8,050. Is the latter the ballpark figure we are looking at?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: That is houses. It is 30,000 people who did not expect to be affected by this. There are 16,000 in Ashbourne and in Ratoath over 10,000 are directly overflown. The flight paths are not directly over Ashbourne but every house in the town is within 3 km of an SID - a flight path - while the aircraft are at or below 4,000 ft. That is close to the ground. When you take off from the end of this runway and you start pulling power swerves - I do not want to go too "aviation nerd" - you are either climbing or banking. You are either accelerating or you are climbing. If you are turning and you are accelerating, you are not climbing. The effect of this change in aeronautical terms is not simply that they are going over populations they would not otherwise, but that they are also lower than if they had continued for five miles straight ahead with wings level. The A320, A330 and Boeing 747 simulators have all shown that, at the end of that five miles straight ahead, you are climbing upwards at 2,000 ft to 3,000 ft per minute. You then make the corner and you still fly over Ballyboughal, but at 10,000 ft rather than 4,000 ft. If you do careful design, which a proper design exercise would have done,

you would see that the waypoint in Ratoath is literally on top of the secondary school. Every aircraft that flies that route, which is about half of them, is required to fly over the secondary school at 4,000 ft unless directed off the route. Put simply, nobody looked at a map of the ground. I think that is what happened.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Does Dr. Maher wish to respond?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: If I can just make one point, we have done a study in the area. With the 63 dB very high levels of noise, we have worked out about 150 houses should be offered voluntary buy-out because there is such an extensive level of noise.

Dr. Niamh Maher: I was going to mention that. There are going to be thousands of people affected by the noise wherever it goes. I am affected by the divergent flight paths and if those paths go off me, the noise is going to be over somebody else, so there should very much be a focus on how we are mitigating that noise effect. It has not been happening properly at all and was not happening even prior to the north runway. That needs to be in place to protect whoever is affected by that noise, wherever it might be. That could be the voluntary buy-out or having appropriate mitigation in place for people. For example, my kids are in a school that is affected by a divergent path-----

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Before Dr. Maher continues, will she give me examples of what appropriate mitigation might look like? I am thinking of what we might tease out. What would it look like, outside of the voluntary buy-out?

Dr. Niamh Maher: It is the buy-out, it is relocation for people living in an area that is affected. We have mentioned the night-time noise as well. We found that the parameters to be offered mitigation, be that buy-out or insulation, were not sufficient to protect people's health. That needs to be looked into properly instead of constantly referring back to something that has been in place for a couple of decades and is not sufficient any more with the information we now have.

There is also a need, of course, to stick to whatever planning conditions were in place at the start. To use my situation as an example, we rebuilt our home and were not meant to be under a flight path but now we are under a flight path with very significant noise because of where we are located. My children attend a school that is now under a flight path. That is Kilcoskan National School, which also was not meant to be affected. They were exposed to that straight off because the rules were not followed. It needs to be remembered that when something is in place that is meant to be followed, it should be enforced. Unfortunately, the only people who are really suffering from this - we are not making any money off of it - are going to deal with the health consequences of it, and so are our kids.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: I will recap.

In terms of the mitigation, we are looking at voluntary buy-out, voluntary relocation. Insulation seems to have gone as far as it can, from what Dr. Maher has said.

Dr. Niamh Maher: Insulation will work, depending on where you are and the noise levels you are exposed to. If the noise levels are extremely high, for example, 65 dB or above, insulation just will not cut it to protect your home.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Enforcement of flight paths is the last one. Are there other mitigation measures? Night curfews are something else that have been flagged.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Curfews are standard, pretty much, across Europe, as we have said. From 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. they roll up the runways. There are no noise abatement procedures being used in Dublin. It is perfectly feasible and the norm across airports the world over to have very specific restrictions on speed, direction, climb attitude and climb power. Dublin has one noise abatement measure, that you are not allowed to turn below 750 ft above sea level, yet the SID for the north runway requires a turn at 650 ft. That is 400 ft above the ground. The one miserable little abatement procedure that was in place is contradicted by the airport's own designed procedure. Fundamentally, there are many measures that can be built into the departure and arrival procedures. That would have to be done by a competent designer with a blank sheet, who would examine Dublin Airport and see what is the best we can do to ensure the future. If we look at this purely as a commercial operator of the airport, it is not about doing the right thing for the neighbours. Purely commercially, if there are 30,000 people you are winding up by flying over them, who are looking at every single detail of your planning applications, why would you do that if you do not need to? I asked that question of Kenny Jacobs in October of 2023 and we are still waiting for the answer. We went in constructively. We are from the industry. We brought a draft proposal on how to move back to the correct flight paths. They pretended to review it and then misled this committee that a review had occurred and the result was very complex. Five and a half months after the FOI shows DAA knew there was going to be no review, they told this committee that AirNav had recently completed a review and our proposal was terribly complicated, and kicked it into the long grass. We have had no meaningful communication with them. We have had a letter from the board informing us that there will be no further engagement with our group from the DAA.

Deputy Shane Moynihan: Is that the experience of other groups here in terms of engagement with DAA?

Mr. David Walton: Yes. They came out to my house in the early days and they said they could not talk about it. I know there have been many instances. I have been at meetings with the St. Margaret's group and understand that they just really do not engage. I think what is most important here, and most galling, is that Mr. O'Brien's proposal is actually very simple. It just means that one or two planes a week can take a left turn and that would stop 250 or 300 planes a day taking an immediate right turn. It is such a simple premise. There is no good reason. We hear that Baldonnell is closed airspace - our massive air force, right? We cannot let two planes a week fly towards them. What are they protecting? It is just insane. Why can the DAA and the Department of Transport not sit down and sort it out?

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I thank all the groups for their very detailed written submissions and their statements today. I will start with a question for Children's Rights Over Flights. I read in their submission the point they reiterated just now about Ireland's aviation policy and their contention that it is not science-based. Could they flesh that out a little bit? How is our current aviation policy not science-based and what would a science-based aviation policy for Ireland look like?

Ms Louise O'Leary: We would contend that it is not based on best available science. When we have been writing to the Minister for Transport, for example, about our concerns about lifting the cap, we have flagged multiple really consequential and alarming scientific reports

since the programme for Government was published with this commitment to lift the cap. They point to an escalation of the climate crisis.

Our first climate tipping point has been breached. Seven of Earth's critical life support limits have been exceeded. We have experienced the record-breaking Storm Éowyn and Storm Chandra, with unprecedented flooding and record-breaking winds. Even just since we put in our submission, there is a really alarming scientific report warning that sea rise estimates have been underestimated. We have been saying that aviation policy has to adjust to the reality of the world and contribute meaningfully to climate mitigation. That is the first point we say in respect of best available science. The second is that when we receive responses from the Minister for Transport, and he cites provisions of the national aviation policy, he refers to non-transformative solutions like sustainable aviation fuel, which really should be called alternative aviation fuel. It is not available in a sustainable way at the scale required to make a meaningful impact on aviation emissions. There have been a couple of really interesting recent analyses, one of which people might have seen on RTÉ. A number of Irish experts looked at what it would take to decarbonise Dublin Airport. For example, it would require planting trees in an area the size of Tipperary to offset the emissions. That was a mid-range estimate. An area the size of Connacht was a higher-level estimate for what they modelled. Sustainable aviation fuel is not a solution. It is not going to reduce emissions. Similarly, what we have seen with technical advancements like more fuel-efficient aircraft, they have been completely leapfrogged by the exponential growth of air traffic, so it is making no difference. There is a tiny percent, 1%, of sustainable aviation fuel mixed in with jet kerosene at a time when flights are increasing more than they ever have. We contend that is not science-based.

It occurred to me when I was cycling in this morning that I cycled in as a good citizen because I am told by my Government that my journey counts. There was a study late last year by the World Resources Institute that collated a vast amount of evidence in respect of 19 different climate actions. Flying less is the second most climate-friendly action an adult can take. My Government is willfully encouraging me to do it more, one of the most climate-harming things I can do. As a parent, I find that really objectionable and absolutely not science-based. We would argue that there are multiple ways that national aviation policy can be rooted in science and can unlock revenue via responsible fiscal approaches like fairly taxing jet kerosene the way petrol is.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I thank Ms O'Leary for that. I might interject, if she does not mind. To Mr. O'Brien, my read of the result of the legislation that is before us is that there is no limit at all on the growth of Dublin Airport in any way. Is that unusual in a European context? Would most European airports have an arrangement such that the organisation running the airport decides on size and there is no sense of national policy, whether it is a climate, infrastructure or economic development policy? Is it normal that the main airport of a nation has no limits on it whatsoever?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: No. There were some comments from the Department that there could be other measures and there still could be planning permission, and ANCA could still apply restrictions. We have seen that DAA is gloriously litigious, as is the airline industry. Say we put a limit on access to sewage treatment and they have to have a sewage treatment plant at Dublin Airport in order to grow. That will be a *de facto* limitation on the number of passengers they can handle, and at the very least they will determine that it is a *de facto* passenger cap and

illegal under this Bill, and we are off to the High Court. Other countries set this type of thing at a national level. The French version of ANCA, ACNUSA, is appointed by the President of the Republic, the President of the Senate and the President of the Assembly.

It is a ten-person body and its mission is to serve the nation and its people. Its strategic plan reflects its ambition to strengthen the acceptability of air transport, to assert its authority in the public interest and to report with rigor and dialogue the emergence of sustainable aviation that respects communities and their residents. It is a national level policy organisation, with teeth, working with the industry. It wants dialogue but ultimately what it determines, goes.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Does this refer back to the points Ms O'Leary was making on the weakness of national aviation policy-----

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Correct.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: -----and that it has not really been driven at government level but left to one of the major players to set it itself, in terms of what DAA is doing?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: All roads lead to DAA. All responsibility for the airport, and every aspect of it, is with DAA. A total of 85% of Ireland's aviation industry is in Dublin Airport.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Mr. O'Brien said his submission is based on fact but he gave a personal opinion earlier. Does he have a sense of why it took DAA so long to bring its planning application, which Fingal County Council is now looking at, to increase the cap to 40 million? Looking through the national aviation policy, there was never a flag that this cap was a big crisis and then suddenly it was a massive crisis. I have never understood why it took DAA so long, if this is so existential to it. Why did take breaching the cap before DAA went for a planning application? Does Mr. O'Brien have a view on this?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Yes, in addition to being a civil engineer, I am a director of multiple companies, as is Mr. Walton. The DAA board has no expertise in two of the three core duties of DAA. DAA is the operator of the shopping centre and car parks and this it does well. It is tasked with being the Aerodrome Operator, which is an International Civil Aviation Organization and European legal term. This covers everything we have spoken about with regard to flight path. DAA is also charged as the infrastructure developer of our key economic asset and key transport hub connectivity to the world. On the executive team that is published on the website, there are no engineers and there is nobody with expertise in property development, no chemical scientist and nobody with aviation expertise. This is the executive team and the board. We are not supposed to use the word "incompetent" but there is nobody in DAA who has demonstrated any evidence of competence in two of the three practice areas that are core to the DAA. In my personal opinion, it is not fit for purpose.

The Minister has a fantastic opportunity now, with the board turning over naturally, and most of the seats ready to be refilled. The chair is about to retire. We have directly recommended to the Minister that representatives be appointed from the areas of chemical sciences because the airport is floating on a lake of cancer-causing CFAS chemicals, civil engineering - not me - with a brief to develop the future of the airport, and aviation to be directly responsible for reporting to the board on the operation of the aerodrome. This might fix things.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I thank the Cathaoirleach for facilitating the swap in speaking slots. I welcome our guests and I apologise for not being here earlier but, as I explained before the

meeting, I had to attend another meeting. I have several questions and I know that time is limited and the Cathaoirleach is right to be strict on it. I want to ask Mr. O'Gradaigh about ANCA's noise abatement order. My understanding is that it has been breached over a number of years. Will he explain what this means and what the impact of it is?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: The noise abatement objective contains noise rules for the airport and ANCA set them back in 2019. There are priority level criteria in the noise abatement objective, which states the number of people exposed to aircraft noise above 55 dB Lnight and 65 dB Lden shall be reduced compared to 2019. These levels are excessive and dangerous. They are the priority levels of noise. However, since 2019 the noise has escalated.

There were 1,533 people above 55 dB Lnight and this increased to 6,791 in 2024. We expect that once we get the 2025 figures this will be greater again. The majority of these people are in south Portmarnock. They are beside the train station. The aircraft come in to land over them. The noise abatement objective has been breached since 2022. What is the purpose of having an aircraft noise competent authority set up its own rules when the rules have been breached since 2022? What is really concerning to us is that the noise abatement objective is being amended and we believe these criteria will be taken out so that it can be said that the objective is not being breached. That is our concern.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: These are dangers that were flagged not only by me but by others. For some reason Fingal County Council pressed ahead with the establishment of ANCA in the way it did. I have a question for Mr. O'Brien on his experience since the north runway was opened. How does he think this Bill can be amended or improved to deal with the issues that have arisen with the opening of this runway?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: I will talk about, and reiterate, two of the key asks but I will begin with the third, which I have not spoken about. This is that the power that will be transferred to the Minister is absolute and permanent. Head 4(6) declares that the Minister shall have the authority to remove any planning condition with no screening or anything. Heads 5, 6 7 and 8 all trigger a process but at present head 4(6) seems to bypass it. We recommend or request that any provision that gives such executive power to the Minister should have a sunset clause. Perhaps this would be two or three years. If we have a situation where DAA has failed to get planning permission and the Minister feels we need to regularise the situation and bring the cap, for the moment, to 36 million so DAA is not breaching the law, fine; give it a couple of years to get its planning application together but there should be a sunset clause.

As I said earlier, the key issue of why it is not flying ahead is couched as that it is for safety and that there are very complex regulations. We have asked DAA directly and we have asked the Department to please hire an independent qualified flight procedure designer to come up with a solution or certify that there is no solution and this is, in fact, the only way to do this. We do not believe it is but if that provision were in there it would have to find somebody to do this and publish it before the powers could be used.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: There is an independent person who could do this work and who could look at it independently and make a recommendation or, indeed, recommend that nothing else can be done except this.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Correct, and we attempted-----

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Is it Mr. O'Brien's understanding that none of this work has happened and this independent advice has not been sought?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Our understanding is that AirNav made the decision that this was the way to implement the requirement that it would turn the traffic 30° right. The result of this decision was then sent to ASAP in Bratislava to be turned into a flight procedure. We asked DAA to take AirNav out of the loop as DAA is the aerodrome operator. AirNav had already written to the Minister to state it made the flight paths but that DAA's breach of the planning permission is DAA's problem. We suggested that as DAA has already been thrown under the bus, why does it not go directly to ASAP in Bratislava and ask it to do an analysis of the airfield and see whether it can fix this problem so it does not fly over 30,000 very angry neighbours . It did not do this.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Is it standard practice that this would be done where there is an issue like this?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Absolutely and, in fact, there are procedures. I cannot remember the period but it is quite normal that there is periodic analysis of an aerodrome. It is called design debt in engineering and software development. Something is fixed or a situation is dealt with quickly and over time we end up with a less than ideal solution. If we step back periodically, we can examine our objective, whether it be to have the lowest possible impact, the most effective use of the aerospace or with regard to land that was already reserved.

We should remember that people were denied planning permission straight ahead of this runway because that is where the planes were to go. They are now living under a flight path. The answer, in short, is "Yes". We tried to commission such an independent study. The feedback we got was that nobody would dare because they feared being blackballed by the industry if they were seen to support neighbours rather than the industry.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: We have ANCA, thanks in no small part to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael because it was their idea. How does ANCA compare to the equivalent bodies in other jurisdictions? Is it possible to have an entity similar to ANCA that would have more teeth and more power and do the job more effectively?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: Yes. As I said to Deputy Boland, the French example is the best one we have seen. It is set up as an entirely independent body. ANCA is a department within Fingal County Council. We believe that, on its face, that is a breach of EU Regulation 598/2014. ANCA is required to be functionally independent but it is not. It is 100% funded by the DAA. How do you regulate the people who pay your pay cheque? This also applies to the IAA, by the way. The IAA is routinely referred to as the independent regulator. It receives no Exchequer funding. All of the regulator's funding comes from the industry in fees the IAA charges for processing submissions. I am sure IAA staff are very nice people but, again, there is no functional fiscal independence from the industry they are regulating. Both of the regulators, ANCA and IAA, are compromised.

Under the French model, the body there is self-funding to the tune of €14 million in fines it charges airlines. It is financially incentivised, rather than disincentivised, to have teeth and do its job.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: I thank Mr. O'Brien.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: It is Mr. O'Gradaigh's contention that this legislation should contain commitments for the planning-for-real process and for engagement with the community. Is that the case?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: That is correct. EU Regulation 598/2014, which governs this process, refers to the balanced approach. Reading the heads of Bill, there is no balance. Residents are not included. As stakeholders, we are nowhere to be seen. Ms Brogan just said that ANCA will look after it.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I thank Mr. O'Gradaigh for that. Mr. O'Brien referenced the significance of a European court ruling and suggested this legislation should wait for that ruling. Will he expand on that point?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: The ruling is imminent. In European court terms, it could be between eight and ten weeks or it could be a couple of months. The Advocate General has already ruled, in a referral of a case taken by the industry in the High Court, to stop the Commission for Aviation Regulation, which is now part of the IAA, from using the passenger cap as a slot criterion. The Advocate General has determined it is a perfect valid slot criterion and has agreed with the IAA in every way. That does not become European law until the court actually accepts it. Eight out of ten times, the court simply accepts the Advocate General's ruling. As a result, airlines from America have lobbied the US Government and the US transport department and that has been transmitted by the ambassador as that we should hurry up and get this legislation through by April so we can prevent that from becoming law. They are very scared, as they said in their own words, of neighbourhoods throughout Europe and, potentially, the world being treated as a stakeholder in how an airport operates.

Deputy Gillian Toole: Is there aviation experience within the Department of Transport? Is there a way of operating the north and south runway that would enable a passenger cap without any change of legislation?

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: The first answer is a simple, straight "No". We put in a freedom of information request to determine that last year. There are 49 general civil servants in the Department. None of those positions has any requirement for any expertise or experience in aviation. Following the helicopter crash, the AAIU stated the Department's lack of that expertise contributed to the crash and its recommendations included that the Department get that expertise.

The Minister accepted those recommendations on behalf of the Department; the Department did not accept them. The Department decided instead to spend taxpayers' money hiring a consultant to tell the Department its level of expertise - or lack thereof - was just fine because there are lots of other Departments and Ministries that do not have expertise either. No implementation of expertise was ever carried out.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. O'Brien. One of the most difficult jobs I have is time management and I really apologise but we have to finish all of our committee meetings at 12 o'clock because of another committee that comes in at 12.30 p.m. Rather than me wrapping up, I will give each of our witnesses one minute each to answer this question. To those who suggest the lifting of the cap is economically urgent and unavoidable, could the witnesses address that question in one minute?

Mr. Liam O'Gradaigh: Unfortunately, this legislation regularises unauthorised development. There is a process and it is a planning process. This is the wrong approach. There is a planning application there; follow the planning system. If the Bill goes ahead, we want balance and to make sure residents are catered for. Specifically, the St. Margaret's The Ward residents are impacted by the highest levels of noise. We have solutions. We have relocation plans and improved installation schemes, and we should be looked after.

Ms Louise O'Leary: The notion that this is essential to the economy is a narrative as opposed to being a well-founded, evidence-based, comprehensive evaluation of the matter. To answer the question, I will reference an FOI request we put in when the heads of the Bill were published. We asked for any records from 1 January 2025 to 14 February 2026 related to any efforts by the Department of Transport or the Minister for Transport to evaluate economic implications for outgoing tourism from Ireland in relation to removing the passenger cap from Dublin Airport. No records existed. As the committee has already heard, far more money is leaving our economy on planes than is coming in. That has not been evaluated, apart from the other arguments we have heard about tourism being static, etc.

We also asked for any records of any efforts relating to evaluating the greenhouse gas implications of removing the passenger cap or determining the public interest in the context of climate change and the implications of removing the passenger cap at Dublin Airport. No such records existed.

Mr. David Walton: There has been a lot of fearmongering about the imminent collapse of the economy. All of us here know the reasons people are unhappy. We do not want to shut down the airport. We all know it is important. We all know it creates jobs. One of the biggest issues is that from a national perspective, it is not being looked at. There is not really an economic argument when you consider the outgoing flights but there are benefits to outgoing flights as well as inbound flights.

The biggest issue we have is having a balanced economy. Shannon and Cork airports are taking 15% of the flights and Knock airport takes a minimal portion. If you want a balanced regional economy, which is in the national interest and in the national plan, and you increase the cap at Dublin Airport, the regional airports will suffer because the airlines will put cheap flights in Dublin and people will drive to Dublin. We just know that people go where the flights are cheapest.

Mr. Gareth O'Brien: The cap is the last constraint standing. If the Oireachtas enacts this Bill, the only planning condition that anyone has ever attempted to enforce at Dublin Airport will have been removed. Every attempt has been blocked. Nights were blocked by a High Court stay. Slots were blocked by a CJEU referral. The cap itself has been blocked by this Bill. The system will have learned that ignoring the law works. Before the committee votes to remove the cap, can it please satisfy itself that what replaces it is real?

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. O'Brien. I thank all of our witnesses. I thank my colleagues as members of the committee. I also acknowledge those in the Visitors Gallery.

I thank the witnesses for their constructive engagement. I always say that the committee's job is not to advocate but to scrutinise. Today's meeting was the first of a wider series of hearings. We are going to have two hearings next week and possibly two hearings the following week as well. That is all part of our pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposed Bill. The evidence

today is a reflection of the fact that this is not just a narrow or technical issue. We will reflect carefully on the issues that have been raised today. Of course, we will also have regard to the very detailed written submissions. I again thank our witnesses for their attendance.

The joint committee adjourned at 12.01 a.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 24 March 2026.