



PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

962 Wayne Ave • Suite 610 • Silver Spring, MD 20910

January 12, 2023

Administrator Bill Nelson
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Two Independence Square
300 E Street, SW
Room 9F44
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator Nelson:

On July 13, 2021, on the occasion of cementing NASA's historic strategic partnership with the European Space Agency to observe Earth and its changing environment, you declared that –

“Climate change is an all-hands-on deck, global challenge that requires action - now.”

On behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), I am writing to both second that sentiment but also to ask about the nature of NASA's “all-hands-on-deck” commitment to meeting the challenge of climate change. Specifically, I am writing to ask you about the climate implications of major projects sponsored by NASA's Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate (ARMD).

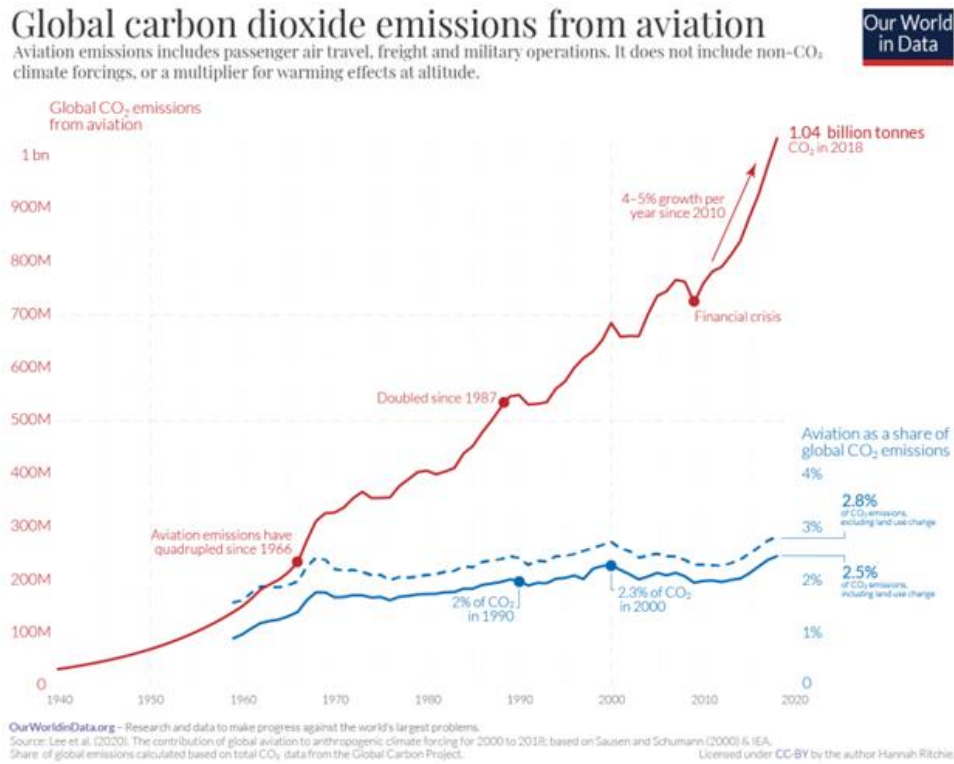
In particular, I want to draw your attention to ARMD's half-a-billion dollar investment in QueSST (X-59) jet to promote the return of commercial supersonic passenger transport (<https://www.nasa.gov/X59>). As you know, supersonic aircraft consume many times more fuel and produce many times the amount of pollution as current commercial flights. The negative implications for climate change and the goal of the aviation sector reaching carbon net neutrality by 2050 for any portion of the commercial passenger fleet going supersonic are clear – and quite disturbing.

Similarly, the climate implications of the ARMD's Urban Air Mobility program that would fill city skies with delivery drones and air-taxis are also quite troubling (<https://www.nasa.gov/uam-overview/>). <https://www.nasa.gov/uam-overview/>), especially since electric cars are more energy efficient than UAM aircraft and will have smaller carbon footprints.

However, neither of these ARMD programs appear to have undergone any analysis for their climate impacts, as required to meet NASA's own Risk Informed Decision Making criteria. To that end, I am urging you to initiate such a review that includes outside parties, including community and environmental interests, and that is conducted in a transparent manner.

As you know, emissions from commercial aviation sector have been rising exponentially. That trajectory makes the challenge of reducing emissions from to net zero by 2050 even more

daunting with each passing year (See <https://theicct.org/publication/co2-emissions-from-commercial-aviation-2013-2018-and-2019/>).



Against this backdrop, the idea that NASA is spending significant amounts of taxpayer dollars to enable higher polluting aircraft that will only benefit a very small percentage of the population for the foreseeable future is difficult to reconcile with the unquestionably commendable climate leadership role that NASA has assumed in so many other areas.

We hope that you agree that NASA's all-hands-on-deck approach to the climate challenge requires the involvement of ARMD operations, as well. We also believe that a first step in that inclusion should entail that the major investments by ARMD undergo a rigorous, independent, and publicly accessible climate impact analysis.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. PEER stands ready to supply any additional information you might desire.

Sincerely,

Tim Whitehouse
Executive Director