

[More from Globe Opinion](#)[Submit a Letter to the Editor](#)[Meet the Editorial Board](#)[Globe Op-Talks](#)

OPINION

Massport's plan to expand private jet space at Hanscom is a climate debacle

Small private jets are intensive spewers of carbon dioxide.

By [Scot Lehigh](#) Globe Columnist, Updated September 29, 2023, 3:00 a.m.



A jet landed on the runway at Hanscom Field in Bedford. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Some environmental calls are difficult tradeoffs. Some are not. Put the proposal to build 27 new aircraft hangars at [Hanscom Field](#), the region's largest noncommercial passenger airport, squarely in the latter category.

That nearly 300 percent increase in hangar space inevitably means more private jets. Dozens more. Perhaps an additional 75 or 80.

More private jets mean more carbon dioxide emissions. More carbon dioxide emissions mean the state would be backsliding on its effort to combat climate change.

And for what?

Essentially, the convenience of corporate executives and socioeconomic elites who can afford to gambol about the country in private jets, whose use has soared in the last few years.

Private jets use [10 to 20 times more fuel per passenger](#) than do commercial aircraft. Small jets are estimated to be up to [14 times more polluting per passenger](#). In 2016, they were responsible for some [33.7 million tons of carbon dioxide](#) worldwide. That's more than the entire nation of Denmark emitted in 2020.

And on shorter flights, the disparity is much larger. According to a study based on travel between New York City and Washington, D.C., private jets spew out approximately [7,913 pounds of carbon dioxide per passenger, while a passenger on a commercial jet is responsible for some 174 pounds](#).

ADVERTISING



If one were, heaven forbid, [to travel by bus](#), the emissions fall to 88 pounds per person, while a train trip over that route emits a mere seven pounds per person.

Here's a stat that speaks to the nature of elite aviation and plutocratic pollution: 1 percent of the population, worldwide, is responsible for more than half of all aviation travel emissions.

“Private jets are typically the most carbon-intensive type of passenger transportation we see,” said [Colin Murphy](#), deputy director of the Policy Institute for Energy, Environment, and the Economy at the University of California, Davis. “It’s really hard to reconcile continued growth in this space with the need to achieve carbon neutrality by the middle of this century.”

It’s against that backdrop that the [Massachusetts Port Authority](#), which owns Hanscom, is considering a dramatic expansion of hangar space at the Bedford general-aviation airfield.

“An expansion like this is fundamentally at odds with our climate law of a 50 percent

reduction by 2030 and getting to net zero by 2050,” said Elizabeth Turnbull Henry, president of the [Environmental League of Massachusetts](#).

Indeed, if this project goes ahead, the likely carbon dioxide emissions from increased private jet flights would overwhelm the agency’s other efforts to go green, said state [Senator Michael Barrett](#), Democrat of Lexington, one of the authors of the state’s [climate law](#).

“It will do so much reputational damage on an issue that is not going away in any of our lifetimes — climate change,” the senator said. “Why would Massport squander public credibility it is going to need on dozens of other issues down the line?”

Why — and for what? A great many of the private flights from Hanscom are short hops to vacation destinations, a conveyance convenience for Boston-area moguls. They can book a first-class commercial ticket from Logan Airport. Or go by chauffeured, privacy-glassed SUV. Or by train. Or possibly even bus. (Sorry, just joking on that last one, rich folks.)

At 11 a.m. Monday, advocates will rally at the State House in opposition to the Hanscom expansion plan. They will bring with them petitions with more than 10,000 signatures urging Governor Maura Healey to oppose the project.

Massport, with its staggered board appointees, is designed to be insulated from direct political control or gubernatorial intervention. Still, the agency is savvy enough not to want to incur the ill will of policy makers.

Healey, for whom climate is a big priority, should declare in no uncertain terms that [this project](#) should not be cleared for takeoff. Not in these climatically turbulent times.

Scot Lehigh is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at scot.lehigh@globe.com. Follow him [@GlobeScotLehigh](https://twitter.com/GlobeScotLehigh).

[Show 120 comments](#)

©2023 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC