

IATA ECONOMICS BRIEFING

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AIR TRAVEL FOR THE RICH OR MASS TRANSPORTATION?

This briefing paper examines the evidence for whether air travel can be said to be for the rich or benefits the population in general. The trend of the past 30 years and the evidence for today provides strong support for the latter view. Air transport is a service for all the population.

UK passengers at London Area airports by socio-economic group

Socio-economic group	1978	1991	2003	2003 leisure only
A/B	52.9%	50.9%	41.8%	35.4%
C	39%	43.5%	52.7%	57.4%
D/E	8.1%	5.6%	5.5%	7.2%

Source: UK Civil Aviation Authority Annual Passenger Survey.

Groups based on occupation of head of household:

A/B – Higher or intermediate management professional

C – Supervisory clerical, junior management professional, skilled manual worker

D/E – Semi-skilled, unskilled manual worker, pensioners, widows, casual workers

- As recently as 20-30 years ago it could have been said air transport was largely for the rich. But this was only partly true, and is no longer the case today. We provide evidence for this using data on UK passengers from the CAA's annual passenger survey. There will be some variation but we have no reason to think this is not representative of most EU-15 countries.
- The table above shows that the proportion of A/B passengers has fallen from well over half the total to 41.8% in 2003. C passengers ('white collar' and skilled manual workers) now dominate the London Area travel market taking 52.7% of the total share of seats in 2003, compared with just 39% back in 1978.
- Moreover, this picture is distorted by the high proportion of business passengers using London Area airports. These passengers will mainly be in the upper socio-economic groups. Looking at leisure-only travel then passengers from socio-economic group C dominate even more at 57.4% of the total.

UK leisure passengers at selected airports by socio-economic group, 2003

Socio-economic group	London	Birmingham	Cardiff	E.Midlands	Liverpool
A/B	35.4%	22.1%	23.8%	32.1%	32.4%
C	57.4%	54.3%	65.2%	47.4%	56.4%
D/E	7.2%	23.6%	11%	20.5%	11.2%

Source: UK Civil Aviation Authority Annual Passenger Survey.

- ↗ London is also the area of the UK where income and wealth is disproportionately high. Airports outside of London show a much smaller proportion of A/B passengers and a much larger proportion of D/E (semi/unskilled and casual workers) passengers – more than 20% of the total at some airports.

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