



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Proposed EU State aid rules threaten regional connectivity and risk leaving Europe's regions behind

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Brussels, 11 June 2026: Responding to the public consultation on its proposed new State aid rules for aviation, ACI EUROPE today called on the European Commission to fundamentally reconsider key aspects of its draft guidelines, warning that they risk undermining regional air connectivity, widening territorial inequalities and fuelling anti-EU sentiment across Europe's regions.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: *"By setting out the applicable regime for both investment and operating aid to airports, the new guidelines will largely shape air connectivity of our regions for years to come – and with it their attractiveness and economic resilience. At a time when territorial inequalities are growing and many citizens already feel disconnected from economic opportunity, weakening regional airports and the connectivity they enable would move Europe in the wrong direction. Yet, this is exactly what the Commission will end up doing if it goes ahead with these new guidelines as they stand today."*

"Regional airports are so much more than simply transport infrastructure. They are vital economic lifelines that connect communities to jobs, investment, tourism, public services and the wider European Single Market. Restricting the ability of Member States to support these airports would leave many regions more isolated, less competitive and ultimately less resilient."

ACI EUROPE warned that 3 critical elements need to be urgently reconsidered:

- 1. A 5-year limitation and new conditionalities for operating aid to airports with 500.000 to 1 million passengers per annum.**

This proposal fails to recognise the economic realities faced by smaller regional airports. Due to diseconomies of scale, increasing traffic seasonality and volatility, footloose and consolidating airlines as well as persistent inflationary pressures, these airports are struggling and will keep struggling to cover their operating costs on a sustained basis.

These realities are well documented and analysed by independent economic studies – including research commissioned by the European Commission. It is puzzling that the Commission has chosen to ignore them and threaten the long-term viability of these airports.

2. Ending investment aid for airports with more than 3 million passengers and imposing new and unwarranted conditionalities for such aid below that threshold.

This marks another major departure from the State aid framework and fails to reflect the investments needs and economic realities of many medium-sized regional airports.

These airports are facing substantial capital requirements to modernise infrastructure, enhance safety, security and cyber security, accelerate decarbonisation and climate adaptation, optimise capacity and comply with an increasing range of regulatory obligations.

Given the long-term nature and relatively low financial returns associated with these investments, access to private financing remains challenging. Maintaining access to investment aid for airports with up to 5 million passengers is therefore essential to ensure that these strategic assets can continue supporting regional economies and Europe's wider connectivity network.

3. Eliminating start-up aid for airlines launching new routes.

This would also weaken the ability of regions to attract and sustain new air services and thus diversify and develop their connectivity.

Jankovec concluded: *"The future State aid framework must be grounded in economic and market realities and support the crucial role regional airports play in maintaining territorial cohesion and economic competitiveness. A framework that makes it harder to sustain regional airports – or forces some of them to close – would only damage local economies and weaken the Single Market. It would also reinforce perceptions that the EU is turning its back on its regions. At a time when we need to strengthen cohesion and public trust, this is simply a risk the EU cannot afford to take."*

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ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 600 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 95% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Airports and air connectivity support 14 million jobs, generating €851 billion in European economic activity (5% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.