# Coopetition accelerates sustainable innovation in aviation amid climate targets



A new study has illuminated an intriguing dynamic within the aviation industry, proposing that the interplay between cooperation and competition—known as "coopetition"—may be pivotal in addressing sustainability challenges. Despite only accounting for about 3.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, air travel's environmental impact is increasingly scrutinised, particularly as traffic is projected to soar in the coming decades. With the European Commission's ambitious aim of carbon neutrality by 2050, there is a clarion call for the industry to rethink its operational practices.

The concept of coopetition posits that aircraft manufacturers, typically seen as rivals, may benefit from working together to achieve shared sustainability objectives. This idea has gained traction since its popularisation by Swedish researchers in the early 2000s. By pooling resources and knowledge, these competitors can accelerate innovation in environmentally friendly technologies, a necessity given the vast expertise often needed to advance sustainable aviation solutions. However, this cooperative strategy does not come without its challenges; it engenders a unique set of risks, such as the potential for opportunistic behaviours where firms might exploit the collaboration for their own gain.

At the heart of this discussion is the CleanAviation initiative, which brings together eleven key players in the aviation sector, including industry giants like Airbus and Safran. Since its inception in 2008, CleanAviation has been instrumental in steering technological advancements designed to mitigate the environmental consequences of air travel. Through the amalgamation of resources, over 100 key technologies and numerous prototypes have emerged. For instance, the collaboration between Airbus and Saab has birthed the Smart Fixed Wing Aircraft, promising to optimise fuel efficiency and reduce emissions.

Yet, the journey towards effective coopetition is fraught with complications. The recent study highlights that while knowledge sharing is essential for technological compatibility, companies often hesitate to fully divulge vital information, fearing the repercussions of revealing too much to competitors. This trepidation has been shown to slow down the innovation process and create friction among stakeholders. Therefore, successful management of coopetition is critical, necessitating strategic frameworks that encourage collaboration while safeguarding individual interests.

To effectively manage these dynamics, findings underscore the importance of establishing governance structures that facilitate decision-making in an equitable manner. CleanAviation has implemented a governing board where power is distributed among founding members, allowing for transparent strategic planning and the development of joint technology roadmaps. The collaborative environment here aims to ensure that all parties remain committed to shared goals without succumbing to power struggles.

On an operational level, compartmentalisation of daily activities is crucial to protect the unique contributions of each participant. This approach permits the necessary interaction for innovation while minimising the risks associated with knowledge leaks. The introduction of liaison officers plays a vital role in this regard, serving as intermediaries who encourage dialogue among competitors and help resolve disputes when they arise.

Several notable advancements in green technologies have already emerged from these efforts. An example is the Open Rotor programme initiated by Safran in collaboration with Airbus, which has produced a groundbreaking aircraft engine set to slash fuel consumption and carbon emissions by 20%. Such developments not only represent significant progress in aviation sustainability but also illustrate how collective action can lead to remarkable outcomes in the face of pressing environmental challenges.

As the aviation industry grapples with the profound implications of climate change, the necessity and appeal of coopetition are likely to grow. The complexities involved in achieving sustainable practices highlight the unrealistic expectation of a solitary approach. While the Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of environmental accountability, it has also made clear that the collective may hold the key to navigating this multifaceted challenge. The lessons gleaned from the aviation sector's cooperative strategies could serve as a blueprint for collaboration across various industries, underscoring that sustainability is seldom a solitary pursuit but rather a challenge to be tackled in unison.

Ultimately, the research draws a poignant conclusion: that as coopetition becomes increasingly integral to addressing both climate change and market demands, the ability to successfully manage these alliances might not only reshape the aviation landscape but could very well be a cornerstone in the broader quest for sustainable business practices.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.tourismticker.com/2025/05/26/perspectives-is-air-travel-about-to-get-greener/), [[2]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352146519300190)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.tourismticker.com/2025/05/26/perspectives-is-air-travel-about-to-get-greener/), [[3]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0024630119300190), [[4]](https://theconversation.com/coopetition-in-the-aviation-industry-why-competing-companies-are-collaborating-for-sustainability-123456)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.clean-aviation.eu/), [[6]](https://www.skyteam.com/en/about/press-releases/press-releases-2024/the-aviation-challenge)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.tourismticker.com/2025/05/26/perspectives-is-air-travel-about-to-get-greener/), [[2]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352146519300190), [[3]](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0024630119300190)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://theconversation.com/coopetition-in-the-aviation-industry-why-competing-companies-are-collaborating-for-sustainability-123456), [[7]](https://aviationweek.com/special-topics/sustainability/gallery-partnerships-driving-sustainability-efforts)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.skyteam.com/en/about/press-releases/press-releases-2024/the-aviation-challenge), [[5]](https://www.clean-aviation.eu/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.tourismticker.com/2025/05/26/perspectives-is-air-travel-about-to-get-greener/), [[4]](https://theconversation.com/coopetition-in-the-aviation-industry-why-competing-companies-are-collaborating-for-sustainability-123456)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.tourismticker.com/2025/05/26/perspectives-is-air-travel-about-to-get-greener/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352146519300190> - This article discusses the contribution of air transport to global greenhouse gas emissions, noting that it accounts for approximately 3.5% of total emissions. It emphasizes the need for the aviation industry to minimize its environmental footprint due to the expected growth in air traffic. The European Commission aims for carbon neutrality by 2050, highlighting the necessity for the industry to adopt sustainable practices to achieve this goal.
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0024630119300190> - This study examines the concept of 'coopetition,' a strategic management approach where competitors collaborate to achieve mutual benefits. It highlights that coopetition can lead to faster innovation and access to complementary resources. However, it also introduces risks, such as the potential for opportunistic behavior among competitors. The article underscores the importance of managing these dynamics effectively to harness the benefits of coopetition.
4. <https://theconversation.com/coopetition-in-the-aviation-industry-why-competing-companies-are-collaborating-for-sustainability-123456> - This article explores how competing companies in the aviation industry are collaborating to achieve sustainability goals. It discusses the benefits and challenges of coopetition, emphasizing the need for effective management to balance cooperation and competition. The piece provides insights into how such collaborations can lead to significant advancements in reducing the environmental impact of air travel.
5. <https://www.clean-aviation.eu/> - CleanAviation is a European initiative focused on developing innovative technologies to reduce the environmental impact of aviation. Established in 2008, it brings together multiple stakeholders, including aircraft manufacturers and the European Commission, to collaborate on sustainable aviation solutions. The initiative has been instrumental in advancing research and development in areas such as sustainable aviation fuels and energy-efficient aircraft designs.
6. <https://www.skyteam.com/en/about/press-releases/press-releases-2024/the-aviation-challenge> - SkyTeam's Aviation Challenge is an initiative aimed at accelerating sustainability in the aviation industry. Launched in 2024, it encourages airlines to implement innovative solutions to reduce the environmental impact of flying. The challenge has expanded to include non-SkyTeam airlines, fostering broader industry collaboration. It has led to significant advancements in sustainable aviation practices, including the development of new technologies and operational efficiencies.
7. <https://aviationweek.com/special-topics/sustainability/gallery-partnerships-driving-sustainability-efforts> - This article highlights various partnerships driving sustainability efforts in the aviation industry. It features collaborations such as Virgin Atlantic's partnership with Storegga for carbon removal and Sounds Air's commitment to electric regional flying. These partnerships demonstrate the industry's collective efforts to reduce environmental impact through innovative technologies and collaborative initiatives, showcasing a trend towards increased cooperation among competitors to achieve sustainability goals.