

# Billionaires are responsible for large amounts of climate pollution from Hanscom, a new report finds

By [David Abel](#) Globe Staff,  
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A jet took off at Hanscom in Bedford. DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Executives at Suffolk Construction, owned by John Fish, have used the Boston-based company's private jet nearly 250 times since last year to fly from Hanscom Field to destinations such as Aruba and Aspen, Barcelona and Rome, Martha's Vineyard and Napa Valley, according to a new report.

Private jet flights have increasingly become a target of criticism from climate advocates, given the large amount of pollution generated to transport usually just a few people.

Suffolk's 19-passenger Gulfstream Aerospace GV-SP 550 flew every two or so days, its Rolls-Royce Pearl engines pumping out an estimated 2,329 tons of carbon emissions, according to the report, which catalogued the climate pollution from flights to and from New England's largest noncommercial airport.

The Suffolk jet burned more than any other based at Hanscom, and about 230 times more than the average Massachusetts resident produces in a year, the report found.

Suffolk officials defended the company's use of the plane, but the authors of the report, by the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-leaning think tank in Washington, D.C., say such travel is a reason the Massachusetts Port Authority should abandon a plan under consideration to expand Hanscom's private jet capacity.

Private jet travel is “an indefensible extravagance on an overheating planet,” said Chuck Collins, an author of the report. “We shouldn't be expanding private jet infrastructure at Hanscom or anywhere.”

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The [report](#), released Monday, analyzed 18 months of flight data from Hanscom starting in January 2022, and found that some 31,000 flights by 2,915 private jets such as Suffolk's produced an estimated 107,000 tons of carbon pollution. About half the flights were probably for recreational or luxury purposes, based on their resort destinations and weekend flight dates, the authors said.

Other billionaires whose planes took large numbers of flights include Arthur S. Demoulas, a former director of Market Basket who [sold his interests](#) in the multibillion-dollar company after unsuccessfully trying to oust his cousin as the supermarket chain's president, and John W. Childs, the founder of a private equity firm in Boston.

The report estimated that Childs's Bombardier Global BD-700 was responsible for more than 1,400 tons of carbon emissions during the period studied, with flights to Palm Springs, Calif., the Hamptons in New York, the US Virgin Islands, and Palermo, Italy. It estimated that Demoulas's jet was responsible for nearly 750 tons of emissions, with flights to destinations including Aspen, Key West, and Las Vegas. Neither Childs nor Demoulas responded to requests for interviews.

Daniel Antonellis, a spokesman for Suffolk Construction, said the flights were primarily for work-related purposes.

“Suffolk is a national company with offices in Boston, Florida, California, New York, and Texas, among other locations,” he said. “Almost all travel on the private jet is business-related for Mr. Fish and his Suffolk leadership team.”

He declined to answer questions about the amount of the travel that wasn't for business.

Private jets flying to and from Hanscom, a publicly owned airport in the suburbs northwest of Boston, has more than [quadrupled](#) over the past three decades.

To accommodate the growing demand for private jets — cited as among the most polluting forms of transportation on the planet — Massport is considering a controversial proposal to build 27 new hangars, which would

significantly increase the amount of space to park private jets.

“We need to decide as a society whether it is acceptable for a small number of people to generate enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions for unnecessary purposes,” said Neil Rasmussen, president of Save Our Heritage, a historic preservation group in Concord, and a vocal critic of Hanscom’s plan to increase the number of hangars. “Against the dire backdrop of climate change, the answer must be no.”

Opponents of the airport’s proposed expansion say they have collected more than 10,000 signatures for a petition urging Governor Maura Healey to block the proposal, which they delivered to the governor’s office on Monday after a [protest](#) in front of the State House.

“If we are committed to environmental justice, we cannot ask the public to make sacrifices to achieve climate objectives, while subsidizing this destructive luxury jet activity for an elite few,” Rasmussen said.

Healey administration officials declined to comment on the report’s findings.

“We will carefully review the environmental impacts of this proposal and continue to engage with communities impacted by airport emissions,” said Danielle Burney, a spokeswoman for the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, in a statement.

Officials from Massport, a quasi-public agency that has [pledged to become carbon neutral by 2031](#), have defended the proposed expansion, saying it’s a response to a demand for hangars at Hanscom, as well as a means of maximizing revenue and complying with federal requirements to provide transportation services to the public.

“One of our primary missions is to support Massachusetts-based businesses by providing the infrastructure they need to compete in the global economy,” said Jennifer Mehigan, a spokesperson for Massport.

Massport officials have said the additional hangars wouldn’t necessarily result in increased private jet traffic and have even suggested the project could curb emissions by reducing the number of so-called ferry flights — planes stored at other airports that must fly to Hanscom to pick up or drop off passengers.

Mehigan questioned the new report’s conclusions and suggested some of the institute’s findings may actually support Massport’s concerns about ferry flights.

The report, for example, found that about 16 percent of private jet flights from Hanscom were to destinations in New England, while an estimated 41 percent of flight departures were less than one hour in duration, with 14 percent of them less than 30 minutes. The report noted that short flights are disproportionately more polluting than other forms of transportation, as takeoffs are the most energy-intensive portion of any flight.

The report’s authors acknowledged the problem of ferry flights and said

they're working on a separate report that seeks to quantify them and their impact. Still, they said, there's no evidence that increasing hangar capacity would reduce private jet emissions.

"It is likely to have the opposite effect," they wrote. "The more infrastructure designed to accommodate private aircraft is constructed, the more likely it is to increase private jet operations by encouraging owners and jet card holders to fly more."

In a previous [report](#) published in May, the institute estimated that private jets produce at least 10 times more pollution per passenger than commercial planes, resulting in 1 percent of very wealthy passengers being responsible for about half of all aviation emissions. Aviation is the source of nearly 7 percent of the state's emissions.

State Senator Michael Barrett, a Lexington Democrat and a principal author of the state's landmark climate law, said the report illustrated how "ethically reckless" it would be to expand Hanscom. He and others said an expansion would make it more difficult for the state to comply with the two-year-old climate law, which requires officials to cut emissions 50 percent below 1990 levels by the end of the decade and effectively eliminate them by 2050.

"For me, personally, this is so frustrating — to work my head off to drive down greenhouse gases statewide, and then have this happening two miles from my house," he said.

Caitlin Peale Sloan, vice president of the Conservation Law Foundation, said the report underscored why "continuing to coddle the ultra-wealthy by expanding private jet services is unjustifiable in the face of the climate crisis."

She was particularly disturbed by how many flights seemed unnecessary, especially in an era of video conferencing.

"This report confirms with data what we have long understood: Private jet travel is wasteful and places huge cost and environmental burdens on the rest of us," she said.

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