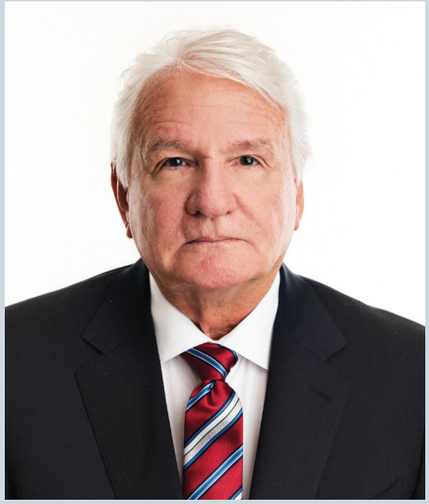
In my **view**

In an excerpt from his recently published memoir, *Turbulence: Fifty Years on the Leading Edge of the Airline Industry*, former airline CEO ***David A Banmille***r ruminates on the future of flying



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What's exciting about the airline industry first and foremost is innovation. From the witnessing of rudimentary flying machines to the sexy jet age, to an era when modern airports are being designed like mini-cities, invention will continue to pave the way in making this business operate optimally while rolling with the changing times.

The techno geek in me remains amazed by the aerospace innovations that have taken place over the span of my career. We don't often think about these things, but without them we would not be aloft. Among the most important have been airfoils, gliders, jet engines, winglets, aluminium alloys, autopilot, landing gear, cabin pressurisation and the black box.

Another interesting development is the rebirth of supersonic air travel, which looks set to penetrate US skies following legislation agreed upon by Congress.

Many are gambling on the return of supersonic flight as a viable commercial operation. Denver-based Boom Supersonic has been developing a 1,451-mile-per-hour, 55-seat aircraft that it claims could make a trip from Washington DC to London in three-and-a-half hours. XB-1, Boom's smaller test aircraft, recently completed wind tunnel tests. The company said it aims to have its full-size airliner ready for flight by 2023.

Meanwhile, Lockheed Martin has been working with NASA to develop a "low-boom flight demonstrator" that would issue a much softer noise than the type emitted by the last generation Concorde. The plane, which is designed to cruise at Mach 1.4 (the equivalent of 1,081 miles per hour) has been in development since 2016 and is scheduled for delivery to NASA in late 2021. NASA plans to fly the plane over US aerospace to test the noise output.

Perhaps the most wide-ranging concern affecting the airline industry is the environmental debate. Passenger figures for 2018 of 4.4 billion represent a 6.9 per cent increase from the previous year, equal to an additional 284 million trips by air, so there is no denying the popularity of flying. As with any human activity, this comes with an environmental cost and it is one that airlines worldwide are committed to reducing.

Governments around the world are feeling the pressure to commit to battling greenhouse gas emissions and many of them, especially those in Europe, are adding an ecotax to airline tickets, which is ineffective. These taxes are misguided, because their slap-on-the wrist connotation is not only counterintuitive, but also counterproductive. It is unproved that funds earmarked for environmental purposes are actually used for such, but money taken away from the airlines could have been used to make green improvements.

Finnair CEO Topi Manner is quoted as saying that his airline and the industry overall need capital to do more to reduce their carbon footprint.

Better aircraft engines, improved aerodynamics, a scale-up of biofuels, as well as new engine technologies are all part of the answer, according to Manner, alongside less obvious items such as electrifying ramp operations at airports.