

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

13 May 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

### **Re-opening of international travel**

As members of the Airport Operators Association, we are writing to you to highlight our concerns about the speed of restart for UK aviation and the actions we believe Government must take to ensure UK aviation can maintain its global standing.

Naturally airports understand the Government's desire to adopt a cautious approach – a further lockdown would be hugely damaging. Nevertheless, we believe the current extremely limited green list of countries demonstrates that the UK is being overly cautious and will fail to grasp the opportunities resulting from the successful roll-out of the vaccine.

International travel is not solely about holidays, as important as they are. It is vital for people to visit family and friends abroad and for businesses to connect to customers. There are a million jobs in aviation, with a further half a million jobs relying on aviation in the tourism sector. This is quite apart from the many sectors that need aviation in order to trade with both existing and new, developing markets. With the current restrictions Government is applying, those jobs remain at very high risk.

If we are to avoid further damage to the sector, to its employees and to the businesses that rely on aviation, then action is needed from the UK and devolved governments to allow for a more meaningful restart of travel in a safe and responsible manner. Measures include improving the flow at the border, introducing affordable, rapid testing for green countries and easing restrictions for vaccinated travellers, as the US and the EU intend to do. AOA has produced a checklist of these essential next steps and we would welcome urgent discussions with you, your ministers and officials to discuss their implementation.

If the UK and devolved governments continue with the current overly cautious approach and serious failures to manage the border appropriately persist, then it is likely passenger numbers will struggle to reach even the historically low levels seen in 2020. This will result in severe financial difficulties for UK airports - the summer season is our most important revenue-generating period – and a need for UK and devolved governments to significantly increase financial support to prevent the further loss of jobs.

Despite the UK's early lead, we now see our European neighbours making significant progress on restarting travel in a meaningful way, in light of their increasingly successful vaccine rollout. With our global competitors, such as France, Germany and the US, having provided significantly more financial support for aviation, this compounds the risk of UK air connectivity falling behind. Without a thriving aviation sector, the Government's economic recovery and its ambitions for a global Britain and to level-up the UK regions will be undeliverable.

#### **Airport Operators Association**

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1.5m UK jobs are at risk and an entire sector has an uncertain future. We need Governments to act now.

Yours sincerely,

**Brian Ambrose**  
Chief Executive  
George Best Belfast City Airport

**Nick Barton**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Birmingham Airport

**Andrew Bell**  
Chief Executive  
Regional & City Airports

**Spencer Birns**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Cardiff Airport

**Karen Dee**  
Chief Executive  
Airport Operators Association

**Gordon Dewar**  
Chief Executive  
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**Steve Frazer**  
Managing Director  
City of Derry Airport

**Chris Harcombe**  
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**Vincent Hodder**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Leeds Bradford Airport

**John Holland-Kaye**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Heathrow Airport

**John Irving**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Liverpool John Lennon Airport

**Glyn Jones**  
Chief Executive Officer  
London Southend Airport

**Nick Jones**  
Chief Executive  
Newcastle International Airport

**Graham Keddie**  
Managing Director  
Belfast International Airport

**Dave Lees**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Bristol Airport

**Alberto Martin**  
Chief Executive Officer  
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**Derek Provan**  
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**Robert Sinclair**  
Chief Executive Officer  
London City Airport

**Stewart Wingate**  
Chief Executive Officer  
London Gatwick Airport

**David Winstanley**  
Chief Executive Officer  
London Biggin Hill Airport

CC. The Rt Hon Arlene Foster MLA, First Minister and Michelle O'Neill MLA, Deputy First Minister  
The Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister  
Professor Mark Drakeford MS, First Minister  
The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer  
The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Transport Secretary

## Annex: Aviation re-start checklist

### Immediate actions

Issue	Action required
Border management	Ensure sufficient Border Force resource, including staffing every available desk in airport border halls
	Adjust checking procedures to minimise delays, such as moving to spot checks. To enable this, Government should speed up digitisation of COVID-19 requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Continue to improve the Passenger Locator Form, including translations into other languages</li><li>- Provide digital mechanisms for proof of test results</li><li>- Integrate industry-led digital app solutions to reduce transaction time at the border.</li><li>- Speed up the upgrade of ePassport gates.</li></ul>
Facilitating travel	Recognise international hubs in the traffic light system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Currently, travellers through international hubs are treated based on the RAG-rating of the country of the hub, rather than country of departure, which makes connecting flights impossible.</li><li>-</li></ul>
	FCDO advice should not invalidate travel insurance for green and amber countries
	Government should not advise against leisure travel to amber countries as this creates potential difficulties for travel insurance providers
Reducing cost of testing	Accept NHS free lateral flow tests for pre-departure tests and for Day 2 tests upon return from a green country, followed by a PCR test for those testing positive
	Further action to bring UK PCR test costs in line with international competitors, including but not limited to eliminating VAT

### Actions in advance of 7 June (1<sup>st</sup> review of countries)

Issue	Action required
Green list	Add countries to the green list that meet the requirements.
	Reintroduce the “islands policy” for locations geographically distant from the mainland, e.g. Canary Islands, Balearic islands, etc.
Amber list	Create an Amber “watch list” for countries potentially moving to Green at the next review
Bilateral discussions	Engage in bilateral discussions with priority countries, like the US, on setting up travel corridors, including mutual recognition of health measures and certificates.

### Actions for 28 June (1<sup>st</sup> review of traffic light system)

Issue	Action Required
Overall approach to risk	Adjust the risk threshold for the green list to take account of continued domestic vaccination success.
Testing requirements	Green list: move to lateral flow tests after return to the UK, followed by confirmatory PCR test for positive results.
	Amber list: Replace PCR test on Day 2 & 8 with lateral flow test, followed by confirmatory PCR test for positive results.
Vaccinated travellers	Following evidence that shows vaccination reduced transmission risk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove the need for test upon return from green list</li> <li>• Introduce ‘green’ test requirements for vaccinated travellers from amber list</li> </ul>
Border	Maintain resource levels at border and complete digitisation and ePassport gates roll out
	New Service Level Agreement to be concluded between airports and Border Force