

AIRPORTSUK | ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

AIRPORTS IN A CHANGING WORLD

AGENDA

08:30 | Registration & breakfast

09:30 | Welcome & opening remarks

A warm welcome to everyone attending the annual conference and opening remarks which will set the stage and provide an outline of the day before the AirportsUK chair and chief executive are introduced for their opening remarks.

09:35 | The view from Great Minster House

Rt Hon Heidi Alexander MP, Secretary of State for Transport – Department for Transport

This past year we have seen continued discussion around airport expansion, a new civil aviation bill going through parliament, and a new national policy statement. So here is an opportunity to step back and hear directly from the government about how it sees the next steps for aviation policy and what the sector can now be doing to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead.

10:00 | Geopolitics, trade and aviation policy

A panel of senior airport CEOs responding to the transport secretary and discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the UK aviation sector, from geopolitical uncertainty and supply chain pressures to opportunities in global trade and the nature of evolving security risks. This panel will discuss how the sector can drive UK connectivity in uncertain times, and what it needs from government to do so, driving the economic growth we need.

10:30 | The UK economic and financial outlook

Paul Johnson, formerly IFS

The UK continues to face significant economic and financial pressures, including constrained public finances and global market volatility and disruption. Higher operating costs and changing economic conditions are undermining the government's focus on delivering long-term growth, improved productivity, increased investment and fiscal stability. Here, the chief executive of the Institute for Fiscal Studies will discuss these challenges and how they could affect the wider economy in the year ahead.

10:50 | Networking coffee break

11:20 | Connecting the UK domestically and globally

Regional airports are vital to our economic and social connectivity, supporting jobs, trade, tourism and investment across all nations and regions. They provide essential links for businesses and communities, strengthen domestic and international connectivity, and play an important role in driving regional growth while enhancing the resilience and capacity of the UK's wider aviation network. Here we gather a panel of senior experts to look at how we can maximise regional airports' impact and drive growth for all parts of the UK.

11:50 | Resilience in the age of climate change

The UK must get its infrastructure ready for a changed and potentially more extreme climate. By 2050, 2°C of global warming could bring more heatwaves, droughts and floods. These conditions will bring challenges for all parts of airport and airline operations as well as surface access and the utilities infrastructure we rely on. The Cabinet Office is reviewing resilience standards across 14 critical sectors, with results due in 2026 as part of its UK Infrastructure: A 10-year Strategy launched by HMT and NISTA. The panel of experts will highlight how UK aviation can adapt to address these challenges.

12:20 | Changing political landscape fireside chat

Join UK's most respected voices in discussion about the challenges facing the UK, as the old two-party structure breaks down and four or even five party politics increasingly becomes a reality. There will be fascinating insight into the changing shape of the British electorate, as well as what it will mean for governing in the years ahead.

12:50 | Networking lunch

14:00 | The view from the Opposition

Richard Holden MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport

The Conservative party continues to develop its policy platform and to hold the government to account in parliament as it hopes that the next general election will see them return to government. As part of this, we will be joined by the shadow transport secretary, who will lay out his views on the role airports can play now, and as part of the UK under a future Conservative administration.

14:20 | Financing infrastructure and attracting investment

Attracting investment for airport infrastructure remains both a challenge and an opportunity. Rising construction and planning costs, economic uncertainty and evolving environmental requirements continue to affect investor confidence. However, growing passenger demand, regional growth ambitions and the transition to more sustainable aviation create strong long-term opportunities for partnerships and private capital investment that can strengthen connectivity, capacity and economic resilience.

14:50 | Keynote 4

This keynote address will provide a government perspective on the economic priorities shaping the UK's aviation sector and wider transport infrastructure agenda. The speaker will outline HM Treasury's approach to supporting sustainable growth, enhancing national connectivity and unlocking investment to drive productivity across the UK. Attendees will hear insights into the role airports play in facilitating trade, tourism and regional development, as well as the opportunities and challenges facing the sector in a changing economic landscape. The session will offer valuable context on government policy, investment priorities and the contribution aviation can make to long-term economic growth.

15:10 | Networking coffee break**15:40 | Big airline interview**

In this fireside-style conversation, an airline CEO will share their perspectives on the forces shaping the future of aviation. Through an informal but insightful interview format, they will discuss how airlines are responding to economic pressures, evolving customer expectations, sustainability commitments, workforce challenges and technological change. The session will also explore opportunities for growth, innovation and collaboration across the aviation ecosystem. Attendees will gain a candid view of strategic priorities, leadership lessons and the practical decisions being made to navigate an increasingly dynamic operating environment while positioning the industry for long-term success.

16:00 | Delivering the government's aviation policy – government and regulator perspectives

As passenger demand continues to grow, airports face increasing pressure to maximise capacity while balancing environmental, operational and community considerations. This panel will explore how strategic planning, infrastructure investment and airspace modernisation can work together to unlock future growth. Attendees will gain insights into emerging priorities, regulatory developments and collaborative approaches that can help ensure airports remain fit for purpose in an evolving aviation landscape.

16:30 | Priorities for a thriving aviation sector to 2030 and beyond/responding to the above?

Hear from an airport CEO on their thoughts on what airports need to prioritise if we are to continue to be at the forefront of the economic and social life of the UK, well into the next decade. Their insight will provide food for thought for the entire sector as we close our conference and ensure that attendees are able to return to their airports with new ideas on how to address the challenges and opportunities we will face in the coming years.

16:50 | Closing remarks

Wrapping up the conference and closing remarks from the chair and chief executive of AirportsUK.

17:00 – 19:00 | Networking drinks reception

*Speakers and timings may be subject to change