

“Beyond the crisis” – speech to the aviation industry

Introduction

Good morning everyone.

It's great to join you today (19 October 2020).

Many thanks to the event organisers for inviting me to speak.

Engagement between industry and government is obviously critical right now.

Which is why I'm so pleased to be part of this conference.

It's also why I'm doing 5 aviation speeches this autumn.

Each addressing different parts of our sector.

Travel and tourism, airport operators, engineers and aviation innovators, green aviation, and today of course, senior airline leaders.

To explain what we've been doing in government to help the industry through this incredible crisis.

To talk about our plans for the future.

But also just as importantly to listen.

To learn more about the difficulties that you're facing.

And to consider any new ideas that could help us help you.

We have already heard from Dr Rannia Leontaridi, Director for Aviation at the Department for Transport.

I also have a team of DfT officials tuning in throughout today's event, who will report back to me this evening.

So I look forward to hearing more about your discussions.

Government support

For airlines, airports, the supply chain, and of course the aviation workforce, it's simply been a devastating year.

There's no other way to describe it.

We know how much the sector is hurting.

That's well understood within government, I can assure you.

From the Business Secretary and Chancellor to the Prime Minister.

We know that COVID's had a particularly overwhelming impact on aviation...

Perhaps more so than any other global industry.

That's why we've taken unprecedented steps to support.

Early action on airport slots.

Paying more than 55,000 aviation employees up to 80% of their wages through the furlough scheme.

Loans, tax deferrals.

And £1.8 billion to the industry through the COVID Corporate Financing.

Now accounts for 11% of total national funding under that programme all the way across the entire economy, just to aviation.

We've been working to revive tourism and travel.

To give families the chance to enjoy a holiday, after those many months of lockdown.

But COVID has made that very difficult.

And we have had to be incredibly cautious.

Back in June (2020), the international travel quarantine applied universally.

This temporary measure helped protect us all from re-importing cases after everyone had been in lockdown.

Meanwhile, we worked to strengthen confidence for passengers too.

By backing the ATOL protection scheme.

Giving holidaymakers reassurance that a voucher would be as good to them as cash and thereby supporting the sector at the same time.

We set up the [Joint Biosecurity Centre](#) to gather intelligence and data on COVID worldwide.

To assess the risks of inbound travel from hundreds of countries and territories around the globe.

By July, the Centre's evidence allowed us to set up the first series of [Travel Corridors](#), enabling travellers to return to the UK from lower-risk countries, without the need to self-isolate.

As a result, international passenger numbers handled at UK airports rose

fourfold between June and July to 3.1 million passengers.

Where quarantine was required, it helped ensure that the sacrifices of our nationwide lockdown were not wasted.

Even now, at a time of rising infections, we know the situation would have been much worse if we hadn't been prudent over the summer.

Like every government, we've had to constantly reassess our response because of the unpredictable nature of this virus.

Like every government, we've had to make very difficult decisions, often very quickly in order to follow whatever the science was telling us as the virus moved from place to place at different speeds.

And like every government, we've had to prioritise the health of our own population, while trying to avoid unnecessary measures to restrict mobility.

But with every week that passes, we learn more,

Information improves.

Our understanding of the virus grows.

And we adapt our response.

That's why more recently, we established more sophisticated corridors.

For the first time, we had enough evidence to add or remove specific islands from quarantine.

I know some have promoted the idea that we should test at borders.

But we have not done so, because the Chief Medical Officer has made clear that it wouldn't capture sufficient information on those who are asymptotically carrying the virus.

In fact, Public Health England, the Joint Biosecurity Centre and the London School of Tropical Disease and Medicine have all examined the issue.

Accepting a Day 0 test on arrival could allow a very significant number of people to wrongly believe they were not bringing COVID-19 back with them.

And if that happened, it wouldn't just be travellers, but it would also be the travel industry that would be the victim of travel having reimported cases.

Future measures

So, with rising COVID cases in the UK – and amongst most of our neighbours – we have to find better, safer solutions.

My ministerial colleagues and I have agreed that a regime, based on a single

test, provided by the private sector and at the cost of the passenger after a period of self-isolation, and doing those things could achieve our objectives.

The next step is to develop how this approach could be implemented.

So last week we launched our [Global Travel Taskforce](#).

To find solutions that will implement all of this safely and effectively.

And speed up the return of flights.

Now this global taskforce is chaired by myself and the Health Secretary.

And the taskforce is working actively with industry right now.

First of all to implement a new test and release regime to reduce the self-isolation period.

When we met for the first time last Thursday.

This will mean a single test for international arrivals a week after arrival.

We have been working extensively with health experts and the private testing sector on the practicalities of such a regime.

And we will continue to make sure that it does not impact on NHS capacity and that's been one of the big challenges of designing such a scheme when NHS test and trace has been under enormous strain although we now have more testing capacity per head than any other country.

In addition to this domestic 'test and release' model we are also working on schemes with partner countries to establish whether self-isolation could take place before departure.

I know it's confusing for passengers when every nation has a different system.

We need a global system and the UK will show leadership by developing a framework for international travel in order to provide global consistency.

Indeed, we will consider all options that increase tourism and business travel, but do so safely.

And thereby help the sector recover from the pandemic.

Finally – we are also preparing an Aviation Recovery Plan for later this autumn, setting out more measures to boost air travel, while continuing to prevent the spread of the virus.

Building back greener

That recovery plan won't just focus on 'the here and now' either.

It's crucial we use this time to look to the future too.

To the post-COVID world which will open up before us.

Defined not only by challenges.

But also by opportunities.

To speed up the transformation of the industry.

Aviation is fortunate in one respect – we know demand for air travel is very likely to grow in decades to come.

But the industry has to transform its environmental impact if it's to be viable.

I welcome the leadership that the industry is showing.

Investing in cleaner planes.

Plans to offset carbon.

But now COVID has prompted further change.

We're seeing manufacturers reassess product plans, and airlines moving to more fuel efficient fleets.

The pace of change is only going to accelerate.

After becoming the first major economy in the world to set a 2050 net zero target.

We're also committed to decarbonising aviation.

And demonstrating zero carbon emission flights across the Atlantic within a generation.

So in the summer, I co-chaired the first meeting of the [Jet Zero Council](#). The Prime Minister dropped by and brought together leaders from aviation, aerospace and academia.

Our single overriding goal: to develop UK capability to achieve net zero emission flights.

The council will help develop new ideas, new technologies and new businesses to deliver net zero by 2050.

And we will consult shortly to update our position on aviation and climate change.

I want the UK to become a global centre for the design, manufacture and use of clean aircraft.

That's why last year we [announced a £300 million joint investment between](#)

[government and industry through the Future Flight Challenge.](#)

Money that will fund electric plane innovation.

And research into other forms of aviation technology.

That's also why we're ploughing nearly £2 billion into aviation research and technology.

Through the [Aerospace Technology Institute Programme.](#)

Working closely with colleagues from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

And that's why – through that programme – we've been able to support the groundbreaking Fresson Project to make electrically powered commercial flights a reality in the UK within 2 years.

There are a lot of other exciting initiatives too.

Through schemes like our Future Flight Challenge.

The Innovation Hub within the CAA.

Which give us great hope for the future.

Conclusion

So, to sum this all up.

I don't underestimate how difficult things are right now.

But aviation will recover.

And when it does, it won't be picking up from where we were at the start of 2020.

It won't be a simple return to normal service.

It'll be leaner, and cleaner, more resilient, more ambitious aviation industry.

So let's all work together to make that recovery happen as soon as possible.

To get this industry back on its feet.

Your businesses depend on it I know.

Our economy most certainly depends on it.

And our country depends on it.

Thank you.