

# Final Global Travel Taskforce: checkpoint and red list changes

## **Introduction**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about international travel.

I'll start by apologising, because I do share your frustration. It is, in fact, the case that the meeting that decides this policy did not take place until Friday, and I put in immediately to make an oral statement off the back of that. I appreciate how frustrating it is to read speculation in the newspapers, much of which turns out to be incorrect, and I bring new information and the correct statement I'll be making this afternoon.

The past 18 months have been hugely frustrating for anyone wishing to travel abroad and, of course, for the travel industry itself. In 2020, the only weapon we had to fight the spread of COVID was to simply keep people apart, preventing them from making all but the most urgent journeys.

However, this year has seen very significant progress.

In February, the Prime Minister asked me to reconvene the [Global Travel Taskforce](#) to develop a plan for safe and sustainable travel – the return of international aviation. A framework that allows us to coexist with endemic COVID-19 and live with the virus on our travels whilst still protecting us from the most dangerous variants.

Through the work of the Taskforce over recent months, we have instigated a gradual reopening of international travel, to allow families and friends to reunite and businesses to get moving again.

Over the summer we implemented a number of improvements:

- taking advantage of the progress of the vaccine rollout here and abroad, we started a pilot to allow passengers who have been fully vaccinated in the UK, in Europe and the US to travel to the UK from amber list countries without the need to self-isolate or take a day 8 test
- we increased the number of countries and territories on the green list to 43 in September 2021
- we allowed the full restart of international cruises in line with the traffic light system

Now, Mr Speaker, at this final checkpoint, I am pleased to be able to ease restrictions further, whilst still safeguarding public health and providing confidence to travellers.

As one of the world's most vaccinated countries, with more than 8 out of 10 fully jabbed, we must use that advantage to restore the freedoms that were,

by necessity, lost over the past 18 months.

## **Expansion of the inbound vaccination policy**

The House will recall that in August, we launched a pilot to exempt from quarantine those who have been fully vaccinated in the US and Europe.

This pilot has been successful and I am delighted that it has provided a much-needed boost to international travel during the summer.

Throughout this crisis, I've remained in regular contact with my opposite, the US Secretary for Transportation Pete Buttigieg, and I'm delighted that as the Prime Minister has arrived in the United States, they have agreed – and I can announce to the House today (20 September 2021) – that vaccinated Brits will be allowed into the US from early November, reciprocating the policy we introduced this summer. And this is a testament to the hard work and progress made by the Expert Working Group, set up after the G7 to restart transatlantic travel, the flagship route of international aviation.

We will now [expand the policy to an array of other countries, including Canada and Japan, from 4 October, for those who can demonstrate their fully vaccinated status](#) and that will bring the number of countries and territories into scope to 50.

Mr Speaker, the UK will now set out standards it expects other countries to meet in terms of certification so their citizens can benefit from this change. We will happily work with anyone who applies and can meet those standards to onboard them as well. And, I can tell the House today, that we are in the final stages of doing this with our friends in the UAE.

Because recovery is the best way to support the aviation sector, and as one of the world's most vaccinated countries, we can now use our advantage to further liberalise travel whilst protecting public health.

## **Future travel**

I would also like to update the House on the next phase of reopening international travel more broadly.

Without a substantially vaccinated population, our focus was necessary to consider countries and territories based on risk – hence the traffic light system. However, vaccines mean that the emphasis can now shift to an individual's status instead.

So, I'm pleased to announce we will introduce a new longer-term framework for testing and health measures at the border, which will remain in place until the new year at the earliest:

- so, from 4 October, we will replace the traffic light system with a single red list of countries and simplified travel measures for arrivals from the rest of the world, depending on vaccination status
- second, we will remove the requirement for fully vaccinated passengers

- to take a pre-departure test, if not travelling from a red list country
- third, by later in October, we will have moved away from 2-day PCR testing to a new system of lateral flow tests for fully vaccinated passengers arriving from non-red list countries. If passengers test positive, they will then be required to take a confirmatory PCR test which will be genomically sequenced to identify and mitigate the risk of variants entering the UK. That PCR test will be at no further cost to the traveller

These changes will reduce the cost to passengers, simplify the process of international travel and remove a significant source of frustration.

Mr Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to confirm that the policy on children remains as now – they are quite simply treated the same as vaccinated adults, regardless of their own vaccination status, if they are resident in the UK or from one of the 50 countries and territories whose vaccinations we recognise.

Unvaccinated passengers, passengers with vaccines not authorised or certificates not yet recognised in the UK arriving from non-red list countries will still be required to take a pre-departure test, day 2 and day 8 PCR tests and to self-isolate.

## **Transit**

I can also tell the House today of another significant easing of the rules for those who change flights or international trains as part of their journey here. This change will ensure that passengers who remain airside in airports, and in railway stations, will only be required to follow the measures associated to their country of departure, rather than any countries they have transited through as part of their journey.

This will make a very substantial difference to travel by unlocking transit routes around the world.

## **Red list changes**

In advance of transitioning to our new international travel framework, I can also confirm that Kenya, Oman, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Egypt will be removed from the red list at 4am on Wednesday 22 September.

## **Conclusion**

So, Mr Speaker, the changes we are making mean a simpler, more straightforward system. One with less testing and lower costs, allowing more people to travel, see loved ones or conduct business around the world.

Our judgement is these changes are the right ones for this moment, making travel significantly easier for people whilst retaining crucial protections against variants of concern, which remain the largest threat. They will

provide a much-needed boost for the travel industry.

However, it is certainly not the end of the story. We will further review these measures early in the new year when we hope to be in a different context that will allow us to go that step further, ahead of the booking windows for the spring and summer holidays of 2022.

And, above all, the changes I've announced today demonstrate that – through vaccination – there is a path back to normality after a torrid 18 months in which many of the things we take for granted have been put on hold. Now is the time for us to get our country moving once again. And I commend this statement to this House.