

Speech: A withdrawal agreement that keeps Britain moving

Good morning everyone.

It's a pleasure to be here at Birmingham Airport today (5 December 2018).

The global gateway to the Midlands...

Which had a record year in 2017...

With nearly 13 million passengers travelling on flights to over 150 destinations.

And which has also just announced a £500 million expansion plan to boost capacity and improve passenger facilities.

Thriving airports say a lot about the places they're serving.

They are tangible evidence of business confidence.

Of ambition to expand into overseas markets.

To attract inward investment from other countries.

And to take advantage of opportunities opening up in the global economy...

As clearly we see here at Birmingham.

Global outlook

Yet this is what our island nation has been doing for centuries.

We've always been an outward-facing country.

It's part of our DNA.

Reaching out to markets abroad.

Investing in transport links.

To help us strike trade deals around the world.

And in the post-Brexit world, we'll need these strengths more than ever.

It's why we are expanding Heathrow.

Why we've given regional airports like Birmingham greater freedom to grow.

And why we're prioritising new aviation agreements with other nations to prepare for life outside the European Union.

Just last week – for example – [we signed a deal with the US cementing flights across the Atlantic once we leave the EU](#).

The deal secures existing air connections, and sets out ways in which new operators can enter the market in future.

We have worked closely with airlines in both countries to make sure we get this deal right.

Then at the weekend we also [concluded an agreement with Canada](#), sorting out the last significant non-EU aviation destination after Brexit.

But of course, maintaining flights to European markets is critical too.

Within Europe, both the European Commission and other member states have been clear that arrangements will be put in place for the aviation sector – regardless of the broader agreement.

This will ensure flights between the UK and EU can continue and that passengers have certainty about travelling.

Supporting the current deal

Clearly, these deals are in the national interest.

We've reached a stage in the Brexit journey where acting in the national interest takes precedence over all other considerations.

That's why it's imperative we get behind the Prime Minister's agreed deal with the European Union now.

I campaigned for Brexit in 2016, and have not changed my view that it's the right choice for Britain.

But I'm also a pragmatist.

It's equally important that we remain good friends and neighbours to our EU partners, while also deepening ties around the world.

I believe that the vast majority of the British population want a mutually beneficial deal with the EU, and a smooth transition.

That's precisely what the Prime Minister's agreement will deliver...

While also delivering the vast majority of benefits that pro-Brexiteers asked for at the Referendum.

It will give us full control of our money...

Of our laws ...

And our borders – ending the free movement of people.

While maintaining security.

And protecting the union of the United Kingdom.

Transport and the PM's deal

We'll benefit from a free trade area with the EU, while also pursuing trade deals with other countries outside Europe.

And we have agreed ambitious transport arrangements with the EU.

Not only will we have a comprehensive Air Transport Agreement...

Visa-free travel for short-term visits, including tourists and business travellers...

And co-operation where it makes sense – on aviation security, safety and air traffic management...

But we'll also have comparable access for hauliers, buses and coaches travelling between the UK and the rest of Europe.

Bilateral arrangements will allow cross border rail services to continue – such as between Belfast and Dublin, and through the Channel Tunnel.

And ships will continue to serve ports here and across the EU, protecting vital imports and exports routes.

And our thriving tourism industry.

This is a good deal for business and for jobs.

The best deal for business and jobs.

It will help us keep our connections with Europe...

While providing a springboard to pursue new agreements around the world.

And it will keep Britain moving.

That's why transport industry leaders have come out today in support of the agreement...

Urging the country to get behind a deal that will provide much needed certainty.

And that's why as Transport Secretary, I am strongly in favour as well.

If I had been offered the current deal before the Referendum in 2016, I would have seen it as an obviously better alternative to the status quo of remaining inside the EU.

But today, when we know that we will not get an improved deal if this one is rejected, then the decision to back it now is even more clear cut.

No deal

Of course, we've been working hard to prepare for all eventualities after our exit.

Including no deal.

As any responsible government would.

We are making provision to ease the pressure on Dover and Calais if there are customs hold ups after we leave.

And we are [making sure British motorists have easy access to International Driving Licences](#) if they are needed.

These are just two of the many transport implications of failing to reach a deal with the EU.

Implications which we set out in detail for each transport mode earlier this year...

Along with relevant advice for the public.

But none of us want them to actually happen.

No-one wants to sever ties with our European neighbours, and leave on bad terms.

So now our focus is to get on delivering the broader exit agreement.

And making progress with our withdrawal plans so we leave the European Union in March, while maintaining good relations.

Conclusion

We have an historic opportunity here.

To take back control of our borders and finances.

To retain a positive working and free trade relationship with our closest neighbours in the EU...

With no tariffs, fees, or charges across all sectors.

And no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

While keeping the Common Travel Area, ensuring everyday life continues as now.

This will ensure the smooth movement of transport and people...

By road, rail, sea and air.

Continued access to European markets...

Yet also the freedom to grow globally...

Providing airports like Birmingham with the momentum to invest for the future.

I believe the overwhelming majority of the country now want us to get on with Brexit...

And turn our attention to what comes next.

That's what this agreement will do.

The deal on the table is also the best deal.

Best for transport.

Best for business.

Best for Britain.

So let's get behind it.

Thank you.