

Speech: Aviation Minister's keynote speech to the British-Irish airports expo

Aviation and global Britain

Thank you Neil. And good morning everyone. It's a real pleasure to join you today. And to have this opportunity to speak to so many airports from across the UK.

I've just had a very interesting tour of the expo. With over 150 exhibitors and 3,000 visitors expected. This week's show is clear evidence that the airports industry is looking to the future with confidence.

Which is something I've been delighted to see many times over as I've visited airports across the UK since becoming Aviation Minister 7 months ago.

And the government is right behind you. Because we need all our airports to thrive. And every region of the UK to benefit from improved air links. And the economic benefits they bring.

Aviation strategy

It is a pleasure – and a privilege – to be Minister for such a world leading and successful industry, the third largest aviation sector in the world. An industry that has seen incredible growth, with an increase of 27% since 2010 in the number of passengers flying from and to UK airports to almost 270 million passengers now handled by UK airports.

And it's against this background of growth that we announced last week that we want to see airports make best use of existing capacity, provided environmental concerns are addressed.

And it is why we are preparing our new [aviation strategy](#). A comprehensive, wide-ranging blueprint. To develop the capacity and connections we need up to 2050 and beyond. And to allow aviation to grow in a safe, secure and sustainable way. Rooted in partnership between government and industry.

The strategy will be relevant to airports of every size. Because we know that many of the challenges facing the sector impact on smaller airports in different ways. Particularly those with fewer resources. And less scope to invest in new facilities or technologies.

So I'm determined that the final strategy will be just as applicable to RABA members as it is to Heathrow, Gatwick or Manchester.

Let me give you a couple of examples that are also being discussed at this week's expo.

Disabled passengers

First, improving the travel experience for disabled passengers.

Airports have a good record in this area. Following new Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) guidance in 2015 which helped many airports improve assistance.

I'm delighted that here, this week, the CAA is launching their report on how airports are meeting their guidance on hidden disabilities. To help passengers with hidden disabilities, such as autism and dementia.

Some airports have already taken a lead. For example, Bristol and Birmingham are among those to roll out a lanyard scheme. As a way for airport staff to easily identify more vulnerable passengers who may not wish to show details of their disability.

But for different reasons, many disabled people still choose not to fly. Just under 1 in 5 don't know who to contact to arrange assistance. And many are unaware that such help has to be provided by law, free of charge.

So – as part of the aviation strategy – we're going to work on measures to raise levels of awareness. While also making sure all airports are equipped to handle them. And in early July I'll be hosting a roundtable with the industry to discuss how this can be achieved.

Security

Another issue being discussed this week is airport security.

Consistently delivered checks are of course critical. Yet implementing them can present a logistical challenge to smaller airports. So the new aviation strategy' will outline measures to work more collaboratively with airports to address security.

We are moving to a more flexible approach giving industry options on how to implement security. And take more local decisions based on risk. We will analyse the regulatory burden on airports by reviewing 'More Stringent Measures'. And our approach to impact assessments. And we will focus efforts on airports that most need support to achieve the highest standards of compliance. To maintain strong resilience, while also responding practically and proportionately.

Heathrow and the National Policy Statement

But while work on the aviation strategy continues ahead of launch early next year, there's an even more pressing matter which has implications for the whole industry. Parliament's imminent vote on the proposed [north-west runway at Heathrow](#).

With no spare runway capacity, Heathrow's growth is constrained and new

global routes can only come with reduced connections to other destinations. Over many decades, successive governments have wrestled with the problem. Despite countless consultations, inquiries and commissions, the key question of how we secure our long-term hub capacity has remained unanswered.

But today, following the Cabinet's recent backing for the new runway, we are closer than ever before to providing that answer. And delivering the capacity that passengers need, businesses need, and other UK airports need.

One of the key benefits from expanding Heathrow will be the increase in connectivity to the nations and regions of the UK the importance of regional connectivity.

I saw this in Inverness a couple of weeks ago, where I discussed the potential for improving domestic routes with the airport and business leaders. Like other regional airports, Inverness wants a third runway at Heathrow to be built as soon as possible.

Just today we have seen EasyJet confirming that the expansion of Heathrow Airport would allow the entry of low cost carriers to the airport at scale for the first time.

Passengers would benefit from the increased competition and lower fares on routes to existing UK and European destinations. New entrants would also launch flights to UK and European airports not currently served by Heathrow providing important economic connections to the UK's only hub airport. And we want up to 15% of additional slots from a new runway to be used for domestic routes. We expect the majority of these routes to be commercially viable.

While these are a commercial decision for airlines, we also expect the airport operator to work constructively to boost UK connectivity. I'm pleased Heathrow has made a number of pledges. For example providing financial support for new routes. And providing discounts for domestic passengers through a restructuring of charges. But if necessary, we can take action to secure routes through the use of Public Service Obligations. And we'll consider ring-fencing slots for their use.

Of course the new runway would also provide huge opportunities for UK suppliers. Many of whom are here this week. Heathrow has set out a detailed procurement programme. To spread the benefits of the project around the country.

All told, the runway would provide benefits of up to £74 billion to passengers and the wider economy. Almost doubling Heathrow's freight capacity. Adding 16 million more long-haul seats in 2040. And delivering a huge boost for tourism, investment and jobs.

So with the vote in Parliament looming, the next few weeks are crucial. We must continue to build support for the project. Continue articulating the case for the runway. And continue getting our messages across to those who may be unaware of the huge economic implications, if Parliament fails to back Heathrow expansion.

So I urge the industry to speak up in support. To make the case for expansion. And to help send out a message that Britain is open for business, and ready to embrace a global future after Brexit.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, a thriving aviation sector is fundamental to our national interests. And to the interests of every UK region. With progress on Heathrow, and a new comprehensive aviation strategy we have a great opportunity to help the industry continue in its success.

As your Aviation Minister, I'm committed to working alongside you to ensure that our aviation strategy delivers for every part of the aviation sector, and for every part of the UK.

Thank you.