

Speech for Airport Operators Association annual dinner

Good evening. Thank you for that welcome.

It's a pleasure to join you. And a real privilege – as an aviation enthusiast – to speak at your annual dinner...

So thanks to Karen and her team for inviting me.

And thank you all for making it this evening to celebrate everything that's great about our aviation sector.

An amazing turnout... actually filling one of the largest formal dining venues in Europe.

You'll be supplied with delicious food.

The wine waiters will be constantly checking up to see if your glasses are filled.

So don't hold back.

But do be aware of the staff in the lavatories...

They're secretly working for MI5 and are there to make sure you don't nick any loo rolls.

We stand amid a testing time for aviation, but one that, together, I am certain we shall weather.

And, if we continue to work together, fuelled by friendly competition, tempered by necessary co-operation... I am certain we can overcome the current turbulence for British and global aviation.

First, let me say a few words about the situation today.

I want to thank the staff of FlyBe, the CAA, our new Aviation Minister Kelly Tolhurst and everyone involved in the operation managing a difficult few days.

As you know, the government, along with industry partners, were engaged in attempts to find a commercially viable solution.

However, the onset of the coronavirus proved one issue too many.

As we saw with Thomas Cook, no one company, no matter its pedigree or history, has a right to survive or place an undue burden on the taxpayer.

It's the competitive nature of the industry that benefits passengers and opens up air travel to all..

Yet for employees and suppliers, the distress and uncertainty at a time like this can be wrenching.

Which is why the government is providing support to help people find new jobs.

We are working on a regional connectivity review to ensure no community has to wait too long before the connections they need are re-established.

These individual episodes, however, are in danger of being overshadowed by a much larger crisis.

COVID-19 is having a dramatic impact across the sector.

I am determined that the government, without prejudice to particular firms, does its bit to ensure that a random act of nature doesn't undermine well managed businesses.

On Friday last I wrote to the slots coordination body ACL, to request they rapidly examine the 80:20 slots issue which is proving so vexatious.

It makes no sense, environmentally or financially, for airlines to be forced to fly ghost planes.

This morning I followed this up by calling on the EU Commission to give this matter urgent attention – I look forward to a positive response.

Like industry colleagues, my officials at the department have been working tirelessly in recent weeks and months to help support the sector.

As we meet here tonight, I want to let you know that I understand the enormity of what you are facing, and this Government will stand by your side.

I know the prosperity of your sector and our country, are, after all, intertwined.

Beyond the immediate term, there are other challenges. Whether it's the Court of Appeal's decision on airport expansion, or our departure from the EU and its institutions, we will work together to find solutions.

We will overcome these immediate challenges and we will then go on to overcome perhaps the great challenge of all.

That is the challenge of decarbonising our planet.

The UK has voted to reach Net Zero by 2050 and, as you know, aviation will have to do its part.

This is no mean feat while maintaining, and indeed improving, living standards.

And this mission is particularly challenging in the context of aviation.

Now let me say at the outset which side I am on. I do not believe, like some,

that Net Zero requires us to retreat from progress.

To succumb to some Mal-thusian doctrine.

To lower our sights...

To live a little less...

No. I believe that the answer lies where it has always lain...

In our ingenuity,..

In the creative genius of our engineers and in the dynamism of our economy.

I am confident in our ability to meet the challenge ahead...

I am also mindful of the scale of that challenge.

But you are responding.

You're responding with a level of excellence unparalleled among our global competitors...

From the pioneering work of UK firm Velosys in greener aviation fuels, to the development of electric flight at Cranfield with Airbus.

Or the 300 mph electric plane unveiled in Gloucestershire by Rolls Royce.

Together with billions of pounds of government support for research and development, and your sustainable aviation 2050 Road Map, which I was pleased to help launch last month, this country can once again be on the crest of a new wave of aviation technology.

Working together, government and industry, we can overcome seemingly impregnable barriers.

And in the next few weeks I will be saying more about my proposals to join up government and industry work to give British aviation a head start.

Aviation is by its very nature is dynamic. Your outlook is global, ambitious and entrepreneurial.

And I know that even as we meet this evening, facing challenges on a truly global scale, we will prevail, come out stronger, with you and this sector leading the world once again.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for all you are doing,

And have a fun evening – thank you.