

Huw Merriman MP
Chair of the Transport Committee
House of Commons,
London
SW1A 0AA

By email only.

12 January 2021

Dear Huw,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December concerning the House of Commons Transport Committee's recent visit to Heathrow Airport and your discussions with the airport's management about preparedness for January 2021. I am replying as the Minister responsible for Transition matters. Please accept my apologies for the delay in my response.

In your letter, you proposed two measures to assist in creating a smoother arrivals process:

- 1. Clear communication with passengers and businesses, including confirmation that EU citizens can continue to use eGates and that any paperwork needed should be a condition of carriage for any airline, coach, ferry or train bringing in EU citizens to UK ports, airports or on Eurostar; and/or*
- 2. Any additional burdens, requiring more time with our Border Force officials at arrivals, should be met by a full resourcing of all Border Force desks.*

In respect of your first proposal, the Government carried out an extensive public information campaign, "The UK's new start, let's get going", in the lead up to the end of the Transition Period which encouraged businesses and citizens to take action to prepare. This campaign continues and the new phase began on 1 January, informing key audiences of new rules that are now in place, and changes they should make in order to continue to trade with and travel to the EU.

Additionally, in July 2020, the Government published, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, the Border Operating Model (BOM) which sets out the requirements related to the movements of goods between GB and the EU and the arrival of travellers from the EU. A further iteration of the model was published in October 2020. Annex G of this document provides details of the processes that apply to passengers crossing the border with effect from 1 January and guidance to enable

airports, businesses who move goods by air, and passengers, to prepare for these changes. The Committee is asked to note that the vast majority of the requirements detailed in the BOM still apply now that an agreement has been reached with the EU.

As detailed in the BOM, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens can continue to use Electronic Passport Gates (e-Gates), which provide a secure and efficient method for travellers to cross the border. Signage at ports already direct UK, EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens to the e-Gate queue and the 'blue queue' at the Primary Control Point. However, we have also been clear that we will keep this position under review to ensure that we can continue to operate our border in the UK's best interest.

Further, clarity on necessary documentation for travel has been provided to the International Air Transport Association so that their Timatic products, which are used by carriers to ensure that passengers are compliant with border requirements, can be updated. This includes the fact that EU, EEA and Swiss nationals may continue to travel on either valid passports or national identity cards until 1 October 2021, when identity cards will no longer be accepted at the border from individuals who do not hold EU Settlement Scheme leave or are otherwise protected by the Withdrawal Agreements.

Turning to your second measure, I am confident that Border Force has the resources in place to meet anticipated overall operational requirements. Border Force recruited over 1,000 additional officers in preparation for the end of transition and continues to ensure maximum flexibility in their recruitment and deployment approach. Further staff will be in place in time for July 2021 when full customs import controls are implemented on movements of goods from the EU to Great Britain.

Prior to the end of the Transition Period, my officials worked closely with other Government Department officials (including Cabinet Office, HMRC, the Department for Transport and others) to ensure readiness for the end of the Transition Period and that border arrangements are as smooth as possible. However, it is important to note that wait times in airports can be caused by a number of factors, not just related to resourcing. This includes the volume of immigration case working, additional support and checks in relation to Covid-19, and specific security activity. Border Force teams seek to balance this range of tasking each day, and whilst mindful of passenger wait times and experience, our primary objective continues to be to ensure the continued security of the UK border.

Yours sincerely,


RT HON JAMES BROKENSHERE MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR SECURITY