



House of Commons
Transport Committee

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Interim report

Fifth Report of Session 2019–21

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 9 March 2021*

Transport Committee

The Transport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Transport and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Huw Merriman MP](#) (*Conservative, Bexhill and Battle*) (Chair)

[Ben Bradshaw MP](#) (*Labour, Exeter*)

[Ruth Cadbury MP](#) (*Labour, Brentford and Isleworth*)

[Lilian Greenwood MP](#) (*Labour, Nottingham South*)

[Simon Jupp MP](#) (*Conservative, East Devon*)

[Robert Langan MP](#) (*Conservative, High Peak*)

[Chris Loder MP](#) (*Conservative, West Dorset*)

[Karl McCartney MP](#) (*Conservative, Lincoln*)

[Grahame Morris MP](#) (*Labour, Easington*)

[Gavin Newlands MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Paisley and Renfrewshire North*)

[Greg Smith MP](#) (*Conservative, Buckingham*)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Nick Beech (Committee Clerk), Estelle Currie (Senior Media Officer), Matt Eaton (Committee Specialist), Rosalind KennyBirch (Committee Specialist), Lewis Pickett (Committee Specialist), Robi Quigley (Second Clerk), Damith Rajakaruna (Committee Operations Manager) and Mandy Sullivan (Committee Operations Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Transport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3266; the Committee's email address is transcom@parliament.uk.

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Covid-19: Restart and recovery of aviation - immediate priorities for Government

1. The Transport Committee has taken a close interest in the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector. At the Committee's 3 March oral evidence session, we explored the significant challenges faced by the aviation industry. Informed witnesses highlighted the need for the Government to provide a greater degree of certainty to allow the industry successfully to facilitate the restart of mass international travel. The situation is urgent, which is why we have acted swiftly to agree this interim Report. We hope that the Government shares our assessment that the challenges posed by the pandemic require a rapid response.

2. Failure to provide clarity has consequences. Redundancies have mounted as the restart date for international travel continues to be delayed. The sectoral restart and recovery plan has not been published, despite the planned publication date of autumn 2020. In addition, the Department for Transport has not specified the standards that destination countries must meet on vaccine and testing capabilities in order to reopen for travel with the UK. The Minister for Aviation told us that the Global Travel Taskforce report may not be published on 12 April 2021. Aviation businesses and their employees have made enormous sacrifices over the past year. The Government must commit to publishing the Global Travel Taskforce report on 12 April to allow consumers, employees and businesses the certainty that they need to plan for the future.

3. The aviation sector has already experienced significant redundancies due to the coronavirus pandemic.¹ Witnesses made it clear that the longer the delay to the resumption of international travel, the greater the financial challenge for industry and the number of jobs at risk. In that context, the Airport Operators Association estimated that business rates relief for English airports will cover losses for approximately 13 days.² The Government's Covid-19 road map states that the "earliest" international travel will resume is 17 May, but that date could be changed.³

4. If the 17 May restart is delayed, airlines and airports will experience an extended period when people are not travelling, which will exacerbate the financial challenges that those businesses have faced over the past year, perhaps to critical levels. *The 17 May date for restarting international travel should be maintained provided that the four reopening tests that the Government set out on 22 February are met.*

5. We welcome the progress that the Government has made on the vaccination roll-out. Following the 2 March meeting of the Global Travel Taskforce, the Secretary of State for Transport said that in taking decisions on reopening international travel, the Department will not only consider progress on the domestic vaccine programme but "review where destination countries have got to with both vaccine and testing capabilities".⁴ The Minister

1 Transport Committee, Second Report of Session 2019–21, [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector](#), HC 268, para 57

2 [Q17](#) [Ms Dee]

3 Cabinet Office, [Guidance: COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#) (22 February 2021)

4 Department for Transport, [Global Travel Taskforce meets to map out safe return to international travel](#) (2 March 2021)

for Aviation clarified that while current evidence is “promising”, because it shows vaccines are lowering rates of transmission and effective against mutant strains, there is “still a long way to go with regard to the science”.⁵

6. Airline and airport witnesses stressed the economic imperative of being able to plan for a resumption of international travel. On 22 February, the Prime Minister said that “a successor to the global travel taskforce will report by 12 April, so that people can plan for the summer”.⁶ The new Global Travel Taskforce held its first meeting on 2 March 2021.⁷⁸ We have since heard that the taskforce will provide a report to the Prime Minister on 12 April 2021, rather than publishing a report to provide clarity for the aviation industry and the public.⁹

7. Ryanair told us that “we do not need a taskforce; we just need action”.¹⁰ Witnesses proposed a range of actions that the Government could take to support the aviation industry. Above all, witnesses highlighted the need for a clear plan. The Aviation Minister told us that “there should be a joined-up approach between the unions, the sector and Government ... that is precisely the point of the Global Travel Taskforce”. He added, “It is the expertise of the sector, the expertise of the unions and their resourcefulness, passion and dedication that is going to get airlines flying again in a robust and safe way”.¹¹ In response to the Committee’s report on *The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector*, the Department told the Committee that a recovery plan would be published in autumn 2020.¹² The Secretary of State for Transport then told the Committee on 3 February 2021 that a medium-to-long-term recovery plan for the aviation sector would be published later in 2021.¹³

8. The aviation industry thrives on certainty. In order to return passenger aircraft to the skies and to connect the UK to the world, a road map to restart international travel is urgently needed. The Department has not yet specified the standards that destination countries must meet on vaccine and testing capabilities in order to reopen for travel with the UK. In addition, it has not clarified whether such criteria will be flexible if the risk of transmission of new variants between vaccinated individuals is found to be minimal.

9. *The Government must commit to publishing the Global Travel Taskforce report on 12 April to give consumers and industry the certainty that they need to plan for a summer 2021 restart for international travel. The publication of the road map should be accompanied by a statement to the House of Commons setting out next steps. The Global Travel Taskforce report must clarify:*

5 [Q63](#)

6 HC Deb, 22 February 2021, [col](#) [Commons Chamber]

7 The new Global Travel Taskforce, formally called [The Global Travel Taskforce: Safe Return of International Travel](#), is the successor to the Global Travel Taskforce which made a series of recommendations on travel in November 2020.

8 Department for Transport, [Global Travel Taskforce meets to map out safe return to international travel](#) (2 March 2021)

9 [Q56](#), [Q92](#)

10 [Q29](#)

11 [Q66](#)

12 Transport Committee, Second Special Report of Session 2019–21, [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Government and Civil Aviation Authority Responses to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 745, para 45

13 [Q25](#)

- *The criteria that destination countries must meet on vaccine and testing capabilities in order to reopen for travel with the UK, as well as the requirements that passengers will need to fulfil in order to travel abroad, including any relating to digital health certification;*
- *when and how the current quarantine schemes will be phased out; and*
- *how the Government plans to support industry should variants or high levels of Covid-19 transmission affect the reopening schedule.*

10. It is disappointing that the timetable on the recovery plan for the aviation sector has slipped. The focus on the Global Travel Taskforce report for travel in summer 2021 should be the first priority. That said, the recovery plan should not slip further, and we will seek an update from the Government on progress in early autumn.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. If the 17 May restart is delayed, airlines and airports will experience an extended period when people are not travelling, which will exacerbate the financial challenges that those businesses have faced over the past year, perhaps to critical levels. *The 17 May date for restarting international travel should be maintained provided that the four reopening tests that the Government set out on 22 February are met.* (Paragraph 4)
2. The aviation industry thrives on certainty. In order to return passenger aircraft to the skies and to connect the UK to the world, a road map to restart international travel is urgently needed. The Department has not yet specified the standards that destination countries must meet on vaccine and testing capabilities in order to reopen for travel with the UK. In addition, it has not clarified whether such criteria will be flexible if the risk of transmission of new variants between vaccinated individuals is found to be minimal. (Paragraph 8)
3. *The Government must commit to publishing the Global Travel Taskforce report on 12 April to give consumers and industry the certainty that they need to plan for a summer 2021 restart for international travel. The publication of the road map should be accompanied by a statement to the House of Commons setting out next steps. The Global Travel Taskforce report must clarify:*
 - *The criteria that destination countries must meet on vaccine and testing capabilities in order to reopen for travel with the UK, as well as the requirements that passengers will need to fulfil in order to travel abroad, including any relating to digital health certification;*
 - *when and how the current quarantine schemes will be phased out; and*
 - *how the Government plans to support industry should variants or high levels of Covid-19 transmission affect the reopening schedule.* (Paragraph 9)
4. It is disappointing that the timetable on the recovery plan for the aviation sector has slipped. The focus on the Global Travel Taskforce report for travel in summer 2021 should be the first priority. That said, the recovery plan should not slip further, and we will seek an update from the Government on progress in early autumn. (Paragraph 10)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 9 March 2021

Members present:

Huw Merriman, in the Chair

Ben Bradshaw	Karl McCartney
Ruth Cadbury	Grahame Morris
Lilian Greenwood	Gavin Newlands
Robert Largan	Greg Smith
Chris Loder	

Draft Report (*The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Interim report*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 10 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till tomorrow at 9.30 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 03 March 2021

Simon Calder, Senior Travel Editor, The Independent (newspaper) [Q1–13](#)

Karen Dee, Chief Executive, Airport Operators Association; **Tim Hawkins**, Chief of Staff, Manchester Airports Group; **Michael O'Leary**, Chief Executive, Ryanair [Q14–53](#)

Richard Moriarty, Chief Executive, Civil Aviation Authority; **Robert Courts MP**, Minister for Aviation, Department for Transport [Q54–94](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of the Chair of the Civil Aviation Authority	HC 354
2nd	The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector	HC 268
3rd	E-scooters: pavement nuisance or transport innovation?	HC 255
4th	Road safety: young and novice drivers	HC 169
1st Special	Pavement parking: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 158
2nd Special	The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Government and Civil Aviation Authority Responses to the Committee's Second Report	HC 745
3rd Special	E-scooters: pavement nuisance or transport innovation?: Government Response to Committee's Third Report	HC 1085