



House of Commons
Transport Committee

**The impact of the
coronavirus pandemic
on the aviation
sector: Interim report:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2019–21**

**First Special Report of Session
2021–22**

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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.

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Publication

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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), Damith Rajakaruna (Committee Operations Manager), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Operations Officer) and Wafia Zia (Second Clerk).

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First Special Report

The Transport Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2019–21, [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Interim report](#) (HC 1257) on 11 March 2021. The Government response was received on 6 May 2021 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

1. The Government thanks the Transport Select Committee for its further consideration of the impact of Covid-19 on the aviation sector. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the committee's recommendations on this vital topic.
2. Although the Committee's report uses the term 'aviation', the Government will use the term 'air transport' throughout its response. This is because the Government's definition of 'aviation' includes both the aerospace sector and the air transport sector, as well as the wider economic impact of activity in both sectors. By contrast, the concerns of the Committee's report focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the air transport sector alone.
3. We fully recognise the incredibly challenging times facing the air transport sector due to Covid-19. The sector is crucial to the UK's economy and before the Covid-19 pandemic it contributed at least £22 billion to GDP each year and supported around half a million jobs across the UK.
4. The pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for the sector, and the Government has had to make hard but necessary decisions around international travel restrictions to protect public health. We have taken steps wherever possible to enable safe international travel, but our highest priority remains protecting public health and the progress of our vaccine roll-out, while supporting the air transport sector to weather and recover from the crisis.
5. Throughout the pandemic, air transport businesses have taken exceptional steps to mitigate operational and financial challenges. In parallel, the Government will have provided support to the sector worth around £7 billion up to the end of April 2021. This includes access to loans and other forms of finance, support for meeting fixed costs, as well as supporting continued employment through the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme and launching the Aviation Skills Retention Platform, an online jobs market to help skilled workers remain in the sector.
6. From December 2020, the emergence of a number of Covid-19 "variants of concern" necessitated further steps to limit mass international travel.
7. In early 2021, in response to the new variants, the Government suspended international travel corridors, restricted entry for those travelling from over 30 countries on the red list and introduced a requirement for those who had visited or transited through a red list country in the previous 10 days to quarantine in a Government approved facility for 10 days. The countries on this list are kept under review based on risk assessments produced by the Joint Biosecurity Centre.
8. Meanwhile, the UK has made outstanding progress on the vaccine roll-out with over 40 million vaccine doses administered to well over 30 million individuals. We are

now focused on how we can ease restrictions across the whole of the economy in a safe and sustainable way, including in the international travel sector. The Secretary of State relaunched the Global Travel Taskforce (GTT) as part of the national roadmap in March 2021 to set out a plan for the safe and sustainable restart of international travel.

9. The GTT brought together key industry players from the air transport, maritime, cruise, international rail and tourism sectors to develop a safe, sustainable and robust return to international travel without compromising public health. The taskforce considered how best to deploy measures including testing and isolation in order to enable international travel while managing the risk of imported cases, especially variants of concern.

10. In addition, we have continued to engage the air transport sector through our Expert Steering Group and will continue to do so. The engagement and insight we have received from the sector has been invaluable, and we will ensure that the latest and best evidence continues to be brought to bear as we progress.

11. On 9 April 2021, the second Global Travel Taskforce published its report on the return of safe international travel. It included a variety of recommendations under the four overarching themes of:

- i) **Progressing a risk-based reopening of international travel**, making use of existing and new measures to ensure that this is safe, sustainable and robust.
- ii) **Ensuring readiness for international travel restart**, building on ongoing work to minimise border pressures as passenger flows rise, whilst keeping staff safe.
- iii) **Building consumer clarity and confidence** through enhanced advice and communications of safety measures and consumer protection when booking travel.
- iv) **Supporting a transition to future travel**, taking the first steps towards co-existing with an endemic COVID-19, in collaboration with global partners.

12. These recommendations will be implemented in a way that is based on science while supporting the economy and allowing families and friends to reunite. We will work with the Devolved Administrations to align arrangements wherever possible across the UK.

13. A strategic framework for the longer-term recovery of the sector, setting out the Government's plans to ensure a successful and sustainable UK air transport sector for the future, will be published later this year.

Recommendation 1 from the Committee's Report (paragraph 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.

14. The Government notes this recommendation. We recognise that international travel is vital, underpinning the UK economy, connecting families and friends and boosting business, and that certainty for airlines and airports is crucial in facilitating a successful restart. We are committed to implementing the recommendations of the GTT in a way that is based on science, and the Secretary of State will be announcing the next steps towards resuming international travel in the coming days.

15. The reopening of international travel will progress with a risk-based framework, making use of existing and new measures to ensure that this is safe, sustainable and robust.

16. Measures limiting outbound travel will be removed by 17 May at the earliest, and a “traffic light” country system will be implemented, with different restrictions applied depending on risk.

17. The methodology determining the country allocation will be based on factors such as the level of community transmission of Variants of Concern, levels of testing, genomic sequencing and reporting. This will allow the Government the flexibility to adapt to the evolving health situation around the world whilst keeping borders open. The categorisation of countries will be as follows:

- **Red countries:** High-risk countries (currently known as “red list”).
- **Amber countries:** Moderate-risk countries.
- **Green countries:** Low-risk countries

18. This system will be in place from 17 May at the earliest. The allocation of countries will be kept under review and respond to emerging evidence, with a particular focus on Variants of Concern. The Joint Biosecurity Centre will publish data and analysis to support the process of allocating countries.

19. The traffic light system will also include the introduction of a “Green Watchlist” to support outbound travellers in identifying countries most at risk of moving from green to amber.

20. This first stage in the easing of restrictions (which will be introduced from 17 May at the earliest) should not be understood as a “return to normal” for international travel. Monitoring and compliance activity will remain, such as the consistent requirement for a Passenger Locator Form and proof of a negative pre-departure test.

Recommendation 2 from the Committee's Report (paragraph 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. (Paragraph 8)

21. The Government partially agrees with this recommendation. We fully understand the importance of certainty to the air transport industry, and have therefore set out the

detailed roadmap for international travel contained in the GTT report. While we have been clear on the requirements for testing required to travel to the UK, wider vaccine and testing standards must be agreed internationally through multilateral organisations including the World Health Organisation. The Secretary of State chaired a virtual meeting of G7 transport ministers on 5 May to identify common goals and principles for the reopening of international travel, including best practices for sharing scientific data and promoting coordination on universally recognised travel certificates. We also continue to work with ICAO and other international agencies to develop agreement on the implementation of global standards. In parallel, we are engaging bilaterally with international partners to exchange information and explore how we can open international travel safely, including the potential piloting of digital and non-digital certification.

22. We have set out three “checkpoints” where we will review measures, taking account of the emerging evidence and domestic and international health picture. These will take place as follows:

- **Checkpoint 1:** no later than 28 June 2021
- **Checkpoint 2:** no later than 31 July 2021
- **Checkpoint 3:** no later than 1 October 2021

23. These reviews will also take account of a range of different evidence. This will include considerations of the four tests as set out in the roadmap:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

24. At every stage, decisions will also take account of impacts on border operations and testing capacity

Recommendation 3 from the Committee's Report (paragraph 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:

- **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.**

25. The Government partially agrees with this recommendation. The report of the second Global Travel Taskforce was submitted to the Prime Minister and published on 9 April. On the same day the Secretary of State for Transport wrote to the Chair of the Transport Select Committee providing more detail on the content and recommendations of the report, and the Government also wrote to all Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords to update them on the report on 13 April.

—See below for the Government's response to each of the three sub-points above

Subpoint 1 of Recommendation 3 (above)

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

26. As outlined in the response to Recommendation 1 above, the Government will employ a “traffic light” system. Health measures for arrivals will vary according to the three categories under the “traffic light” system, as set out in the following table in the GTT report:

Measure	Green Country	Amber Country	Red Country
Passenger Locator Form	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pre-departure Test	Yes	Yes	Yes
Managed Quarantine at Hotel	No	No	10 days
Self-isolation	No	10 days	N/A
Test to Release	N/A	On day 5	No
PCR Testing	On or before day 2	On or before day 2	On or before day 2
Further PCR Testing	No	Day 8	Day 8

27. The GTT recommends the requirement for a Passenger Locator Form for arrivals from all countries, to ensure information gathering and compliance. The Passenger Locator Form is essential in ensuring that people understand and meet the requirements of entry, such as the work of the Isolation Assurance and Compliance Service in checking quarantine compliance.

28. We are exploring the role that COVID-19 status certification could play in opening up international travel in partnership with other countries, multilateral organisations and

industry organisations. As per recommendation four in the GTT report, the Government will take steps to ensure that residents are supported to prove their COVID-19 status certification for outbound travel. This work is being led by NHSX, as discussed in paragraph 55 of the GTT report.

29. International visitors will still be able to visit the UK whether or not they have been vaccinated but will need to follow the border requirements depending on the risk rating of the destination(s) they have been in prior to arrival.

30. Travel Certification will include both testing and vaccines. This will ensure that those who cannot have the vaccine are not left at a disadvantage and can demonstrate a negative COVID-19 test result for entry where it is a requirement. For as long as the scientific evidence remains unclear on the impact of vaccines on transmission, testing will continue to play a key role.

Subpoint 2 of Recommendation 3 (above)

When and how the current quarantine schemes will be phased out

31. As outlined above, we have set three checkpoints for the review of measures on international travel. All measures will be reviewed, as appropriate, as part of these checkpoints, which will also consider the efficacy of measures in progressing to a safe, sustainable and robust international travel system in the longer term, both for people, families and businesses, and for the wider transport and tourism industry.

Subpoint 3 of Recommendation 3 (above)

How the Government plans to support industry should variants or high levels of Covid-19 transmission affect the reopening schedule

32. The Government understands the strain that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions have placed upon our air transport and tourism industries. Throughout the pandemic we have worked closely with industry to understand their needs and provide comprehensive support packages, and this work continues.

33. The package of economic support which we have put in place has been unprecedented, including liquidity schemes and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) furlough scheme. We estimate that by the end of April 2021 the air transport sector (airlines, airports and related services) will have benefited from around £7bn of Government support since the start of the pandemic.

34. Based on official statistics from HM Revenue and Customs, 52% of passenger air transport employees were furloughed using the CJRS as of 31 January 2021. We estimate that the sector will have received around £1 billion in support through CJRS up to the end of April 2021.

35. Through the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS), we are supporting commercial airports and ground handling operators. We expect successful applicants to have received payments by the end of March 2021, with around £80m made available in grants. The renewed scheme will support airports' and ground handlers' fixed costs up to £4m for the first six months of financial year 2021/22.

36. The AGOSS and furlough (CJRS) schemes have both been extended until September 2021.

37. Ongoing engagement with the air transport sector will be critical for the Government to be prepared and able to react in a timely manner to any requests for support. As part of its normal operations the Government has always considered providing support to strategically important companies whose failure or distress could cause disproportionate harm to the UK economy or society. Any support given will be on terms that protect the taxpayer.

Recommendation 4 from the Committee's Report (paragraph 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.

38. The Government notes this recommendation. It is clear that the first priority was the report of the second Global Travel Taskforce, which was published on 9 April 2021. The Government aims to give as much certainty and assurance as possible to people, businesses and the travel industry, and this is why the GTT sets out the risk-based framework and checkpoint reviews.

39. The GTT report also reaffirms our previous commitment to publish a strategic framework for the recovery of the aviation sector later this year.

40. The Government is willing to provide an update on progress to the committee in early autumn as requested.