

Karen Dee
Chief Executive

Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE
Chair

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
LONDON SW1P 4DR

21 December 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

After the events of this weekend, we need to set out the dire situation that will now affect the UK's airport industry for the next few months.

Other nations' travel bans will effectively close our passenger business from now for the duration they are in force. Beyond this, the speed with which they have come about will destroy any consumer confidence for further weeks if not months. This combines with the move to Tier 4 for much of England and similar restrictions applying in the devolved nations and our assumption that wider use of Tier 4 style restrictions (or a national lockdown) will be required from January. The result of this is that we see very little prospect of commercially viable operations through the first quarter of 2021.

Our only hope is that by the end of this period the risk factor from Covid 19 will have reduced substantially allowing the easing of restrictions and return of stability and confidence.

We need the Government to take immediate action to ensure that airports can cope with the current day-to-day emergency and then continue to function through the immediate months ahead.

We seek three things:

Firstly, communications – the Government must set out clear, proactive public messaging regarding the ability to fly within the tier system – not just the regulatory focused broad communications so far. Our members are reporting widespread confusion amongst passengers which is leading to many people turning up at airports on the off chance that they may be able to fly and similarly large numbers of passenger no-shows for those flights which are continuing. The messaging must tackle this head-on so that passengers have the confidence to travel where that is still possible.

Secondly, finances – these latest events are a step change for the worse on the back of the worst year in our industry's history. Governments have effectively forced our businesses to close. We need Government to step in and cover operational losses during this extraordinary period of crisis. There is precedent for this - for example, the Northern Ireland Executive recognises the importance and value of aviation to its economy and is taking a pro-active stance in this area. We urge you to act swiftly to provide similar support.

Thirdly, testing – it is clear that even once these immediate travel bans are removed, the damage done to passenger confidence will not be solved until an improved system of testing for international travel is in place. Industry is very keen to play its part in delivering this and sees mass rapid testing as a crucial element so that not only is quarantine no longer required but the travel corridor is robust so as to survive any repeat of the current crisis. Clearly this will rely on agreement at an international level so that destination countries can be reassured that travelers from the UK will not pose any unacceptable risk. We urge you to work urgently with your counterparts to reach such agreement.

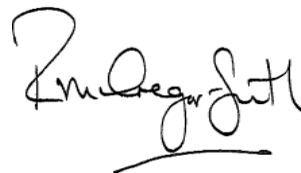
We cannot emphasise enough the urgency of this situation. Airports are critical national infrastructure upon which the future of the UK economy depends. Industry needs action - not words - from Government to ensure we are able to help deliver the economic recovery we will need so desperately once the pandemic is brought under control.

We look forward to discussing these issues with you shortly.

Yours sincerely,



Karen Dee
Chief Executive



Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE
Chair