

To: globaltraveltaskforce@dft.gov.uk

12 November 2020

Dear Global Travel Taskforce,

Re: an international travel testing regime to get business moving

International travel is vital for London, and for UK business as a whole. The ability of talent, tourists, and trade to move seamlessly in and out of the UK is a prerequisite for building a Global Britain. From leisure, hospitality, and retail, through to higher education and professional services, London's economy needs to be connected to the world.

London First welcomes the establishment of the Global Travel Taskforce and this week's statement by the Secretary of State for Transport that good progress is being made on a test to release regime based on a single test for arrivals into the UK. This promises to be a significant step forward.

For the sake of the post-pandemic economic recovery it is critical that, by the time the current nationwide restrictions are lifted in early December, a new regime for international travel is in place. It is, of course, essential that any testing regime that is adopted should not endanger public health. But there are also certain principles that must be at the heart of the new regime if it is going to work for businesses across the UK and support, rather than hamper, the economic recovery. These principles include being:

1. Realistic about risk

The latest data must be used as the new regime for international arrivals is designed and refined. This data should be robust and realistic. When assessing risk, it should consider the world as it is, rather than how we might like it to be. [New research from Oxera](#) shows that only 7 in 10 symptomatic individuals follow the 14-day quarantine rules and this falls to as few as 3 in 10 for asymptomatic cases. A poorly-obeyed and weakly-enforced quarantine is a less effective public health intervention than a clear and consistent testing regime.

2. Dynamic and transparent

Any regime needs to be flexible and responsive as data changes on infection rates in different locations. The consistency in announcing changes to the travel corridors list at the same time every week has been a noticeable improvement. However, greater transparency on decision-making and on the triggers for changing regulations would allow businesses and individuals to plan with confidence. Until a vaccine is widely available, we know that travellers will not be able to have total certainty, but predictability about changes can go a long way towards mitigating this and bolstering confidence.

3. Clear and simple in its structure and communication

Complexity is another key barrier to international travel. After years of ever-diminishing regulation on cross-border movement, the pandemic has reintroduced the need to understand multiple restrictions from multiple sources. Any new regime for arrivals into the UK should be simple in its structure, clearly communicated and internationally consistent as far as possible. There should be no more than three core categories: low risk countries where restrictions are not necessary; partner countries where we are able to agree a harmonised testing regime (preferably pre-departure) to minimise or completely remove



restrictions; and higher-risk countries where we still require a unilateral, defensive, test to release regime.

4. Regional in its approach to remaining restrictions

Treating some European islands as separate geographic entities in the travel corridor regime has been a positive step. This more targeted, sub-national approach to restrictions should be extended in any future regime. This is particularly important for large countries and key trading partners – such as the USA – where there are well established sub-national regions and the current rates of infection vary wildly.

5. Understanding of business trips

Whilst enabling tourists to travel and families to be reunited is essential for the economic and mental health of the country, business trips should not be forgotten. [A recent report from WPI Strategy](#) found that two thirds of UK business leaders see air travel as key to their future prospects and this number reaches almost 90% for larger businesses. Many business trips are shorter than the quarantine periods being discussed as part of the test to release regime. For example, 6 in every 10 of Eurostar's business passengers return within 48 hours. In the short-term, international models such as Japan and the Netherlands should be examined to see if a quarantine exemption for short business trips could be designed on the basis of a negative rapid test on arrival and a strict code of conduct signed by the employer and/or employee.

6. Proactive in using trials to refine the regime

Whilst a universal test to release regime could be implemented immediately, other improvements to the international travel regime could take more time. Establishing trials to gather data and iron out any details should be a priority in these areas. This includes any short business trip exemption as mentioned above, and also the longer-term pre-departure testing standard. Conducting trials with a small number of key markets (for example, on the London-New York route which helps to support £200bn per year in transatlantic trade) would both help to refine the longer-term ambition for pre-departure testing.

7. The basis for a common international standard

The aviation industry, and the business community more widely, is looking for confidence about the medium-term direction of travel. This is most likely to take the form of a common international standard for pre-departure testing to remove the need for quarantine altogether. A clear indication of the policy priorities and timeframes for developing such a standard would allow businesses to plan ahead and constructively support the Government's efforts.

8. Psychologically and financially affordable for passengers

Finally, any testing regime must be practical and affordable for passengers. This means that any remaining quarantine requirements in the test to release regime should be as low as possible and certainly not more than five days. A longer period of self-isolation is unlikely to make a meaningful difference to businesses' and individuals' propensity to travel. As far as the costs for tests are concerned, it is right that whilst there are still testing capacity constraints the public sector should not bear the cost of testing international arrivals. However, as NHS testing capacity increases and rapid, asymptomatic testing become the norm, these should be available to international arrivals too.

We look forward to seeing the conclusions of the Global Travel Taskforce and urge you to publish your recommendations as soon as possible so that the new regime can be in place in time for the easing of current restrictions in early December. We would also welcome the continuation of the taskforce to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive testing regime that fully replaces quarantine by Easter 2021 and we remain ready to assist your work in any way that we can.

Yours sincerely,

Jasmine Whitbread
Chief Executive
London First