

The Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London, SW1A 2AA

16 April 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

Businesses in the capital are reassured that the Government is pressing ahead with the roadmap, which has provided a desperately-needed boost to the retail and hospitality sectors, particularly in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ), which have suffered from repeated closures.

However, it is disappointing that there was no substantive update on the review into social distancing, which we anticipate is moving towards the liberalisation of current restrictions, given all the successes of other public health measures from vaccination to mask-wearing. The current social distancing rules, coupled with the uncertain timing of the review, hobbles the effect of unlocking for many businesses and for central London as a whole.

So that office workers can return in greater numbers over the summer, office managers need to know the new guidance as soon as possible. Waiting until June will greatly reduce their ability to facilitate the timely return of their staff.

In addition to the many productivity – and mental health – benefits which will come from ending mandatory working from home, it will also provide vital boost to the businesses in city centres which rely on the trade generated by office workers. Again, this is particularly important for London's CAZ given the relatively low number of residents. Bringing those office workers back is critical in supporting the city's eco-system of smaller business, hospitality and cultural venues that rely on office workers as their customer base. The outcome of the review will also determine the viability of many, given the impact on capacity of the restrictions currently in place.

The existing social distancing rules also restrict the capacity of public transport networks and contribute to nervousness about travelling – the safety and hygiene measures that have been implemented notwithstanding. Reduced passenger numbers continue to hit the finances of Transport for London, which in recent years has been more dependent on farebox income than international comparators. It is vital that we maintain service levels throughout the coming months so that commuters and other travellers have a positive experience of returning to the network and to central London.

You often fondly recall from your time as Mayor of London the wonderful attractions that the city has to offer. The sooner we can open up and get people back, the sooner we can all experience them again – and to do this we need to have the conclusions of the social distancing review. We urge you to publish it as soon as possible; the viability of so many businesses depend on it.

Yours sincerely,

**Paul Barnes**, Chief Executive, Association of International Retail  
**John Dickie**, Interim Chief Executive, London First  
**Ros Morgan**, Chief Executive, Heart of London Business Alliance  
**Kate Nicholls**, Chief Executive, UK Hospitality  
**Jace Tyrell**, Chief Executive, New West End Company

cc. Paul Scully MP

