

MAYOR OF LONDON

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

Date: 28 September 2021

Dear Grant,

We are writing to you as members of the London Covid Business Forum, which looks at the immediate economic impacts of the pandemic on the capital, to call on the Government to take several key steps to fully reopen international travel and enable a vital part of our economy to bounce back as swiftly as possible.

We wholeheartedly welcome the recent announcement that aimed to simplify international travel. No longer requiring fully-vaccinated passengers to take a pre-departure test before boarding their flight to the UK, and allowing cheaper tests such as lateral flow tests to be used after arrival will make it easier for people to fly overseas, and visit friends and family, and will support our international travel industry and the millions of jobs that depend on it. The recent announcement by the US Government rescinding the ban on fully-vaccinated UK nationals from entering the country is also a real shot in the arm for the sector, and demonstrates clear faith in our vaccination programme.

However, the UK aviation market remains at half the level it was in 2019, and our European competitors like Spain, Italy, and France, have recovered more of their pre-Covid levels. In normal times aviation alone directly contributes £22bn each year to the economy, and its impact is also apparent on the wider economy - inbound tourism accounts for more than 7% of the UK economy, while our world-class universities receive £6.9bn each year from international students.

To build on the recent steps taken and help maximise the potential for a more rapid recovery, we would urge the Government to make the following changes:

First, the Government should create a real green list for fully vaccinated travellers, with travel from countries and regions with significantly lower rates of Covid-19 than the UK, with well-vaccinated populations and no known variants of concern, treated in the same way as domestic travel – with no restrictions, no tests, and no passenger locator form.

Second, the Government should allow NHS testing capacity to be used for travel and fund this appropriately. This can be done cheaply with rapid tests, that are only escalated to PCR tests in the event of a positive result.

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Third, we would urge the Government to be more transparent in its reasons and thresholds for changing the categorisation of a country. The continued risk of new variants emerging within or outside the UK is understood, and requires a careful approach. But making these publicly available and giving more than a week's notice of any changes would help individuals and businesses make informed decisions about their future travel and avoid a rush to return to the UK from any particular country. At the same time, we would call on you to review and simplify the passenger locator form, to make it easier for Border Force to process arrivals quickly and efficiently, and without undue bureaucracy.

These changes would be a real boost to the international travel and tourism industries and the UK economy as a whole, as we look to recover from the pandemic. The sector has now had two summers with minimal income and, crucially, no bespoke support from Government. As the furlough scheme comes to a close it is more important than ever that steps are taken to support one of our flagship sectors. Failure to do so risks undermining our hopes for a truly Global Britain.

Yours sincerely,

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Julie Brown
CFO, Burberry

Baroness Bull
House of Lords

Richard Burge
Chief Executive, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Councillor Elizabeth Campbell
Leader of the Council, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Executive Member for Business, Economy and Culture, London Councils

John Dickie
Chief Executive, London First

Bernard Donoghue
Co-Chair London Tourism Recovery Board and CEO of Association of Leading Visitor Attractions

Millie Kendall MBE
Chief Executive Officer, British Beauty Council

Asma Khan
Restaurateur, Founder, Darjeeling Express

Emma McClarkin
Chief Executive, British Beer & Pub Association

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Ojay McDonald

CEO, Association of Town and City Management

Catherine McGuinness

Policy Chair, City of London Corporation

Sir Adrian Montague

Chairman, TheCityUK Leadership Council

Kate Nicholls

Chief Executive, UKHospitality

Caroline Norbury MBE

Chief Executive, Creative Industries Federation

Simon Pitkeathley

Chief Executive Officer, Camden Town Unlimited

Sir Peter Rogers Chairman

New West End Company

cc: Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy