

Global Travel Taskforce sets out framework to safely reopen international travel

April 9, 2021



The Safety and Assurance Manager for Heathrow Express says the Global Travel Taskforce framework announcement on Friday (April 9) provides them with a clear commitment to a restart of international travel.

The comments from Louise Lucas comes as the framework to chart the safe return of international travel has been set out by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps.

A traffic light system, which will categorise countries based on risk alongside the restrictions required for travel, will be set up to protect the public and the vaccine rollout from international COVID-19 variants.

Key factors in the assessment will include:

- the percentage of their population that have been vaccinated
- the rate of infection
- the prevalence of variants of concern
- the country's access to reliable scientific data and genomic sequencing

Louise said: "Today's Global Travel Taskforce framework announcement provides us with a clear commitment to a restart of international travel. While we look forward to further details in May, and look forward to welcoming back leisure travellers in the summer, passengers travelling to Heathrow airport now, for essential journeys, will be welcomed onto newly refurbished trains and can be reassured that we are running a full service timetable every 15 minutes.

"Since the start of the pandemic we have increased our cleaning regime to a more rigorous standard to make sure our trains are thoroughly cleaned and sanitised many times every day, with extra attention paid to high contact touch points like handrails and buttons. Our trains also provide ample space for passengers to socially distance, for a safe and comfortable journey."

The report, produced by the Global Travel Taskforce, shows how international travel could resume from 17 May 2021 at the earliest, in an accessible and affordable way.

This includes the removal of the permission to travel form – meaning passengers would no longer need to prove they have a valid reason to leave the country.

The UK is a global leader in genome sequencing, which in positive cases allows the identification of variants of concern.

The risks posed by these variants remain significant, and restrictions for inbound passengers, such as 10-day managed quarantine, home quarantine, and stringent testing will remain in place – but will apply to people differently depending on whether the destination visited is categorised as 'green', 'amber' or 'red'.

- Green: arrivals will need to take a pre-departure test as well as a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test on or before day 2 of their arrival back into the UK – but will not need to quarantine on return (unless they receive a positive result) or take any additional tests, halving the cost of tests on their return from holiday
- Amber: arrivals will need to quarantine for a period of 10 days and take a pre-departure test, and a PCR test on day 2 and day 8 with the option for Test to Release on day 5 to end self-isolation early
- Red: arrivals will be subject to restrictions currently in place for 'red list' countries which include a 10-day stay in a managed quarantine hotel, pre-departure testing and PCR testing on day 2 and 8

Testing remains an essential part of protecting public health as restrictions begin to ease – with all arrivals who are not exempt required to book a pre-departure, day 2 and day 8 test before travelling.

Arrivals travelling from 'red list' countries should book a quarantine package before departure, and arrivals from 'amber' and 'green' countries will be required to book test packages before travelling from one of the government's approved list of providers.

Testing post-arrival remains an important tool in our wider measures to manage the risk of imported cases – allowing us to monitor positive tests and ensure people isolate, as well as identify and genomically sequence variants of concern.

We will also work with the travel industry and private testing providers ahead of international travel reopening, to see how we can further reduce the cost of travel for the British public, while ensuring travel is as safe as possible.

This could include cheaper tests being used when holidaymakers return home, as well as whether the government would be able to provide pre-departure tests.

It is too early to predict which countries will be on which list over the summer, and the government continues to consider a range of factors to inform the restrictions placed on them. We will set out by early May which countries will fall into which category, as well as confirming whether international travel can resume from 17 May 2021.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: “International travel is vital – it boosts businesses and underpins the UK economy – but more than that, it brings people together, connects families who have been kept apart, and allows us to explore new horizons.

“The framework announced today will help allow us to reopen travel safely and sustainably, ensure we protect our hard-won achievements on the vaccine roll out, and offer peace of mind to both passengers and industry as we begin to take trips abroad once again.”

The UK will also play a leading role in the development of international standards around a digital travel certification system. The Department for Transport (DfT) is working across government to consider the role certification could play in facilitating outbound travel, for those countries which have systems in place. Work also continues to develop a system that would facilitate travel certification for inbound international travel.

To give passengers more certainty when travelling, a ‘green watchlist’ will be introduced to help identify countries most at risk of moving from ‘green’ to ‘amber’. The watchlist will provide greater assurance for those who wish to travel abroad.

While the watchlist will warn travellers of potential changes in advance, the government will not hesitate to act immediately should the data show that countries risk ratings have changed.

The allocation of countries will be kept under review and respond to emerging evidence, with a particular focus on variants of concern.

Restrictions will be formally reviewed on 28 June 2021 to take account of the domestic and international health picture, and to see whether current measures could be rolled back. Further formal reviews will take place at checkpoints no later than 31 July and 1 October 2021.

To ensure the UK’s borders remain safe and efficient when passenger flows increase, the government has

also announced plans to digitise the passenger locator form, integrating it into the UK border system and enabling checks to take place at e-gates by autumn 2021.

To further boost consumer confidence, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will be given additional enforcement powers to act on airlines that have breached consumer rights – with a dedicated consultation on how to use additional tools to enforce consumer rights expected later this year.

A COVID-19 charter will also be introduced from 17 May 2021, clearly setting out what is required of passengers and what their rights are while measures remain in place.

Photo credit: Heathrow Express