



## UK Airport Consultative Committees

### Liaison Group

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#### **BY EMAIL**

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

9 July 2020

Dear Mr Shapps,

#### **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on UK airports**

I would like to take this opportunity of introducing you to the work of UKACCs – the Liaison Group of UK Airport Consultative Committees. The Group represents 23 airport consultative committees (ACCs) from the UK's largest airports (ranging from major international airports such as Heathrow and Gatwick to small regional airports such as Inverness and Bournemouth).

Our member ACCs are acutely aware that the COVID-19 outbreak has had an unprecedented impact on national and local economies across the UK with all sectors of the economy facing very uncertain and challenging times ahead. The UK's airports face a long and challenging road to recovery so it is vitally important that all affected parties should work alongside Government.

Given the breadth and reach of an ACC's membership and the independence of their Chairmen, they are well placed to assist in helping to create a more sustainable aviation industry at a local level as well as at the national level through UKACCs' participation and collaboration in the Government's work. ACCs individually, and UKACCs collectively, provide a unique independent platform for dialogue across a wide range of interests around the UK's major airports which can help shape recovery plans. ACCs are always conscious of the need to ensure a balance is struck and, using their experience of mediating conflicting interests, can assist in building a common understanding on realising how a healthy aviation sector can work in harmony with local communities.

The Government has required airports to provide consultation facilities at their airport. In practice this has resulted in airports establishing an ACC bringing together a wide range of interests (including local community, environmental, local authority, economic, business, air passengers, tourism, employees and the aviation industry) to develop a mutual understanding and find a common view on a range of matters. As you can imagine the Independent Chairs of ACCs have the difficult task of ensuring all

views, which are often conflicting, are discussed and a balanced approach to addressing issues is achieved. UKACCs brings together the Chairs and Secretaries of the ACCs from the largest UK airports to share best practice and to discuss matters of common interest which enables us to provide an independent, collective voice to Government, the CAA and other key stakeholders on strategy and policy development. This spread of airports has enabled UKACCs to represent national together with regional views. The combination of ACCs which are truly representative of their local demographic and their Independent Chairmen provides a powerful voice to assist your Department in its policy and strategy development.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought international aviation to a near-standstill not only impacting on the aviation and travel industry but also the regional economies around our airports which benefit directly and indirectly from an airport's operation. As you are aware aviation plays a significant role in the economy especially trade, cargo, tourism and hospitality. Those regions/areas around airports appear to be hardest hit by the dramatic downturn as revealed by the [Centre for Cities](#) work on the impact of COVID-19. UKACCs recognises that regional and sectoral variances need targeted support as highlighted in the Chancellor's recent summer budget announcement. It is clear however that a strong aviation recovery plan is key to support regional recovery, particularly those that rely on the connectivity (domestic and international) and trade opportunities airports bring to their region.

It is vitally important that all affected parties should work alongside Government in developing the strategies for recovery of not only the aviation industry but also the wider economy. The active engagement and partnership working with airports, local authorities, local economic partnerships and businesses should help ensure that a collaborative approach is adopted in planning the next steps to recovery and identifying what additional support is needed during the recovery of airport operations and reviving the national, regional and local economies around our airports. ACCs, led by their Independent Chairmen, have a key role in engaging with local authorities and communities, including business groups, LEPs and environmental groups in helping airports identify steps needed to support the recovery of local economic wealth.

Given the breadth and reach of an ACC's membership and the independence of their Chairmen, they are well placed to assist in helping to create a more sustainable aviation industry at a local level as well as at the national level through UKACCs' participation and collaboration in the Government's work. ACCs individually, and UKACCs collectively, provide a unique independent platform for dialogue across a wide range of interests around the UK's major airports which can help shape recovery plans.

UKACCs welcomes the recommendations of the House of Commons Transport Committee's report on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector and likewise urges the Government to resume as a matter of urgency its review of regional connectivity with a view to publication by the end of 2020.

Your recent announcement on lifting the quarantine requirements in England for lower risk countries in time for holidays this summer is also welcomed. UKACCs hopes that the Government can continue to engage with the devolved administrations to bring about a similar lifting of quarantine arrangements at the safest and earliest possible time. UKACCs also agrees that continuing negotiations on the possible establishment of other international travel corridors is an essential component of the aviation recovery strategy which in turn will help to ease the wider economic downturn. What is clear however is that the aviation industry is unlikely to recover quickly given the on-going global health emergency. There is a need therefore for the Government to continue to assess and discuss what further business support measures are needed to help airports and their regional economies through the period of recession particularly where demand for air travel remains low in a way that ensures that as demand returns the workforce needed to support an airport's operation, including air traffic controllers, is on hand to respond quickly.

The continuation of the Government's furlough scheme for the aviation sector is important and needs to offer flexibility. Whilst the Chancellor's recently announced job retention bonus for employers who bring back furloughed staff and job placement schemes for young people are commendable, UKACCs questions whether given the on-going restrictions on air travel a sector specific job retention scheme is needed. UKACCs also acknowledges the calls for extending the temporary business rates relief scheme to airports similar to those temporary relief schemes now in place in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Such an approach is supported provided local authorities who grant this relief will be fully reimbursed so as to preserve local authorities' own income and budgets which are already impacted by the pandemic.

The desire to rebuild aviation swiftly and efficiently must not however be at any cost and the opportunity should be taken to review, as part of the national recovery strategy, sustainable growth measures particularly in respect of addressing the environmental and negative community impacts such as seeking faster reductions in carbon emissions, better noise management and improved air pollution (including the need for standards on ultrafine particles). This effective re-start of the aviation industry provides an unique opportunity to seek to better balance of the positive and negative effects of the aviation industry.

ACCs are acutely aware of the need to ensure a balance is struck and can assist in building a common understanding on realising how a healthy aviation sector can work in harmony with local communities. As part of the Government's work opportunities could be taken to explore the need for a better balance of real capacity at our airports and in the skies which reflects a sensible margin for system resilience. Such as how airports achieve maximum use of scarce runway resource; airlines scheduling unachievable turnaround times to maximise aircraft utilisation; reorganisation and better demand management of the airspace system; establishing national KPIs that reduce extended aircraft arrivals routings and departure delays; and improved environmental performance, other KPI monitoring and reporting. Such measures would provide steps towards improved environmental performance, benefitting airlines, airports and local communities, thus helping to build trust between the industry and communities.

The Government's establishment of the Net Zero Transport Council to advise on how to eliminate carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector is a commendable initiative and UKACCs hopes that as the work of the Council progresses, there will be an opportunity for us to participate in the Council's work in respect of how airports can develop and accelerate their net zero targets. Needless to say, UKACCs is ready to participate in any specialised groups that may be established.

I hope you can take into consideration the important points I have raised and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you and your Minister for Aviation, ways in which UKACCs can use its unique position and assist in the recovery plans for aviation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Colin Flack  
Chair  
UKACCs

CC. Minister for Aviation

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