

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

Sent via email: grant@shapps.com

28 August 2019

Dear Grant Shapps

Change for the future – protecting UK aviation

I'm writing to you with the explicit aim of avoiding further job cuts at Bristol Airport and to consider a change in policy for travel, by implementing a testing regime at airports for arriving passengers in order save our declining aviation industry.

During the past six months the aviation sector has been subject to its most challenging period ever in its history. Bristol Airport has experienced a massive reduction in traffic levels – 99% down during the lockdown period, with a stunted recovery as a direct result of the quarantine changes being implemented. Unfortunately, this has meant job losses in the region of c.750 – 1000 across the airport.

It's abundantly clear that we will have to live with Covid-19 for some considerably period of time and we're well aware of the need to ensure that health, safety and security are of paramount importance and we continue to follow guidance from the Department of Transport on the implementation of operational changes to support our customers and staff.

However, we are also concerned about the impact that the quarantine restrictions are having on the aviation industry – these frequently change and are particularly acute, causing disruption for passenger bookings and a substantive decline in consumer confidence.

We absolutely recognise the urgent need to establish a change in policy for travel between countries, with clear safeguards in place to minimise the impact on health as illustrated elsewhere across Europe and the World. To support this we have recently surveyed our passengers and, from a sample of over 5,000, 87% of them were supportive of a move towards a testing regime on arrival if this meant that the quarantine period could be shortened and of those people surveyed, 66% were prepared to pay up to £50 to be tested.

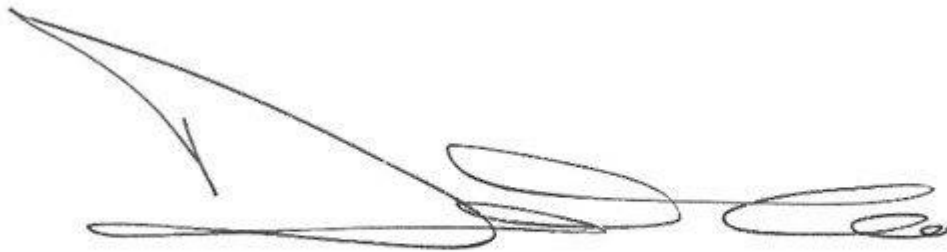
With both consumer support for a change towards a testing regime and the prospect of even more job losses across aviation, I strongly urge you to reconsider this issue - we firmly believe there is support for this and see an opportunity to pilot a testing scheme to track its viability and effectiveness, and Bristol Airport is ready to progress and implement this quickly – having already researched this prospect.

Without this, there will be a further decline in consumer confidence for travel to and from the UK, a reduced demand for air travel which will have long term and industry wide implications, including route connectivity losses – impacting on trade and a loss of skills in the UK, our work on sustainability will be impacted with funding and resources no longer available and this will no doubt result in further redundancies and a loss of future employment opportunities across the airport and the UK.

The case for change has never been clearer and I strongly urge you and your Cabinet colleagues to act urgently to address the current blanket quarantine system for a more informed and objective approach which gives confidence to those travelling as well as to the wider UK population.

If you wish to discuss any of these points further, please do not hesitate to contact me dave.lees@bristolairport.com and 07710 370069.

Best wishes



Dave Lees
CEO
Bristol Airport

cc.
Dr Liam Fox, MP
John Penrose, MP
Kelly Tolhurst, Aviation Minister