



Department for
Transport

From the Minister of State
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Dear Ms Street

Thank you for your letter of 13 August covering a range of important and topical aviation issues. Please accept my apologies for the delay in sending a formal response.

I fully recognise the important role played by UKACCS and the individual Airport Consultative Committees. As you know, my officials attended the recent UKACCS annual meeting at London City Airport which I understand was a great success.

Your letter covers a wide range of issues which I will address in turn.

Aviation policy

We have not yet decided whether or on what timescale we may wish to produce a new over-arching policy framework for airports and aviation. The Government will issue a more detailed statement on this in due course. On the question of the South East Airports Taskforce, the primary focus is on addressing operational matters at the three main London airports in the face of no new runway capacity, with the accent on improving conditions for users. It is not about wider policy formulation, which is under separate consideration. In drawing up the membership, we have had to strike a

difficult balance between having a reasonable cross section of interests on the group and keeping it to a manageable size with a clear focus on airport operations. We have no current plans to extend the membership, but I plan to keep this under review in the light of the specific issues that are raised in the group.

I can assure you that we do not want this forum to be exclusive. We will look for opportunities to involve others at working level as the work proceeds, and will be publishing the terms of reference and minutes of meetings on the DfT website, once agreed. In addition, Taskforce members are being encouraged to ensure engagement with the wider airport community through existing channels, such as the Airport Consultative Committees.

Preservation of slots for domestic services

On the question of preserving slots for domestic services at Heathrow, you have noted that it remains open for regional stakeholders to apply to the Secretary of State for the imposition of a Public Service Obligation (PSO) on a given route. However, you have expressed concern that PSOs can only be used to secure a link to a "London" airport, rather than a specific airport such as Heathrow, which makes it difficult to feed into other international services.

As you will be aware, if a decision were taken to try to modify the PSO rules so as to secure slots at specific airports, this would give rise to some difficult legal obstacles to overcome. Even if it proved to be possible to get over these legal hurdles, caution would be needed because what you propose would involve Government intervention in the use of very valuable slots. You will appreciate that such intervention could be controversial.

That said, I would be interested to hear any ideas you have regarding how routes can be preserved to serve regional airports from Heathrow and other London airports in an efficient way for air passengers.

Improving the passenger experience

As your letter acknowledges, the Government has announced its decision not to extend Passenger Focus's remit to passenger representation in aviation and has said it instead wishes to make existing arrangements for passenger representation work better. We believe that the Airport Consultative Committees, particularly those with passenger service committees, can play an important role in helping take this work forward. We are therefore considering how to make better use of existing arrangements and the future role of Airport Consultative Committees in liaison with the national consumer representation body.

I understand that at UKACCS's recent annual meeting the Civil Aviation Authority explained that they are working on some best practice guidelines which could be incorporated in the revision of the Department's guidelines for Airport Consultative Committees. As you know my officials have recently met with UKACCS and a number of Chairmen from individual Airport Consultative Committees to progress this. I understand that this was a most constructive meeting. The next step is for officials to meet with representatives of a selection of airports for their input.

Air Passenger Duty

Thank you for sharing your letter to Justine Greening. I would encourage you to maintain your discussions with HM Treasury and participate in any consultation on the issue, should the Chancellor decide to consult on major changes to Air Passenger Duty.

Finally, I note that you have requested a meeting to discuss issues relating to the passenger experience. I am in no doubt of the potential for Airport Consultative Committees to have an important role in enhancing the passenger experience. Given that my officials have recently met with you and a cross section of committee chairs, I suggest that we let this proceed and see what develops from those discussions.

*Regards
Theresa*

THE RT. HON. THERESA VILLIERS