

Speech: An airspace fit for the 21st century

Good evening everyone.

I'd like first of all to take this opportunity to update you on the situation in London tonight.

I'm sure as you will all know earlier today (5 March 2019) a number of suspicious packets were discovered today at locations across the city – including at Heathrow and London City Airports, as well as at Waterloo Station.

Specialist officers of the Met Police have assessed them as containing small improvised explosive devices are now investigating.

While we wait for the police's work to take course, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to officers for their efforts and their rapid response.

And to all the staff involved at these sites for their swift action and fortitude in dealing with these incidents and for keeping passengers on the move. The airports' responses have been exemplary.

My department is monitoring the situation and is in close communication with the police, Home Office, British Transport Police and other relevant organisations.

I did of course want to start my speech this evening on a different note by thanking Ed for his chairmanship of the AOA.

As I'm sure we all know over the past 11 years he's been a really staunch advocate for airports, ensuring that the industry's voice is clearly heard, its needs articulated.

And representing a sector which has seen remarkable growth over that period.

And which continued to develop and expand in 2018.

Yet again passenger numbers reached all-time highs at airports across the UK.

With over 28 million travellers passing through Manchester, more than 14 million at Edinburgh and almost 9 million at Bristol.

And you have all continued to forge new connections across the globe.

With Gatwick's direct flights to Shanghai, Manchester's new connection to Mumbai and Stansted's link to the Middle East.

And it's exciting to see scheduled passenger flights to return to Carlisle

Airport for the first time in a quarter of a century, providing Cumbria with new air connections to London, Belfast and Dublin.

A great example of how our regional airports are thriving.

Over the past year I've witnessed that success unfold at other airports like Newquay – which plays such a critical role in keeping the south-west connected.

The great strides you have made improving the passenger experience.

When I opened new facilities at Leeds Bradford and Luton.

And I saw how Gatwick is readying itself for the future when I visited Boeing's new service hangar – built to maintain some of the world's most energy efficient aircraft.

And this was a year in which airports continued to play a vital role in powering our economy.

You've not only handled tens of billions of pounds worth of freight and with the wider aviation sector, supported hundreds of thousands of jobs.

As Ed mentioned, many of you have also pledged to improve gender equality throughout the industry so these great opportunities are open to all.

Through the [Women in aviation and aerospace charter](#), which now boasts support from almost 100 organisations – representing a significant proportion of the sector.

The launch of the charter really was a pivotal moment in building an industry in which women can thrive at every level.

I would reiterate Ed's encouragement to add your organisation's name to the charter if it's not already included.

And I'd like to thank you all for your efforts in getting this initiative off the ground.

As well as my ministerial colleague [Baroness Sugg for her hard work on addressing the aviation sector's gender gap](#).

This is a hugely important issue at any time and it's one that's particularly pertinent today in the week of International Women's Day

I know that as a sector you've been doing some great work on this front.

With EasyJet aiming for one fifth of new pilot entrants to be female by 2020.

While Flybe's campaign to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and encourage more girls to consider a career in the skies, has been a success.

And of course I welcome the news today that Virgin Atlantic will be revising its make up code for flight attendants.

However as Liz has highlighted we cannot be complacent.

There is still more that we can do.

For instance, by providing the environment where everyone can thrive by introducing family friendly policies, such as enhanced maternity pay, that have been shown to help attract and retain women in other sectors.

So, new routes, new developments and a new commitment to ensuring opportunities are open to all.

It's been another impressive 12 months for the aviation sector.

That's why I haven't been able to resist recruiting aviation expertise to help the railways become more customer-focussed.

Andrew Haines, recently of the CAA, is now leading Network Rail, while Keith Williams, formerly of BA is running our [Rail Review](#).

I would like to thank Richard Moriarty for the great work he's done as successor to Andrew.

But to keep this industry at the forefront of progress, we need to keep modernising aviation itself.

You don't need me to tell you that reforming the way we use our airspace is among the most pressing of tasks.

Our airspace was structured for the propeller driven planes of the 1950s.

Quite simply it doesn't meet the demands of the jet age – never mind the needs of 21st century aircraft – fitted with sophisticated onboard technologies like performance based navigation.

It's vital this changes.

So we can make better use of new technology to cut aircraft noise and carbon emissions.

So that holidaymakers' long awaited breaks are not disrupted by flights that fail to leave on time.

So that passengers can continue to enjoy good value flights to the widest possible range of destinations.

Last year we set out our clear support and political backing for modernisation in order to deliver quicker, quieter and cleaner journeys, as well as greater capacity.

But we now need to make the national case. For while research shows that the majority of people are in favour of modernisation, 8 in 10 have no idea about our plans on this front.

So, we need to work harder at conveying the message of why modernisation is

needed – ahead of the formal consultations in 2021 and 2022 on proposed new flight paths.

And we're also consulting on new legislation to support modernisation.

But we need you, the airports, to engage locally. Listening to communities' concerns. Explaining the issues. Cutting through misconceptions. And making sure everyone understands why we're doing this.

So, thank you for your engagement on this subject so far.

We all know the heartfelt strength of feeling that is often evoked by changes to flight paths and airspace.

But by working together we can help people gain a deeper understanding of this complex yet crucial issue.

And despite the challenges involved, I've no doubt we will succeed in making the case for an airspace that's ready to meet the needs of communities and the demands of the 21st century.

Engagement with local communities on aviation related matters has come a long way in recent years.

And we are seeking to continue in this vein, through the [Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise, \(ICCAN\)](#) that will advise the government on noise mitigation and how the needs of communities can best be served.

I'm delighted that Robert Light, its independent commissioner, has joined us this evening.

These independent bodies have got to hold our feet to the fire and have those difficult conversations.

Such conversations are vitally important. Not just because they provide an opportunity to explain our plans.

But also, because they enable us to learn more about the needs and concerns of people affected by a changing aviation sector.

Two great recent examples of that were the consultations on the [Airports National Policy Statement](#) – a crucial first step towards securing much needed extra capacity at Heathrow. This capacity will boost regional connectivity and will benefit the whole country.

And on our new [aviation strategy](#).

They've helped spread the message that while growth is needed for this country's prosperity, it cannot come at any cost.

Airlines and airports must earn the right to grow.

Communities must be supported, passenger voices heard and, as Ed points out, the environment protected.

Our [Aviation 2050 consultation](#) not only asks the sector to consider what it can do for the people and places that surround them.

It also proposes new standards to boost the experience of all passengers.

I know, of course, that travellers' welfare is of paramount importance to everyone in this room.

You've come together to tackle disruptive passengers by creating an industry-wide code of practice.

You've done some excellent work training your staff to be aware of the challenges faced by those travelling with a hidden disability when they pass through airports.

And you've introduced measures like Gatwick's recently opened sensory room, which provides a place where travellers with autism, dementia, cognitive impairment or other special needs, can relax before their flights.

The next step is to build on that good practice, through Aviation 2050.

And our proposed [passenger charter](#) will lay out our expectations for how we expect every airline and airport to behave towards travellers.

From ensuring wheelchairs are safely stowed in the aircraft hold to [making sure passengers with allergies have consistent information](#).

I know many of you have already contributed to the consultation through meetings, discussions and round tables with my department

Your thoughts are hugely valued and I'd like to encourage you to continue to share them with us.

But while I am well aware of the importance of preparing for the future, I am also conscious that airports have faced new challenges in recent months.

The utterly irresponsible and illegal drone activity at Gatwick, which caused so much disruption for more than a hundred thousand travellers at Christmas highlighted an emerging threat that has had a huge impact here in the UK and also around the world, such as in New Jersey.

We are doing everything in our power to ensure that such incidents being repeated.

Last year we also passed legislation that means from [November all operators of drones must register and pilots complete a competency test](#).

Legislation is important. That's why we've just strengthened the existing legal protections for airport perimeters. But this an issue where both enforcement and education are key.

So, our forthcoming Drones Bill will give the police enhanced powers to tackle drones mis-use, including the ability to stop and search.

Of course, I recognise the concerns raised by Ed about Brexit.

But the Prime Minister, and the rest of government, remain determined to leave the EU with a deal that works for the aviation industry.

As you know we have reached some important milestones.

We have agreed new [bilateral flight arrangements with 11 third countries, including the US](#) and Canada – ensuring flights to those countries will continue after March 29.

And the EU has provisionally agreed legislation that will ensure flights to and from it will continue in the event of no deal, so passengers can continue to book flights with confidence.

The UK will reciprocate by providing equivalent rights to airlines from those European states – enabling flights to carry on in any scenario. And very shortly I will be setting out the detail of this.

But regardless of the outcome of negotiations, my department is seeking post Brexit arrangements that maximise operational and commercial flexibility for airports and airlines.

As you know, we are at a critical stage in the negotiations, and in the progress of Brexit legislation in Parliament. Geoffrey Cox is in Brussels now working on that.

So, I hope soon we will have much greater clarity.

In the meantime, I'd like to stress how much we value your patience and support throughout the negotiation period. Please also be assured that, no matter what happens, planes will keep flying.

That process of engagement and partnership will of course continue.

What the Brexit debate has shown us, time and time again, is the true value of aviation to our economy and the country as a whole.

That's why it's such a priority in the negotiations.

Why we've launched our [Aviation strategy consultation](#). And why we're moving forward together on plans for a modernised airspace.

I'm certain that all this crucial work today will enable this great industry, which has flourished now for 100 years to shine even more brightly in the future.

So thank you all for listening.

And have a great evening.