



Willie Walsh
Director General

8 March 2022

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500
United States of America

Dear Mr. Zients,

I viewed with great interest President Biden's State of the Union address and his call for a reset on COVID-19 policies. As Director General of the international Air Transport Association (IATA) and our more than 290 international airline members, including six of the largest US passenger airlines, I strongly support the President's conclusion that COVID-19 need no longer control our lives.

As you know, the international airline industry has been significantly harmed by COVID-19 and the myriad government responses to the virus. While we have begun to see signs of a recovery, the industry today has nearly 50% less passenger traffic than it did prior to COVID-19, and we have suffered total losses in 2020-21 of \$189.5 billion with a further \$11.6 billion in losses expected this year. We do not expect global passenger numbers to return to 2019 levels until 2024. When healthy, the global airline industry supports \$3.5 trillion in global GDP and contributes \$779 billion to US GDP.

Throughout the pandemic, IATA and the airlines we represent have done their best to support governments as they attempted to control the spread of this dangerous disease. Airlines across the world voluntarily implemented health and safety protocols to provide maximum protection to our customers and crew. We have also worked with the US Government and other governments around the world to provide operational know-how and support on various proposed COVID-19 policies. While we have not always agreed with governments' approach on these policies, we are confident that industry and government have both benefitted from this ongoing cooperation.

The past few weeks have seen a dramatic shift by many governments around the world, including most recently my native Ireland, to ease or remove COVID-19 travel restrictions and requirements as the disease enters its endemic phase. I understand that under your leadership the Biden Administration is studying when and how to remove COVID-19 travel restrictions. To that end, I offer the following recommendations for your consideration:

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International Air Transport Association,

800 Place Victoria, P.O. Box 113
Montréal, QC, Canada H4Z 1M1

IATA Center, 33 Route de l'Aéroport, P.O. Box 416,
Geneva 15 Airport – 1215, Switzerland.

Tel: +41 (0) 22 770 2903
Email: iatadg@iata.org

iata.org

Mask mandate: We urge the Biden Administration not to renew its mask mandate for transportation when it lapses on March 18, 2022. It makes no sense to continue to require masks on airplanes when they are no longer being required in shopping malls, theatres or offices. Aircraft are equipped with highly sophisticated hospital quality filtration systems and have much higher air flow and air exchange rates than most other indoor environments where mask mandates already have been removed. Several Scandinavian countries have removed their mask mandates while other leading governments have made mask wearing either explicitly voluntary or are no longer enforcing a masking requirement. If the Biden Administration believes that further study of this requirement is necessary before it is lifted, we urge you to extend the mandate for only an additional 30 days or until mask mandates are removed for any other form of transportation.

Pre-departure testing: We strongly support the growing list of leading countries that have decided to remove their pre-departure testing requirement. President Biden is rightfully proud of the high level of full vaccination achieved in the US and the various therapeutics now available to keep those who become infected out of hospitals. Any minimal remaining public health benefits from testing are far outweighed by the detrimental impact this policy continues to have on people's travel freedom and livelihoods.

Passenger attestation: Concurrent with removing pre-departure testing should be the removal of the requirement that passengers complete a long intrusive questionnaire on their testing and vaccination status. The attestation results in large costs for airlines and potential threats to passengers' privacy while offering little to no health or law enforcement benefits. We recommend that the attestation be eliminated in favor of language outlining civil and criminal penalties for presentation of false vaccination records to airline staff by non-US citizens.

While decisions as to whether or not to remove travel restrictions should be based solely on the health concerns that resulted in their being promulgated in the first place, it is important to note that countries that have removed these no-longer fit for purpose travel restrictions have already seen a significant upswing in forward bookings. International travel was artificially constrained by COVID-19 and government policies. We expect a robust recovery when the United States and other leading countries join the European Commission, the United Kingdom and countries across the globe that have concluded that travel restrictions are no longer necessary from a public health perspective.

Over the longer term, we look forward to working with the Biden Administration to remove or modify all remaining COVID-19 travel restrictions, including the vaccination mandate for non-US citizens and the contact tracing program.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Willie Walsh
Director General
International Air Transport Association