

Scene setter

The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) has requested that you meet [REDACTED] [REDACTED] to discuss the return to safe travel within and into Europe, sustainable aviation and files such as the European Slots Regulation. In addition, they would also like to discuss the role of the business travel industry in delivering the European Green Deal.

GBTA is one of the world's premier business travel and meetings trade organisations. It is headquartered in the Washington, D.C. area. It has operations on six continents. Its 9,000-plus members manage more than \$345 billion in global business travel and meetings expenditures annually. GBTA delivers education, events, research, advocacy and media to a global network of over 28,000 travel professionals

GBTA shares the EU ambition to return to safe and sustainable travel for fully vaccinated travellers, thereby boosting economies and reviving social ties. Further, GBTA appreciates the ambitious nature of the Fit for 55 package (FF55) and looks forward to contributing to the reduction targets defined in it.

Objective(s)

- To explain current COM initiatives of interest to GBTA and, where appropriate, to encourage their involvement.

Key Messages

COVID AND SAFE TRAVEL

- The situation remains extremely fluid, as we just saw with the existence of the new South African variant. So whatever I may say today may not be true in few weeks.
- The air traffic situation has been steadily recovering. For mid-November, Eurocontrol shows traffic at almost 80% of 2019 levels. But who knows what will be the situation in few weeks with the new variant.
- The main tool for recovery remains a successful vaccination campaign. Almost 65% of the EU population has now been fully vaccinated (76% of the adult population).

Unfortunately, levels of vaccination differ significantly between Member States [*85% are fully vaccinated in Portugal, but only 19% in Bulgaria*]. This constitutes a continuing risk.

- Vaccination should not be a prerequisite for travel. However, travel can only properly resume if vaccinated passengers are exempt from quarantine.

EU Digital Covid Certificate (EU DCC)

- Air traffic levels have risen significantly since the July introduction of the EU-DCC. By now, over 600 million certificates have been generated – a testimony to the success of the initiative.

- IATA has endorsed the EU DCC, agreeing that it may be a blueprint for a global solution. Among third countries, there is strong interest in aligning with our system. *[Today the EU-DCC can be used in 49 countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas.]*

Travel into the EU (from 3rd Countries)

- Council Recommendation 2020/912 currently regulates travel into the EU. COM will soon propose a revision on non-essential travel with the aim of simplifying procedures.

The notification threshold for a third country would be changed. Ultimately, we seek to move to a person-based approach by removing country lists and making travel into the EU conditional on immunisation status or the traveller's function (e.g. essential travel).

- We welcome US reopening to vaccinated travellers and acceptance of the EU DCC as proof of vaccination.
- Your views and feedback?

Travel within the EU

- Last week, COM adopted a proposal for a new Council Recommendation on facilitating safe free movement within the EU. This takes account of the success of the EU DCC, vaccination uptake and the changing epidemiological situation.
- The proposal simplifies travel measures: holders of an EU DCC should normally not be subject to additional restrictions, wherever they travel in the EU.
- The (adapted) traffic light map would serve mainly for information (but also to coordinate measures for areas where the level of viral circulation is particularly low or high).
- The proposal also includes a standard validity period of 9 months for vaccination certificates issued after the primary vaccination series, to avoid diverging approaches between Member States. The 9 month-period takes into account the guidance of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on the administration of booster doses as of 6 months, and provides for an additional period of 3 months to ensure that national vaccination campaigns can adjust and citizens can have access to boosters.
- We hope the Member States will adopt the proposal swiftly. The Commission proposes that these updates apply as of 10 January 2022.

EU SUPPORT TO TRANSPORT (ESPECIALLY UNDER RRF)

- The transport sector will be a major beneficiary of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). *[Our assessment is that RRF will almost double the EU funds allocated to mobility under the next MFF, with more than €93 billion from RRF (16.5% of total).]*
- Over 85% of the funds dedicated to transport *[more than €80 billion]* are allocated to the greening and sustainability of transport modes. *[A high share is dedicated to rail projects (50%). Road investments amount to about 30% of the transport-related funding and public infrastructure, multi-modal transport and active mobility amount to about 14%.]* RRF funding for transport will essentially support investment in infrastructure modernisation.

These investments will also indirectly benefit the business travel industry.

- The content of the national recovery plans is now set. Twenty two (of 27) national plans have been formally approved. We are now entering the implementation phase.
- In some cases, project implementation foresees the launch of calls for proposals (for example, to the benefit of local authorities) and the exact nature or location of the investments remain to be determined. This might be an opportunity for your organisation.

EMISSION REDUCTIONS – THE GREEN DEAL AND SUSTAINABLE AND SMART MOBILITY STRATEGY

- The SSMS is a “deliverable” to the European Green Deal. It sets out a roadmap towards a transport future. It is structured on three key objectives: making the European transport system (i) sustainable, (ii) smart and (iii) resilient.
- While mobility offers many benefits, it also has costs, not least in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, poor air quality, water pollution, congestion, accidents and noise. Today, transport accounts for a quarter of EU GHG and unlike other sectors, emissions from transport have risen slightly over recent years.
- Thus, we need a credible path towards the 90% reduction in transport-related GHG emissions by 2050 set out in the Green Deal. To do this, we must: (i) make all transport modes more sustainable; (ii) make sustainable alternatives widely available in a multimodal transport system; (iii) put in place the right incentives (such as fair and efficient pricing to drive the transition).
- Greater transport efficiency is part of the answer. To achieve this, digitalisation and innovation are essential.

- “Resilience” is important too because COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerabilities of the transport system and thus the single market. Without an effective and efficient single market, we cannot reap the full benefits of digitalisation and data and the innovations they can bring.
- Having adopted the SSMS in December last year, we are now translating it into concrete actions, inter alia through Fit for 55 (FF55) *[see below]*.
- The July FF55 package included initiatives on: (i) AFIR; (ii) ReFuel EU Aviation ; (iii) FuelEU Maritime.

The next FF55 instalment in December will focus on Intelligent Transport Systems, TEN-T, rail freight corridors and passenger rail.

AVIATION

- Meanwhile our coverage of ongoing aviation files continues.

Slots

- Despite overall positive developments in air traffic levels in the EU, some long-haul intercontinental markets still lag behind significantly. *[The Chinese market is currently down by 51% due to new flight restrictions designed to contain Covid-19.]*
- Thus, COM may again take action *[adoption of another delegated act]* to extend slot relief.

The industry still needs to be able to use the exception on the justified non-use of slots (“force majeure”) in cases where countries have imposed / retained travel restrictions.

- As to the new use-rate, we believe that clear improvements in traffic levels justify a higher rate (than the current 50%).

Single European Sky and the Single Market

- As traffic levels recover, we must avoid a repetition of the 2018-2019 capacity crisis. Reform the Single European Sky (SES) is key.

We must both address the issues of the past and ensure an efficient and resilient European traffic management framework this is scalable, effective and environmentally sustainable for the future.

- Through SES reform, we can make important savings.

Enabling direct routing remains the most effective of the proposed network reforms. That is why we seek to strengthening the network approach.

On the environmental front, mandatory modulation of charges at EU level can help reduce aviation's carbon footprint. (This is another of "basket of measures" needed to ensure aviation's meaningful contribution to the European Green Deal.)

With reformed economic governance, the performance of air navigation services, including on climate [*horizontal and vertical flight efficiency*] and environmental [*noise; NOx*] performance, should improve.

Digitisation will help tackle the inflexibility we see today. That is why SES reform seeks to build a true European market for data services supporting air traffic service providers and improving efficiency.

- Further, COM has just relaunched its review of the Air Services Regulation. A legislative proposal is scheduled for the end of 2022.
- Moreover, a study was recently launched to assess the impacts of Covid-19 on aviation. The study's findings (due summer 2022) will provide a base for COM's policies (such as the Air Services Regulation, Airport Charges Directive, Slots Regulation).

FIT FOR 55

- A key sector such as aviation obviously figures prominently in our sustainability and decarbonisation plans. Aviation in its different aspects thus also features in FF55.
- We will extend the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). Airlines currently pay for 50% of their emissions. We propose to phase out free allowances gradually / by end 2026.
- With our ReFuelEU initiative, we propose to boost sustainable aviation fuels by obliging fuel suppliers to blend at least 2% by 2025, 5% by 2030, and 20% by 2035.

We include sub-targets for e-fuels, with 0.7% by 2030 and 5% by 2035.

The initiative has flanking measures such as the Renewable and Low Carbon Fuels Alliance and funding mechanisms (on R&D and the Green Taxonomy).

- Under the Energy Taxation directive (ETD), removing the kerosene tax exemption on intra-EU flights will support the uptake of SAF. From 2023 to 2033, fossil kerosene will be gradually taxed, but SAF including e-fuels will enjoy a minimum zero rate during a 10-year transition period (with very low rates thereafter).

- The EU remains committed to implementing the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSA – which started its offsetting phase in January).

However, to reflect EU climate ambitions, we will pay particular attention to certain aspects of CORSA such as the need to avoid double counting of emissions, the need for high levels of state participation and the compliance requirement.

- On 21 April, COM adopted a package of measures to help improve the flow of money towards sustainable activities across the EU. This includes the EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act (which already included certain criteria for aviation i.e. low carbon infrastructure).

Defensive Points

SLOTS

Slot relief merely distorts competition. Why is it still necessary?

- Eurocontrol data show that intra-EEA traffic is progressing to recovery. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that some global regions are lagging behind (because of travel restrictions).
- We must strike a balance between being pro-competitive while also recognising that, due to Covid, some airlines remain unable to meet the 80% use requirement.

FIT FOR 55

The Fit for 55 proposal on ETS casts doubt on the EU commitment to CORSA. Do you still support it?

- Yes, definitely!
- We want CORSA to succeed in the Carbon Neutral Goal from 2020. This will require high levels of participation and robust environmental integrity. The COM proposal should promote both of these (and counter any potential CORSA weaknesses).
- The fact that we propose to maintain our current emissions trading system for intra-EEA flights (and departures to the UK and Switzerland) reflects our higher climate ambition. It is also in line with the statement we delivered at the last Assembly. Thus, it should be no surprise.
- In aviation, the EU is a single jurisdiction on many important policy fronts - market access, ownership and control, single aircraft certification, third country operators, blacklists, etc.). To avoid double charging under ETS and CORSA on the same routes, there possibility of filing a difference to ICAO exists.

Will the EU sign the International Aviation Climate Ambition Declaration (presented during the COP26 climate summit)?

- The declaration addresses only states. EU Member States may sign, provided the level of ambition is in line with EU policy and that there is sufficient take-up from

different world regions. (Unless these conditions are met, the initiative could be counterproductive at this stage.)

EU TRAVEL

***Why do you propose a 9-month validity period for vaccination certificates?
This will make travel more complicated again.***

- Many Member States have announced or have already started to administer booster doses. In this context, **more and more Member States are already adopting rules as to how long vaccination certificates should be accepted.**
- This takes into account that the protection from infection with COVID-19 resulting from vaccination appears to be decreasing over time.
- **Unilateral measures in this area have the potential to cause significant disruptions** to citizens and businesses. In the **absence of a uniform approach at EU level, citizens would be obliged to verify each Member State's rules** in order to determine whether their vaccination certificates continue to be accepted.
- These risks are particularly harmful in a situation where the EU economy has already been significantly affected by the virus.
- **Having a coordinated approach and offering sufficient predictability is also important for economic reasons** in the internal market.
- For these reasons, the Commission considers it necessary to provide for a standard acceptance period for vaccination certificates issued following the completion of primary vaccination series. This period should be set at 9 months.,
- This takes into account the guidance of ECDC regarding the administration of booster doses as of 6 months after completion of the primary vaccination series and providing for an additional period of 3 months to ensure that national vaccination campaigns can adjust and citizens can have access to the administration of boosters.
- This means that Member States, in the context of travel, should accept vaccination certificates for the primary vaccination series as long as not more than 9 months have passed.

Selective Background

1. Covid and Safe Travel

Council Recommendation 2020/912

On 30 June 2020, the Council adopted Recommendation 2020/912 on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction. According to the recommendation, Member States should gradually lift the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU from 1 July 2020 in a coordinated manner. This applies to residents of third countries meeting the required criteria and listed in Annex I to the Council Recommendation and to those travelling for essential reasons listed in Annex 2 (e.g. health workers, cross-border workers). EU citizens and long-term residents in the EU and their family members can always travel to the EU, possibly subject to testing, quarantine and/or self-isolation.

A number of revisions have been considered. In May 2021, the recommendation was amended to allow those fully vaccinated with vaccines approved by the European Medicine Agency or by the World Health Organisation to travel to the EU, irrespective of their country of origin and to introduce as counter-weight, an emergency brake mechanism to limit the risk of coronavirus variants of concern entering the EU.

A further November revision sought to enlarge the list of eligible third countries in Annex I by increasing the notification rate thresholds in addition to the testing rate thresholds. The system would also move progressively from a country approach (Annex I) to a person / essential function-based approach (vaccinated/recovered people).

US Reopening

On 20 September 2021, President Biden announced that the US would permit fully vaccinated foreign nationals to travel to the US, provided they show a proof of: (i) vaccination prior to boarding an airplane and (ii) negative test within three days prior to boarding the flight. On 8 November 2021, the re-opening took effect.

Entry to the US by air is suspended for non-citizens / non-immigrants who are not fully vaccinated.

Council Recommendation 2020/1475

On 25 November, the European Commission proposed a new Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to facilitate safe free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic, repealing the existing Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475. Since the last update of the travel rules, vaccine uptake has increased significantly and the EU Digital COVID Certificate has been rolled out successfully. Therefore, the Commission is proposing that holders of a valid EU Digital COVID Certificate should in principle not be subject to additional restrictions, such as tests or quarantine, wherever they travel from in the EU.

Key updates to the common approach to travel measures within the EU are:

- **Focus on a 'person-based approach':** a person in possession of a valid EU Digital COVID Certificate should in principle not be subject to additional restrictions, such as tests or quarantine, regardless of their place of departure in the EU. Persons without an EU Digital COVID Certificate should be allowed to travel based on a test carried out prior to or after arrival.
- **Standard validity of vaccination certificates:** To avoid diverging and disruptive approaches, the Commission proposes a standard acceptance period of 9-month for vaccination certificates issued following the completion of the primary vaccination series. The 9 month period takes into account the guidance of the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) on the administration of booster doses as of 6 months, and provides for an additional period of 3 months to ensure that national vaccination campaigns can adjust and citizens can have access to boosters. This means that, in the context of travel, Member States should not refuse a vaccination certificate that has been issued less than 9 months since the administration of the last dose of the primary vaccination. Member States should immediately take all necessary steps to ensure access to vaccination for those population groups whose previously issued vaccination certificates approach the 9-month limit.

- **Booster shots:** As of yet, there are no studies expressly addressing the effectiveness of boosters on transmission of COVID-19 and therefore it is not possible to determine an acceptance period for boosters. However, given the emerging data it can be expected that protection from booster vaccinations may last longer than that resulting from the primary vaccination series. The Commission will closely monitor newly emerging scientific evidence on this issue. On the basis of such evidence, the Commission may, if needed, propose an appropriate acceptance period also for vaccination certificates issued following a booster.
- **The EU traffic light map is maintained in an adapted form**, combining new cases with a region's vaccine uptake and testing rate. The map would be mainly for information, but would also serve a coordination function for areas with particularly low ('green') or particularly high level ('dark red') of circulation of the virus. For these areas, specific rules would apply by derogation from the 'person-based approach'. For travel from 'green' areas, that would mean that no restrictions should be applied. Travel to and from 'dark red' areas should be discouraged, given the high number of new infections there, and persons who are neither vaccinated nor have recovered from the virus should be required to test and quarantine.
- **Exemptions** for certain travellers are maintained but are more limited, as many essential travellers have had the opportunity to be vaccinated in the meantime. This should include transport workers, seafarers, patient transports, cross-border commuters, and children under the age of 12.
- The **emergency procedure** intended to delay the spread of possible new COVID-19 variants of concern or interest or address serious epidemiological situations (included in the last amendment to the Recommendation) should be streamlined and more operational.

As the proposal will be discussed in the Council before being adopted, the proposed recommendations are still subject to change. To allow for sufficient time for the coordinated approach to be implemented, the Commission proposes that these updates apply as of 10 January 2022.

2. Slots

Winter 21/22: Slot use rate is set at 50%. The possibility for airlines to return slot series prior to the start of the season whilst retaining grandfather rights for the following season has removed. The justified non-use of slots exception ("force majeure" exception) will continue to apply.

Summer 22: COM continues to monitor the situation. It has proposed adopting another delegated act to extend slot relief to summer 22. Traffic intra-EEA is recovering well. However, some regions lag behind due to continuing travel restrictions; this will be covered by the "force majeure" exception. COM must adopt the delegated act before 31 December.

3. ReFuelEU Aviation

COM adopted its legislative proposal on 14 July. It is based on a SAF blending obligation on aviation fuel suppliers with increasing targets over time, starting in 2025 (see ramp up below). An obligation on airlines to uplift aviation fuel prior to departures from EU airports aims to ensure a level playing field between airlines and airports for intra and extra-EEA flights.

Proposed Ramp-up Targets

Total shares in the fuel mix (in %)	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
SAF ramp up:	2	5	20	32	38	63
Of which: sub-mandate on e-fuels	-	0.7	5	8	11	28

SAF Flanking Measures

These include -

- Intensifying EU efforts at ICAO to promote establishment of global SAF targets.
- A Renewable and Low Carbon Fuels Value Chain Alliance. Similar to the Batteries Alliance. Could be the platform to deploy SAF funding mechanisms, notably through an IPCEI (important project of common European interest). This is still hypothetical but there is interest in the Commission.
- Steering funding towards SAF deployment e.g. ETS Innovation Fund, Horizon Europe (R&D), others.
- Facilitating SAF certification through the establishment of an EU SAF Clearing House (EASA will perform an EP Preparatory Action to assess the feasibility)

4. Single European Sky

On 3 June the Transport Council agreed a General Approach. In parallel, Parliament's TRAN Committee adopted its negotiation position on 17 June.

Trilogues started in July. This may allow agreement on a final text in 2022. Afterwards, technical regulations will be updated, so that the reform can enter into force for the preparation and start of RP4, in 2025.

5. Multimodal Initiatives

In the context of SSMS, we are putting in place an enabling framework to enhance the multimodal dimension of transport and mobility. For passengers we seek to facilitate seamless journeys when using different transport modes and nudge towards sustainable choices.

To this end, we are preparing a new legislative proposal for 2022, to facilitate further the development of Multimodal Digital Mobility Services, such as MaaS services, or ticket intermediaries. Those intermediaries will facilitate access to information, booking and payment within modes (e.g. in rail) but also in a multimodal context. In parallel, we want to ensure that information (including real time data on disruptions and information on a journey's carbon footprint) is accessible to passengers before and during their trip. This should facilitate planning and enhance the quality of the journey. As announced in the SSMS, in 2022 we will revise the specifications for Multimodal Travel Information Services.