

# **Airport boss says government strategy on air travel will 'damage economy'**

**The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, confirmed yesterday that while the UK Government had announced a list of the countries which it will remove from quarantine restrictions in relation to travel to England, the Scottish Government was not taking that same decision as yet.**

Ms Sturgeon said at the daily media briefing that it is challenging to make these decisions 'at speed', partly because of the 'shambolic decision making process' of 'other governments'. It was clear she meant the UK Government.

She asserted that the prevalence of the virus here in Scotland is five times lower than it is in England, and so admitting travellers from some countries might create a significant risk.

She said: "We've often had limited or no notice of the UK's proposals, and that matters because some of the judgments involved here are difficult and complex.

And just to illustrate the point about the shifting sands of the UK government's position, the list of countries that they were yesterday demanding that the Scottish Government signed up to and suggesting that we were a barrier to getting agreement on, is not the same as the list that they have

shared with us today. So, we need as the Scottish Government to analyse these proposals properly, and rationally, and we need to do that, obviously from a public health perspective, but we also need to do that from a legal perspective.”

She continued: “We want to welcome visitors again from around the world and of course we also want to allow our own citizens to travel. That’s important for our tourism sector, it’s important for our aviation sector and it’s important for our economy, generally.

“Scotland has a long standing reputation, and one that I hope will go well into the future, of being an open and welcoming country. And we also want, if possible, for obvious practical reasons, to have alignment on these matters with the rest of the UK.”

So it will be a day or two yet before any upturn in air travel is likely. At present Qatar, Ryanair, Wizz, Air France, BA, KLM and Turkish either have flights departing and arriving into Edinburgh Airport, or are just about to start those again.

This delay has been met with some criticism by the owners of the Airport, Global Infrastructure Partners, who are also shareholders in Gatwick Airport.

Gordon Dewar, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Airport, said: “The decision taken by the Scottish Government to diverge from the rest of the UK will lead to immediate and long-term economic damage. Jobs in aviation, tourism and the supply chains that surround them are already going – that will continue due to this decision.

“Scotland taking a different path means that the confusion around an already confused quarantine policy only increases and passengers will be left wondering what the rules are. We of course support health measures but despite writing to the government asking for the evidence to understand the

reasoning, we have yet to receive it.

“It is wrong to only view this issue through the lens of holidays, although English airports will be welcoming Scots holidaymakers and new routes stripped from Scottish airports, as it hampers Scotland’s ability to recover economically.

“As the First Minister was personally told earlier this week, this will harm Scotland well beyond this summer. We warned that to close Scotland off would lead to the departure of airlines, who themselves warned the First Minister of the same. Scottish jobs are being sacrificed on a system that is unintelligible, unenforceable and that does not deliver the health benefits we all want.

“With this decision we are in the very real situation that Scotland will get the worst of all worlds – a damaged economy and a policy which is very likely to be unworkable in practice and therefore has no practical health impact.”