



Irish Travel Agents Association paper for presentation to Joint Committee on Transport and Communications Networks to discuss recent Aviation Recovery Taskforce final report

14 October 2020

The Irish travel industry directly employs approximately 3,500 people across the 26 counties. This is a mainly Irish-owned SME business sector with many high street shops in rural and regional towns as well as concentrations in the larger cities. The industry is regulated by the Commission for Aviation Regulation offering additional financial and consumer protection for those booking travel services via a Travel Agent. Turnover across the sector was approx. €1.4 billion per annum and the Irish Travel Agents Association are the representative body for the industry. Travel Agents serve both the corporate and leisure markets with the full range of outbound travel services.

The ITAA is deeply concerned about the impact the COVID-19 crisis is having on the wider travel sector and Irish travel agents.

The Travel Industry is unique because:

1. Trading is down 90 to 95% since March 2020 and will continue at that level of trading for the foreseeable future because of the messaging around non-essential travel.
2. Travel companies have had to remain open to service customers with cancellations, refunds and rebooking. The companies could not close down even though they were effectively blocked from trading and they have had to continue to carry a proportion of salary and all overhead costs.
3. Travel agents have had to engage in negative trading due to the refund requirement on business that was secured in 2019 and early 2020.
4. The industry expectation was towards a resumption after six months, but we currently have no re-opening date. We require a compensation package to partially cover running costs. We need an infrastructure put in place to allow international travel to recommence which complies with health guidelines and keeps passengers safe.
5. Travel Agents are the only industry sector in Ireland which is both regulated (licensed) and bonded for consumer protection.

RECENT REPORT OF THE AVIATION TASK FORCE

The ITAA welcomed the publication of the Aviation Recovery Taskforce report published in July and the recommendations within. However, the Association had anticipated that the interim recommendations of the Taskforce would be implemented by the Government following its publication on June 22. This has not been done.

We need Government adoption of the EU traffic light system and we need Ireland to follow the rest of the EU with the implementation of that system.

The Taskforce emphasises the urgency of a plan “to economically co-exist with the virus and, as an island nation, this has to include international travel.” The ITAA reiterates the urgency of this, and follow fellow EU members with a safety conscious reopening of international travel.

While much ITAA business relates to outbound travel, the nature of the aviation sector means that the outbound and inbound sectors are inherently linked. The ITAA supports the promotion of aviation and regional airports to save Ireland’s tourism sector and by extension, its economy.

Travel agents, as the vital element in outbound travel, will do our utmost to contribute to promoting foreign travel; our role in promoting outbound travel compliments the efforts of others to promote inward travel.

PROPOSED EU ‘TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM’

The ITAA welcome that the Government has committed to EU-wide rules for a traffic-light system aimed at opening our skies. Most EU airports are operating safely with additional structural supports and the ITAA are of the opinion that Irish airports be permitted to follow suit with our neighbouring EU airports.

COVID TESTING AT AIRPORTS

First and foremost, the safety and comfort of our customers is paramount to all ITAA member travel agents. We have called for the development and implementation of routine COVID-19 testing for passengers boarding flights out of the country, as this will ensure a “clean” environment throughout the travel process. Evidence has shown it significantly reduces the spread of the illness.

The ITAA believe that this testing will help to rebuild consumer confidence in travel. The DAA can roll out testing within days in Dublin and Cork airports, delivering 15,000 screenings daily, this will need State assistance.