Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the UK- EU Specialised Committee on Air Transport

DfT, London and online, 10 June 2026

1. Opening statements

Both sides remarked on the importance of air connectivity between the UK and the EU, particularly amid geopolitical concerns. The UK and the EU commented on the continued growth of the UK-EU aviation market – particularly with regards to passenger travel and tourism.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

Both sides agreed to the addition of Jet Fuel Prices and Availability as an agenda item under any other business. It was also agreed to move agenda item 5.4 "operating permit process" to 5.2.

3. Market developments

The UK reported passenger levels between the UK, and the EU have returned to 100% of 2019 levels and have consistently maintained that level since 2025. International passenger levels to points outside of the EU are at 110% of pre-covid levels. The UK remarked that whilst passenger numbers have increased, it's interesting to note that aircraft movements between the UK and the EU have decreased in comparison to 2019. The EU noted the different trend in aircraft movements and passenger numbers was interesting and resolved to see if this was also reflected in their statistics. The UK suggested that this may reflect a trend towards larger aircraft being utilised for operations. The UK highlighted an increase in passenger demand to most countries across Europe, aside from Slovenia, Sweden, Belgium and Netherlands which have seen a decrease in demand. The UK highlighted that Spanish airports continue to dominate the top 20 destination airports for passengers flying out of the UK.

The UK reported air freight has not recovered as well as passenger levels, with air freight currently at 80% of 2019 levels.

The EU shared similar statistics on UK-EU recovery, reporting that 70% of all international air passengers at the UK airports are travelling to or from European destinations. 2025 data showed 222.8 million available seats with 191.6 million total passenger (86% average load factor). The EU mentioned 1449 airport pairs between the UK and the EU (with London -Dublin route most operated), operated by 73 carriers.

4. Exchange of information on legislative and policy developments

The UK updated the EU on the **Civil Aviation Bill**, which was introduced to Parliament last year and is expected to come into effect by the end of 2026. The Bill covers six measures related to passenger rights, consumer protection legislation, airspace modernisation, airport slots, Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) rulemaking and aviation criminal offences. In response to the EU's question on whether the Bill would act as new regulation on passenger rights and slots, the UK explained that it would provide power to the Secretary of State and the CAA to enforce existing regulations and propose future regulations but would not change current legislation.

On **Air Services Regulation 1008/2008** the EU confirmed a review is ongoing, taking into consideration lessons learnt from covid and changes to market and environmental dynamics. The EU is working towards finalising a policy proposal in late 2026.

The EU reported on its new **Aviation Strategy**, confirming they have identified priority areas including making EU skies more efficient, supporting innovation, fair competition, sustainability and resilience. The EU emphasised the new aviation strategy considers the entire aviation sector and is not solely airline focused. A call for evidence was published for public consultations in April (closed on 21 May) and the Strategy is expected to be adopted around November 2026. The UK expressed they are keen to discuss the findings once the report is published.

On **Passenger Rights** the UK provided an update on the work of the Aviation Accessibility Implementation Group (formerly named the Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish group). The group published an independent report in 2025 setting out the 19 recommendations to improve aviation accessibility, amongst those recommendations, 16 were aimed at industry and 3 aimed at the CAA. The group is supporting industry to implement these recommendations and will report annually on its progress.

The EU reported that agreement has not yet been reached between the EU Council and European Parliament on the policy proposals for **Regulation 261/2004 reform**. A conciliation procedure is ongoing, with a deadline for agreement to be reached by 15 June. The EU confirmed that if an agreement is not reached, the current legislation will continue to apply.

On **Heathrow Expansion**, the UK explained it is currently undertaking a review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS). The ANPS is the policy framework for expansion at Heathrow and the primary basis for decision making on any development consent application. The ANPS was originally designated in 2018, and the review seeks to reflect changes in legislation, policy, and data since 2018. The revised ANPS is due to be published this summer for consultation. Following a consultation, Parliamentary scrutiny and designation of any amended ANPS, applications for development consent may be submitted by promoters. The EU queried the role of private investors in the expansion. The UK explained that while the Government will facilitate the expansion, it will be delivered by private organisations, and any organisation is free to submit a planning application.

The UK reported that the CAA was reviewing the H8 price control at Heathrow. Consultation on the review was ongoing, with the CAA expecting to publish its Initial Proposals in late June 2026, followed by Final Proposals in November 2026 and a Final Decision by April 2027.

On **ground handling** the UK informed they are not currently planning to make any changes to regulation aside from changes to safety regulations which are being implemented by the CAA.

On **slots** the UK explained they are conducting a review of the legislation, with three areas of focus: expansion, resilience and regulatory gaps. Initial engagement with stakeholders will begin in July 2026, with the intention to create a long list of areas for improvement to present to Ministers. The long list will be narrowed down to a shortlist that the UK will seek consultation on. The UK highlighted the significance of the Civil Aviation Bill in progressing slot reform, as it provides the enabling powers to amend slot regulations.

The EU asked if slot reform could be reviewed following the expansion of Heathrow and increased capacity. The UK explained that it intends to set and implement reform before Heathrow Expansion is complete in order to provide certainty to industry. Subject to planning decisions, new capacity is expected at Gatwick airport by 2030, and at Heathrow by 2035.

The EU reported slots and ground handling legislation is currently being reviewed as part of the **fitness check** of EU airport legislation.

The UK reported on the publication of their **Pandemic Preparedness Strategy** in March 2026. The UK also outlined the measures recently implemented in response to outbreaks of Ebola and Hantavirus, commenting on the benefit of international cooperation in these complex situations and highlighting recent Hantavirus co-operation with Spain and the Netherlands.

The UK informed the EU the **National Aviation Emergency Plan** (NAEP) will soon be published on gov.uk. The NAEP will include an annex on guidance to airlines on assistance to air accident victims and their families (AAAVF). The CAA are conducting audits on UK airlines' AAAVF provisions with the use of a checklist based on the NAEP. The UK noted the 12-month anniversary of the Air India Crash and highlighted the ongoing collaborative work in ECAC with regards to assistance to air accident victims.

The EU reaffirmed its full commitment to **CORSIA** through changes implemented in its legislation with a Commission's proposal expected in July 2026. The EU is also focused on the successful implementation of CORSIA on an international level through the cooperation with ICAO. The EU noted that UK-EU discussions on ETS are ongoing.

On **noise policy** the UK provided an overview of the night flight regime which regulates noise at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports. The regime was last renewed in October 2025 and will run until October 2028. The UK informed the EU of the reports on the first part of the Aviation Night Noise Effects study (ANNE) and the counterpart Aviation Noise Attitudes Survey (ANAS) published by the CAA. The report outlines the findings of a survey on the self-reported impact of aviation noise. A report on the second part of ANNE, detailing the objective impact of aviation noise on sleep disturbance at night is expected to be published later this year.

The EU explained a review of **EU Regulation 598/2014** began at the start of 2026 with a call for evidence which resulted in 774 responses from citizens. A report on the findings of the call for evidence is expected to be published in early 2027.

On **Airspace Modernisation**, the UK reported it has established a new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) and the Airspace Design Support Fund to combat challenges faced in modernising airspace. The UK expects the key airspace changes to be deployed between 2030-2036. The UK is also working with the CAA to review the guidance which informs the airspace change processes – outcomes of this review are expected to be published this summer.

5. Issues regarding the implementation of the Title on Air Transport

5.1. Bilateral arrangements between the United Kingdom and Member States (Art. 419)

The UK provided an overview of its **bilateral arrangements** on all-cargo "fifth freedom" services with the EU Member States. Agreements are now concluded with 24 Member States, 2 more are currently under negotiation and 1 has been refused by the concerned Member State. The 24 agreements that are concluded, include updated agreements that have recently been negotiated to better reflect current practical needs. The UK reiterated its intention to continue engaging with the MS to update these agreements. The EU restated that there is an approval procedure Member States are required to follow for those bilateral agreements.

The UK also confirmed that it had block permits or a similar understanding for 3rd/4th freedom non-scheduled services in place with 25 EU MS. The UK highlighted that since Germany's departure from the 1956 Paris Agreement, their exchange of block permits is not currently formalised and confirmed its intention to formalise it. In addition to agreements on all-cargo fifth freedom services, the UK will also be engaging with MS to update and extend their block permits, seeking consistency across the MS.

The UK requested a streamlined **block permits process,** noting that UK carriers currently lack clear information on block permits availability across the MS. The UK CAA takes a proactive approach to block permits, writing to EU carriers to inform them what block permits are available and therefore the CAA asked for a similar treatment. The UK requested the Commission's assistance in highlighting block permit availability to UK carriers, for example through a Commission's web page covering the relevant information. The UK confirmed there are 244 block permits currently active for EU carriers and requested EU MS confirm how many block permits are being granted to UK carriers.

The UK flagged additional requirements by some Member States, such as in-state representative requirement, experienced by UK carriers when applying for block permits. The EU requested the UK share further examples and resolved to look into the issue.

The UK highlighted inconsistencies between EU Member States in the authorisation of **wet-leasing arrangements** (in and out from the EU). The UK proposed further discussion to define guidelines for wet leasing between the UK and the EU and reiterated the benefit of an approach utilising the EASA whitelist. The UK CAA has entered a call for evidence for wet leasing to identify the issues experienced by UK carriers in order to form new policies.

In response to EU queries, the UK clarified that carriers face wet leasing issues regarding unclear rules and unpredictable approval timelines. The EU agreed to look into this and requested the UK share specific examples.

On **Airline Ownership & Control** the UK reaffirmed its position on the benefits of liberalising airline ownership and control requirements under the TCA. The EU explained that its position in this respect has not changed but is under consideration in the 1008/2008 review.

With respect to EU MS' right to conduct their own evaluation of an operator's ownership and control (O&C) structure, the UK raised concerns of EU carriers requesting access to UK-EU block permits that do not appear to be majority owned and controlled by EU nationals. The UK highlighted that the TCA doesn't include a mechanism for discussing concerns about an operator's O&C and suggested that this should be discussed further. The EU indicated its openness to discuss these issues.

6. Any other business

The UK requested further information on the implementation of the **capacity measures** highlighting the need for non-discrimination. The EU confirmed that it is in contact with the MS regarding the planned reductions and ensuring MSs follow the balanced approach.

Regarding **All-Cargo 5th Freedom Rights Applications,** the UK highlighted an EU MS unilaterally blocked a UK carrier from operation permitted under the bilateral agreement, by restricting all-cargo fifth operations to a 3rd country. The UK will continue discussions with the MS and is keen to ensure both sides are abiding by the bilateral agreements.

The UK relayed concerns raised by UK carriers since the full implementation of the **Entry Exit System** (EES) in April this year. UK carriers reported up to 3-hour border delays at some EU airports.. In addition, one airline has raised that as many as 10-20 passengers per peak flight to miss their departures. These issues may be exacerbated over the peak summer holiday period.

The EU highlighted the benefits of the system, citing strengthening security and preventing irregular migration as key benefits. Since its implementation, EES has resulted in 40,000 refused entries, over 1,000 which were identified as a threat to national security. The EU noted the UK's concerns and referenced the flexibility MS have to suspend biometric scans to deal with congestion. The UK acknowledged the flexibility but remained concerned that issues will continue after the period of flexibility ends. The UK highlighted that UK carriers need to engage with every MS individually and suggested it would be beneficial to have central coordination and guidelines to mitigate the delay at borders. The EU representatives explained they are organising a workshop with MS to identify best practices and are engaging with industry and focal points from MS on a regular basis. The EU could not comment on whether there would be any consideration to extending the flexibility period beyond September.

The UK shared concerns of carriers that the launch of the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System** (ETIAS) potentially in November will not provide enough time to communicate the changes to passengers and also about technical aspects of implementation. The EU assured that the decision will be adopted two months prior to its launch, and a communications campaign will begin at that time.

The UK expressed concern about the lack of reciprocal flexible treatment of **air ambulance** operations by Member State's Authorities. The UK suggested air ambulance operations could be brought under the umbrella of block permits to provide flexibility to these services. The EU recognised that the urgent nature of these services requires immediate access to permits and resolved to discuss this further with the UK.

Both sides provided an overview on the impact of recent jet fuel availability. The UK informed of the introduction of slot regulations to give airlines the flexibility to adjust schedules in advance should they need to because of jet fuel issues and airspace closure resulting from the conflict. This included the ability to hand back up to an additional 10% of slots, over and above existing flexibilities, subject to specific conditions.

The EU similarly reported flexibilities they've implemented, specifically around tankering, passenger rights and slots.

7. Closing remarks

Courteous closing remarks were exchanged. Both sides agreed to communicate, when necessary, between meetings and flag issues.

Annex – Participants of the 5th Meeting of the Specialised Committee on Air Transport

UK delegation

- UK Co-chair of the Specialised Committee on Air Transport
- UK Civil Aviation Authority
- UK Department of Transport Officials
- UK Mission to the European Union Official
- Cabinet Office Officials
- Transport Scotland Officials

EU delegation

- EU Co-chair of the Specialised Committee on Air Transport
- European Commission Officials
- Delegation of the European Union to the UK Official
- Representatives of the EU Member States