

CEO of DXB calls for clear guidelines to resume travel

In a recent interview, Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai International Airport, expressed his frustration that the world's governments are not creating a clear roadmap to restart global travel. He says no one is giving the industry any guidance on how to move forward.

Griffiths says there is a "massive disconnect," wherein the aviation industry has taken massive measures but in return is given no clear path back to allowing for international travel to resume.

He says, "Why hasn't any country (to my knowledge) said 'Right, if we can achieve those particular parameters — which could be vaccination rates, control of the spread, death rate coming down, hospitalizations coming down — if these countries can get to that point by a particular date then travel there is going to be possible.' No one has given the industry any standard to which they can plan for the safe reopening of travel."

Nothing solid

While there have been some hints at parameters, such as the EU's statement that US visitors would be allowed back if vaccinated, no clear picture has emerged. "If you talk to any airport or airline executive around the world, [they'll say] you can't plan an operation on that basis," says Griffiths. "If we could have some sort of guidelines agreed with governments around the world as to what criteria needs to be achieved to restart global travel, then we can put a timeline against that. We'd all have much more hope that we are going to get somewhere over the summer, maybe when things have been achieved against those medical benchmarks."

Ready to ramp up

Dubai International Airport has shown some signs of recovery. Griffiths says the airport has about 67% of the carriers that were operating before the pandemic. "We've seen very strong support; the capacity and frequency might not be there, but at least the presence is there." He says while the airport is operating at only about 20% of total capacity, with so many carriers operational things can ramp up quickly and easily. "Our estimation is that the recovery will come incredibly quickly when it actually arrives."

Valid documentation

As with most in the industry, Griffiths is interested in the success of the IATA travel pass. "The integrity of documents such as vaccination certificates is going to be crucial," he says. "Turning up with a little piece of cardboard issued by one authority or another won't cut the mustard."

Griffiths is encouraged that Microsoft, Apple, Google and Salesforce all said they would collaborate. "Most of us now are storing credit cards and debit cards on our phones. If that system is secure enough to be able to handle all of the transactions we make financially, then couldn't we use that infrastructure to simply get a red or green from an authority saying the documentation we are using to travel with is valid, and our biometric and medical information is stored in that way?" he asks. "You don't need to cede control. I think this is what the IATA travel pass solution is trying to achieve, a tokenized way of saying is this customer able to travel, does he meet all the criteria. No one needs to disclose personal information; just give a red or green."