

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
MR HAN KOK JUAN, DIRECTOR-GENERAL,
CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE,
AT THE AVIATION SAFETY FORUM 2022,
7 MARCH 2022, 2:00PM, PAN PACIFIC HOTEL, SINGAPORE

Distinguished guests,

Friends and colleagues,

Good afternoon.

1. It gives me great pleasure to join all of you at Aviation Safety Forum 2022. We have under one roof today the chieftains of the Singapore aviation sector. Our doing so, physically, sends a powerful signal. The Singapore aviation sector has turned a corner. We have come together to chart the way forward.

Outlook

2. COVID-19 has decimated air travel and disrupted the people-to-people exchanges that brought the world closer together. In March 2020, as COVID-19 raged across the globe, Singapore shut our borders. This was an unprecedented move, to protect our people. However, as a small open economy, we knew we had to reconnect with the world. That is how we make a living and create a better life for our people. The question was not whether, but how to do so safely.
3. In September 2021, we launched the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL). We started with two countries. In six months, we extended to 32. The latest are Greece and Vietnam. Air passenger volume grew from 3% to 15% of pre-COVID levels. The VTL helps build public support and confidence that we can reopen our borders safely.
4. What lies ahead of us in 2022? What is the outlook for the aviation sector? I see it in three timeframes: short-term (2022); medium-term (2023 to 2025); and long-term (2026 and beyond):
 - a. Short-term (2022). After the current Omicron wave declines and the COVID-19 situation stabilises, we will start transiting to Vaccinated Travel. We will open our borders more broadly. Travel will return to close to what it used to be pre-COVID for those who are vaccinated. Barring unforeseen circumstances, 2022 will be the year of recovery for the Singapore aviation sector. We are making plans to cater for an increase in air passenger volume from 15% to 50% of pre-COVID-19 levels this year. We will optimise the use of the airport terminals, simplify immigration checks, testing and other safe management protocols, and work with the sector to ramp up operations and manpower to ensure a safe and smooth Changi experience as traffic returns.

- b. Medium-term (2023 to 2025). The International Air Transport Association (IATA) expects international air travel to fully recover to 100% of pre-COVID levels in 2025. Asia's recovery will trail behind the rest of the world. 2023 to 2025 will be years of reclaiming Singapore's position as a premier air hub and building back stronger. As our aviation stakeholders review their global strategies and deployment, we will work together to grow new networks, build capacity ahead of demand, enhance resilience and develop capabilities for the future. Our goal is for the Singapore air hub to be an even more attractive base for companies to operate, innovate and introduce new products and services.
 - c. Long-term (2026 and beyond). COVID-19 and climate change concerns will dampen growth, but long-term air travel demand remains robust, underpinned by strong economic fundamentals, the rise of Asia and a growing middle class. 2026 and beyond will be years of seizing opportunities and creating value for the travelling public, for companies based here and for Singapore and Singaporeans. We are reviewing our plans for Changi Airport Terminal 5 and driving technology and innovation in advanced air mobility, digitalisation and automation.
- 5. There is consensus amongst government and industry leaders around the world that as the aviation sector emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, it cannot be a return to business as usual but that the international aviation system we rebuild must be more sustainable; the question is not one of whether but of when and how.
 - 6. Sustainability will be a key priority for Singapore's aviation sector in the coming years. The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) is developing a Singapore Sustainable Air Hub Blueprint. The Blueprint will set medium-term (2030) and long-term (2050) goals and identify practical, tangible pathways. We will focus on three key areas: airport, airlines, and air traffic management. We will also lay the foundation of four critical enablers to drive sector-wide decarbonisation: policy and regulation, industry development, infrastructure planning and provision, and jobs and skills. We have set up an International Advisory Panel (IAP) and will engage widely to canvass ideas and foster collaboration. We plan to publish the Singapore Sustainable Air Hub Blueprint by early 2023.
 - 7. In summary, the future of aviation is bright. Air travel demand remains robust. The sector will bounce back strongly as it has done through past crises like 9/11. We have tided over two difficult years. I look forward to working alongside all of you to rebuild stronger with enhanced connectivity, added capacity and capabilities, and better offerings in and through Singapore.

Soaring Safely Together

- 8. So, what does safety have to do with these all? All our plans will come to nought if we have a major accident or serious safety incident. We will be back to ground zero, set back many years, as the world moves on. The fatal accidents in 1997 and 2000 and the more recent 737 MAX episode are timely reminders of why we cannot take safety for granted. Safety is a bedrock of aviation. Any serious incidents or accidents have wide repercussions. Repairing the damage will take a long time.

9. Why should we be concerned? From reports around the world, COVID has introduced unprecedented challenges: proficiency of personnel; airworthiness of aircraft under storage; familiarity with new protocols and layouts; and leadership and culture in financially stressed companies under shareholder pressure to trim cost, repair balance sheets and quickly meet demand.
10. Aviation safety must be a non-negotiable and the top priority of the Singapore aviation sector as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and ramp up operations. Fortunately, we have in Singapore three strong safeguards.
 - a. First, a strong safety regime. Singapore has one of the strongest safety regimes in the world. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) audits States on their implementation of safety oversight systems. Our effective implementation score is 98.6%, compared to the global average of 69.4%. ICAO will be auditing Singapore's safety regime next month. It is a timely health check. I am quietly confident we will do well.
 - b. Second, a strong safety culture. Our strong safety regime is underpinned by a strong safety culture in Singapore amongst our companies and workers. Safety is in our DNA. We are professionals. We do our jobs well. This is borne out in the first-ever industry-wide safety culture survey CAAS conducted to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on safety culture and identify areas for improvement. Overall, 95% of respondents across various domains agreed or strongly agreed that there is strong, positive aviation safety culture in Singapore, notwithstanding COVID-19 challenges. We need to maintain and step up. For example, as demand surges, we need to proactively identify areas or circumstances where our workers might find it difficult to perform their work both safely and well. We need to give them proper support and ensure that sufficient resources are set aside. We also need to reinforce an environment where staff feel safe to report mistakes made.
 - c. Third, strong safety leadership. Our strong safety culture is in turn underpinned by strong safety leadership amongst companies in the Singapore aviation sector. The fact that we have in this room over 200 leaders in the Singapore aviation sector for a safety forum amidst many competing demands for our time and attention, is testament. We will further reaffirm this with the safety charter we will launch later. 80 organisations have signed the charter to date. I expect more to do so in the coming months. It sends a powerful message to our staff, to Singaporeans and to the world.

Conclusion

11. When people fly, they put their trust in us - regulators, aircraft manufacturers and airlines - to get them where they need to go, safely. The aviation eco-system comprises a wide array of companies and workers. Each of us, in our respective individual and organisational capacity, will have to play our part. We are highly interconnected and need to work together. Let us pledge to uphold the highest safety standards as we work together to rebuild and reclaim Singapore's position as a global air hub. Let us soar safely, together.