AIRPORT SECURITY SCANNERS

The Secretary of State for Transport (Patrick McLoughlin): Security scanners are currently in operation at ten of the UK's largest airports. They were deployed in response to the threat to aviation posed by non-metallic improvised explosive devices, such as the device used in the attack on Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam Schiphol to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, and the device recovered in Yemen in spring 2012. These devices were designed to make detection by existing screening methods extremely difficult. More broadly, the UK threat level remains at substantial: an attack is a strong possibility.

It is for these reasons that, after careful consideration, I have decided that a further eleven airports will be required to deploy security scanners, and I will be issuing directions to that effect to the following airports:

Stansted	Luton	Bristol
Liverpool	Newcastle	Aberdeen
Leeds Bradford	East Midlands	Prestwick
Cardiff	Belfast City	

In parallel, work is underway with those airports which already deploy security scanners to consider the case for increasing their deployment of security scanners.

In the UK, all security scanners now use millimetre wave technology, which has no known health risks, and which is quite different from x-ray technology. Furthermore, all security scanners deployed now use automatic threat recognition software, which means that no image of a passenger is produced, thus alleviating any residual health or privacy concerns.

The overwhelming evidence from airports is that nearly all passengers accept the use of security scanners and find the process quick and convenient. However, I appreciate a small minority may still prefer to request an alternative procedure for a variety of reasons.

In the past, passengers who refused to be scanned by a security scanner were not offered an alternative, and were not allowed to fly on that occasion. This was a security and operational decision: only a private search (a thorough hand-search in which the passenger may be asked to loosen or remove clothing) would offer a broadly similar security assurance to a scan, and it was considered that offering this as an alternative would be too operationally disruptive to the airport and to other passengers.

However, experience of operating security scanners for several years has shown that the vast majority of passengers are content to be screened by a security scanner if selected. Consequently the number of passengers refusing to be scanned is very low. As a result, and having reviewed the current position, I have concluded that from

tomorrow, Friday 22 November, passengers who opt out of being screened by a security scanner will be allowed a private search alternative. This is a method of screening which we consider is of an equivalent security value to a security scan. These revised arrangements will be kept under review to ensure that high levels of security are maintained whilst avoiding disproportionate impacts on airports and passengers.

In addition, where it can be demonstrated that another security process, or combination of processes, offer the same level of security as a scan, then I will consider allowing further alternatives to a private search to be offered to passengers.

If a passenger does not accept this alternative method, and still refuses the security scan, they will not be allowed to fly on that occasion.

This approach will allow the small minority of passengers who continue to have concerns about the use of scanners to request an alternative method of screening while maintaining high levels of security at UK airports.