



Department  
for Transport

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Dear Richard,

The CAA's performance as a regulator has been critical in maintaining the very high standards of aviation safety in the UK. As per my letter to Sir Stephen on 23 February, supporting innovation is a key priority for the CAA; we have the opportunity now to apply these same standards of excellence to realise the benefits of emerging flight technologies.

The Future of Flight sector is becoming an increasingly integrated and important part of UK airspace. We must provide it with the support it needs to maximise growth and realise the economic and social benefits of the technologies in ways that are safe, secure and sustainable.

We all recognise that new aviation technologies, and especially drones, are set to scale up significantly over the rest of this decade. I am pleased to hear that the CAA has plans to digitalise and improve the process for applications under the 'specific' category – where most of the economic opportunities lie – and where manual authorisations are currently leading to delays, in some instances of several months. The Specific Operations Risk Assessment (SORA) approach will allow applications to be processed more quickly and more predictably for users, and support the increased scale of demand expected. I am keen to see this improvement delivered at pace so that the UK is fully set up to regulate and enable commercial drone operations in the shortest time possible.

These improvements to the authorisation process are not only important to implement now but should allow the CAA to secure greater revenues from future drone applicants in future, recouping any upfront investment. This is the sort of investment that the CAA should be making into its future, by digitising its offering and investing to save, and I believe aligns with some of the early thinking on enhancing digitalisation as part of the CAA Review.

With the Future of Flight Industry Group meeting for the first time next week, this is an opportune time to jointly set out our commitments to the future of the sector as we develop a shared Future of Flight Plan. I'm sure that a positive announcement from the CAA committing to deliver SORA over the next 12 months would be received very positively by the group and set a positive signal of our collective ambition here.

I would appreciate regular updates on progress within the CAA on the delivery of the shared vision that will come through the Future of Flight Group, and how the key issues such as supporting beyond visual line of sight operations, and certification of new advanced air mobility aircraft are being addressed. It would be useful to have a senior point of contact for my officials and my office for this purpose.

I look forward to our continued engagement on this matter, a positive announcement on SORA, and our collaboration on the objectives of the Future of Flight Industry Group. I know my officials would be happy to discuss this in more detail with your team as needed.

Yours,  
Charlotte

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