



Briefing

RECONNECTING NEW ZEALANDERS: CONFIRMING STEPS 1 AND 2 CAN PROCEED AS PLANNED

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response

CC: Reconnecting New Zealanders Ministerial Group

Date	18/02/2022	Priority	High
Deadline	21/02/2022	Briefing Number	DPMC-2021/22-1451

Purpose

This briefing outlines the public health and operational readiness for Steps 1 and 2 of Reconnecting New Zealanders and confirms that these Steps can proceed as planned.

Recommendations

1. **Note** that on 1 February 2022, Cabinet agreed to the commencement of the reconnecting steps, beginning with Step 1 at 11.59pm on Sunday 27 February and Step 2 at 11.59pm on Sunday 13 March [CAB-22-MIN-0008 refers];
2. **Note** that the Ministry of Health has advised that there are no public health or health system reasons why Steps 1 and 2 could not proceed as planned;
3. **Note** that border agencies have confirmed that, while timing remains tight, they are confident that operational readiness for go-live will be achieved by 27 February;
4. **Note** that the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has confirmed that self-isolation implementation is on track and there is no reason why Steps 1 and 2 could not proceed as planned;
5. **Note** that New Zealand Police will investigate or enforce intentional breaches of self-isolation requirements that relate to the requirement to remain at one's place of self-isolation and permitting non-household members to enter a place of self-isolation;

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- 6. **Note** that New Zealand Police will take a graduated enforcement approach for those breaches which are prioritised as significant public health risks, which needs to be balanced against other operational demands (this may include issuing an infringement notice or commencing proceedings for the infringement);
- 7. **Agree** to proactively release this briefing with any appropriate redactions.

YES/NO



Alice Hume
Policy Manager, Strategy and Policy,
COVID-19 Group, DPMC

18/02/2022



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

20/2/2022
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Contact for telephone discussion if required:

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Minister's office comments:

- Noted
- Seen
- Approved
- Needs change
- Withdrawn
- Not seen by Minister
- Overtaken by events
- Referred to

Proactively Released

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Background

1. On 1 February 2022, Cabinet agreed to the commencement of the reconnecting steps, beginning with:
 - a) Step 1 – New Zealanders and other eligible travellers (under New Zealand’s existing border settings) from Australia at 11.59pm on Sunday 27 February; and
 - b) Step 2 – New Zealanders and other eligible travellers (under New Zealand’s existing border settings) from other countries at 11.59pm on Sunday 13 March [CAB-22-MIN-0008 refers];
2. Cabinet directed officials from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and the Ministry of Health (the Ministry), in consultation with other relevant agencies, to notify Reconnecting Ministers ahead of Steps 1 and 2, if there are any critical public health or operational reasons why Steps 1 and/or 2 cannot proceed as planned.

Public health readiness

3. The Ministry has confirmed that there are no critical public health reasons why Steps 1 and 2 cannot proceed as planned.
4. While there remains some risk that easing our border settings will result in cases entering the New Zealand community, in the context of the escalation in domestic cases of COVID-19, this is unlikely to make a significant difference to overall case numbers.
5. Current trends indicate that the number of COVID-19 cases at the border are decreasing. Therefore, as cases in the community are continuing to increase, the relative public health risk at the border is proportionately less than when the Cabinet agreed to proceed with Steps 1 and 2 on 1 February 2022.
6. The wave of the Omicron outbreak in Australia, and in many of the countries where arrivals will be flying from, appears to be declining. For example, in the first two weeks of February, active cases detected in Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) from flights originating in Australia dropped to around 1.5% of all passengers (9 cases out of 658 arrivals), well below the rates of 4% to 5% seen during the month of January.
7. The Ministry has updated the modelling on the number of COVID-19 cases expected to enter the community after self-isolation in Steps 1 and 2, provided to Cabinet on 1 February 2022 [CAB-22- MIN-0008 refers]. Updated estimates highlight that if Step 1 leads to around 5,000 – 6,000 travellers per week from Australia, there could be 30 – 80 imported cases per week being introduced to the community, rather than 30 - 150 cases as previously estimated. The upper limit is based on the proportion of cases detected in arrivals from Australia in early February (2%), which is expected to continue to decline by the time Step 1 commences.

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8. However, the Ministry of Transport has indicated that, based on current booking data, in the first week the actual number of travellers is likely to be more than, and in subsequent weeks less than, originally estimated¹.
9. The Ministry also consider that the public health measures in place for Steps 1 and 2 are sufficient and proportionate for managing the COVID-19 risk from travellers. They will continue to reassess the border measures as the global and domestic pandemic context evolves.

Operational and health system readiness

10. Border agencies have been working towards a milestone of 80% readiness at 15 February, and 100% readiness at 24 February. As at 15 February, the assessment was that readiness was close to the 80% level. While border agencies are unlikely to be able to confirm full readiness on 24 February, they are confident that operational readiness for go-live will, while tight, be achieved by 27 February.
11. In addition, the Ministry has confirmed that there are no critical border health operations or health system capacity issues that would provide cause for deferring Steps 1 or 2.

Key actions to be completed prior to implementation

12. There are several key actions to be completed ahead of implementation on 27 February. These include the following:
 - a) **Finalising changes to the Air Border and Isolation and Quarantine Orders** (and flow-on to Director-General of Health notice-making provisions) – This is critical to inform operational processes and training of officers, along with advice and appropriate guidance to external parties such as airlines. The Ministry have advised that amendments to the Air Border Order are expected to be provided to the Minister for COVID-19 Response to sign on 23 February 2022.
 - b) **Delivery of the temporary health declaration system** (Nau Mai Rā) to issue traveller passes (prior to New Zealand Traveller Declaration going live on 31 March 2022) – an early delivery is required to support travellers submitting forms prior to travel and the Ministry have advised that this is on track to be delivered on 22 February;
 - c) **Establishing a process for triaging breach notifications** – Multiple types of COVID-19 breaches can be reported on the Unite Against COVID-19 website. Self-isolation breach reports for community cases and close contacts are currently triaged by the Ministry and allocated to owners to follow up. Work is underway to agree resourcing levels for this triage team and to establish a process for international arrivals. There is a risk that a surge in reporting traveller self-isolation breaches creates a back log in the triage process;
 - d) **Producing and distributing Welcome Packs at the airport** – The Ministry is working closely with a logistics partner to produce and distribute Welcome Packs (containing RATs and self-isolation guidance) to airports. Printing and assembly has commenced, with no supply issues for tests foreseen for Step 1;

¹ As at 17 February, the Ministry of Transport have indicated that current travel bookings to date from Australia in Step 1 suggest around 9,000 passengers in the first week, with numbers expected to fall to 2,000 – 5,000 in subsequent weeks.

e) **Delivering communications material** – DPMC is working closely with the Department of Internal Affairs and other agencies to deliver translations of key material for the traveller journey and self-isolation requirements, along with alternate format versions for New Zealand’s disabled community. Downloadable versions of the translations and alternate formats will be available on the United Against COVID-19 website.

13. Border agencies and the Ministry have advised that, while timeframes remain tight for operational delivery, these outstanding actions can be operationalised in time for Step 1.

Implementation risks are being closely managed

14. As implementation needs to progress at pace there is a risk that there will be little or no opportunity for ‘dry runs’, particularly for customer-facing operational processes at the airport. New scenarios for staff, including management of high, medium and low risk pathways, may result in some errors and border agencies will need to manage complexities in real time.

15. There is a risk that compressed time for travellers and stakeholders to access, understand and apply the information and guidance, has the potential to lead to misunderstanding or non-compliance. To mitigate these risks, operational agencies are actively prioritising the release of essential information as early as possible, and further refinements will be made over time.

16. Risks are being closely managed and reported on via DPMC’s Reconnecting New Zealanders Readiness Status Report. This is supported by more detailed reporting by Custom’s Border Operational Readiness reporting and MBIE’s Self-Isolation reporting.

Managing the shift from Step 1 to Step 2

17. Operational agencies have not identified any significant operational issues in moving from Step 1 to Step 2 on 13 March 2022. Agencies are aware of a number of key shifts to be managed, including:

- a) Facilitating an increased number of travellers at the airport and through border systems;
- b) Ensuring sufficient RAT supply, including the logistics around distribution of RATs packs at the airports as volumes increase;
- c) Extended deployment of Airline Liaison Officers by Immigration New Zealand to international airport hubs, and border system adjustments for advance passenger processing; and
- d) The need to monitor consular issues from a wider range of countries.

18. Agencies are confident that systems and processes will be in place by 13 March to manage these shifts. Across the system, agencies will build on the learnings from Step 1 implementation and ensure, where appropriate, data is gathered from 27 February to inform what may need to be factored into Step 2. Step 2 will also provide the opportunity to pick up any deliverables deprioritised in Step 1.

19. A Traveller Journey Map outlining the journey from booking to arrival in New Zealand is provided in Appendix 1.

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Operational readiness for self-isolation

20. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has confirmed that self-isolation implementation is on track and there are currently no substantial reasons why Steps 1 and 2 could not proceed as planned.

Self-isolation guidance has been published

21. On 15 February, guidance for eligible travellers entering self-isolation was published by the Ministry. This guidance sets out requirements for travellers:
- a) Prior to departure – including PDT, vaccination, Nau Mai Rā, arranging suitable accommodation;
 - b) On arrival - including travelling to place of self-isolation;
 - c) In self-isolation – including testing, exercising, accessing food/supplies, rules for isolating with other household members; and
 - d) When exiting self-isolation – including calculating isolation period, downloading NZ COVID Tracer App.
22. The Ministry's guidance provides advice to travellers on what to do if they develop COVID-19 symptoms, have non-COVID-19 health needs, seeking mental health and wellbeing support, and accessing financial/welfare support.

Enforcement of compliance with border and self-isolation requirements

23. There are a number of infringement offences for non-compliance with self-isolation requirements. Enforcement agencies are not required to prove that a person intended to commit an act or intentionally failed to comply with a requirement – the fact that a person has done so is sufficient to issue an infringement notice.
24. Intentional failure to comply with any requirement set out in a COVID-19 Order (including, but not limited to, those which have infringement offences attached to them) constitutes a criminal offence.
25. The following agencies are responsible for compliance monitoring:
- a) **New Zealand Customs Service** is responsible for issuing infringement notices for non-compliance with PDT and vaccination requirements – non-compliance will be detected upon arrival at airports, in advance of the NZTD. Customs officers authorisations will be extended to allow Customs officers to issue infringement notices for deliberate non-compliance with traveller pass requirements;
 - b) **The Ministry** is responsible for using infringement notices for non-compliance with the testing regime – an escalation response is in place (a reminder text will be sent in the first instance, a directive letter will be sent, if people remain non-compliant an infringement offence will be issued);
 - c) **New Zealand Police** is responsible for enforcement action related to a person failing to remain at their place of self-isolation, and for permitting non-household members to enter

a place of self-isolation. NZ Police has indicated that it will apply a graduated enforcement approach for those breaches which are prioritised as significant public health risks. This may include issuing an infringement notice or commencing proceedings for the infringement.

26. The public will be able to report potential breaches of these requirements via the Unite Against COVID-19 website, or *105.
27. There are several infringement offences for which there is no enforcement capability. These include failure to provide self-isolation information and failure to wear a face covering travelling to one's place of self-isolation.
28. Only the NZ Police will investigate or enforce intentional breaches of self-isolation requirements that relate to the requirement to remain at one's place of self-isolation and permitting non-household members to enter a place of self-isolation. NZ Police will apply a graduated enforcement approach that needs to be balanced against other operational demands. This may include issuing an infringement notice or commencing proceedings for the infringement.
29. In practice, this means that there are a range of requirements set out in Orders that do not have infringement offences attached to them, and will not be investigated or enforced (where an intentional breach may have occurred)².
30. There is a risk that non-compliance with self-isolation requirements exceeds agency capacity to respond. A process for reviewing, triaging, and allocating incoming reports of breaches via the Unite Against COVID-19 website is being developed. Information sharing agreements between agencies, for enforcement purposes, still need to be finalised for Step 1.

Exiting eligible people from MIQ at Steps 1 and 2

31. On 11 February, the Minister for COVID-19 Response was advised that the approximately 381 people³ in a managed isolation facility (MIF) who become eligible to self-isolate at Step 1 must be exited from that MIF, and instead enter self-isolation [BR-2122-2661 refers].
32. The Minister agreed that MBIE can hold these travellers in a MIF for up to 72 hours (after 11.59pm, 27 February) to ensure that MIQ can confirm that all travellers are eligible to be released. The same process will be proposed for Step 2.
33. Planning is underway to exit these travellers, and MBIE have indicated that most eligible travellers will be able to be released on 28 February.

Airline and airport update

34. Significant work is underway by the airports and airlines to prepare for the border re-opening. We understand that:
 - a) Auckland and Christchurch Airports will start international operations from 28 February;

² For example, the requirement to travel to one's place of self-isolation as quickly and directly as is reasonably practicable under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order 2021

³ This figure may be higher following the MIQ room release scheduled for 17 February 2022.

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- b) Wellington Airport is ready to start operations from Australia from 31 March, or earlier if needed;
 - c) Queenstown Airport is unlikely to start international operations until self-isolation requirements are removed as there will not be sufficient demand.
35. Under Step 1 non-scheduled flights will be able to commence from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, but not Queenstown.
36. Airlines have seen strong demand for flights in the days immediately following the border reopening (i.e. pent up demand from those wanting to return to New Zealand); current booking levels suggest this is likely to settle at a lower level for the following weeks and months.
37. Air New Zealand already operates 20 flights per week to four Australian cities which are supported under the Maintaining International Airfreight Capacity scheme (MIAC); these flights will form the core of its passenger network under Step 1, with reduced or no MIAC support. Qantas has put on daily flights from Sydney for the first week, but then reverts to twice-weekly. Qantas is not operating from any other Australian cities. Other carriers may not operate while self-isolation remains in place.
38. The impact of self-isolation requirements on demand for passenger travel can be seen overseas. For example, Air Canada saw an 85% decline in traveller volumes when compared to pre-COVID numbers which only rose when isolation requirements were removed.
39. The recovery of air connectivity remains a concern while self-isolation remains in place. At present, passenger bookings from Australia are low once the initial rush subsides. Auckland Airport has advised that slot bookings for summer 2022-23 are looking very weak as few international airlines will commit when self-isolation remains in place, given their international experience that very few tourists will begin their holiday with self-isolation.
40. Strong and clear signals to the aviation industry on when New Zealand will start to move away from self-isolation would help to reduce this risk of losing further air connectivity.
41. Airline schedules are expected to remain dynamic in the coming months as airlines begin to re-engage with the New Zealand market and capacity is matched with demand.
42. Following your decision to permit non-scheduled flights to enter New Zealand under Step 1, agencies are continuing work on the operational requirements for non-scheduled flight operators. This includes finalising how much advance notice, before departure, operators will provide to border agencies that all passengers on board have met the requirements to travel under the medium-risk pathway.

Next Steps

43. Amendments to the Air Border Order will be provided to the Minister for COVID-19 Response to sign on 23 February 2022.

Consultation

44. This briefing has been prepared in consultation with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Customs, NZ Police, and the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment.

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Attachments:	
Attachment A:	Traveller Journey Map - from booking through to arrival in New Zealand

APPENDIX 1

TRAVELLER JOURNEY MAP – FROM BOOKING THROUGH TO ARRIVAL IN NEW ZEALAND

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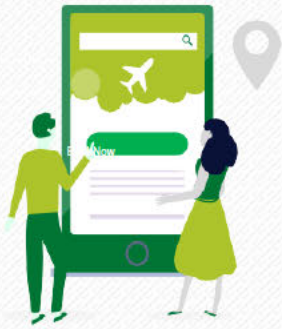
Detailed traveller journey

Border Implementation - Pre-travel

Working draft 18 Feb 2022- pending final reviews

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

Start booking flight



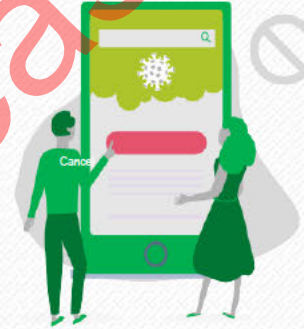
Booking confirmation



Post booking and pre-travel communications



Eligibility-related cancellations or changes



Pre-departure checks



STEP 1

- Information on eligibility and requirements for travellers.
- Clear communication about requirements for travel pathways and for "life in New Zealand" once isolation is completed, under the traffic light settings

- Confirmation email with information on requirements for eligibility, pathways and what happens if travel plans or eligibility alters

- Airline sends out pre-flight communications reminding travellers of requirements for eligibility, pathways and how to travel safely
- Clear guidance on rebooking/cancellation process should traveller be unable to travel because their traveller eligibility has changed
- Clear messaging to help establish realistic traveller expectations about the travel experience.

- Airlines offer appropriate and flexible ticket types for sale

- Customs undertakes advance passenger screening using electronic advance data
- Australian Border Force validates 14 day eligibility and advises New Zealand of any non compliance
- Immigration New Zealand will issue "Do not board" instructions for any non-eligible travellers

NEXT STEPS

- Continue to iterate public-facing communications and deliver on Communications Plan to provide clarity for travellers
- Continue to work with aviation sector to provide guidance and clarity on traveller queries

- Website updates and alignment
- Collaboration with airlines and airports

- Finalise expectations for airlines and airports
- Continue to iterate industry guidance to help provide clarity

- Airlines to confirm approach
- Collaboration with airlines and airports
- Airlines continue to adjust schedules to meet operational needs and demand

- Test advance screening functionality
- Finalise and test data-matching

REGULATORY LEVERS

- Safe Travel Advisories
- NZ Immigration settings
- Air Border Order
- Director General of Health Notices
- Isolation and Quarantine Order

- Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight"

- Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight"

- Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight"
- Airline Conditions of Carriage Rules

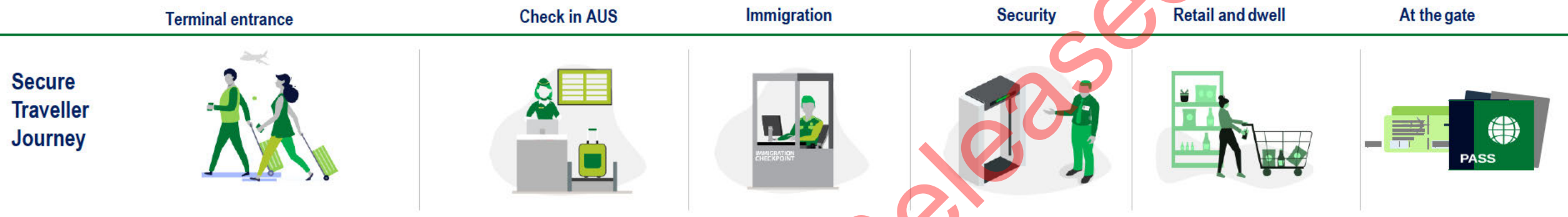
- Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight"
- Airline Conditions of Carriage Rules

Detailed traveller journey

Border Implementation – Outbound from Australia

Working draft 18 Feb 2022- pending final reviews

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION



Secure Traveller Journey

	Terminal entrance	Check in AUS	Immigration	Security	Retail and dwell	At the gate
STEP 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admission to terminals and distancing if required in line with local COVID-19 mandates Available wipes to wipe down trolleys High touch point frequent cleaning Wearing of masks encouraged If on-site testing facilities are available travellers may chose to undertake their pre-departure test at the airport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 traveller eligibility requirements acknowledged by traveller Airlines will take all "reasonable endeavours" to ensure that travellers are eligible before they are given permission to board. Airline Liaison Officers in place to support the airlines to ensure only eligible travellers are allowed to travel Self-service facilities unlikely to be in use initially and delays are expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traveller protocol applies Maintain queue, signage, cleaning/sterilisation and any local PPE protocols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain queue, signage, cleaning/sterilisation and PPE protocols, e.g. sanitised security trays Limit traveller and staff interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lounge capacity managed in line with local COVID-19 requirements High frequency cleaning Food outlets and retail managed in line with local COVID-19 mandates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ill traveller protocol applies for any noticeably symptomatic travellers Traveller flow management Contactless processes wherever possible Masks and social distancing recommended.
NEXT STEPS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise Health screening questions Deployment of Airport Liaison Officers Airport Liaison Officer training for airlines Continue to iterate industry guidance to help provide clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deployment of Airport Liaison Officers Airport Liaison Officer engagement with airports Support from Customs Liaison Officers and consular staff if required Continue to iterate industry guidance to help provide clarity 			
REGULATORY LEVERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight" Overseas health requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard suite as detailed in "Start booking a flight" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immigration Rules Air Border Order 			

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Detailed traveller journey Border Implementation - In Flight

Working draft 18 Feb 2022- pending final reviews

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

Boarding the plane

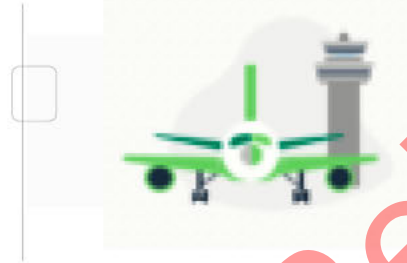
In the air

Preparing for landing

Landed/disembarking plane

Through the Terminal

Secure Traveller Journey



STEP 1

- Aircraft sanitised prior to boarding
- Agreed crew protocols followed
- Mixing of traveller pathways on plane allowed
- No separation of travellers and all seats occupied
- Ill traveller protocols apply and in-flight protocols reinforced: masks, limit movement, wash hands, cough into elbow
- Travellers to stay in their seats where possible,
- Crew and traveller PPE as required by current Health Order
- In-flight announcement to establish expectations for arrival. Information about arrival experience e.g. checking of documents, pathway separation, e-Gates, RAT packs etc.
- Travellers encouraged to download and use contact tracing app and follow local health guidelines
- Aircraft sanitisation process commences
- Use of masks required
- Low, Medium and High Risk pathway travellers will mix within the terminal
- Airline, airport and border agencies co-ordinate pathway separation.
- Signage in place to help travellers find their way
- Health professionals on hand to assist any travellers who self-declare as symptomatic

NEXT STEPS

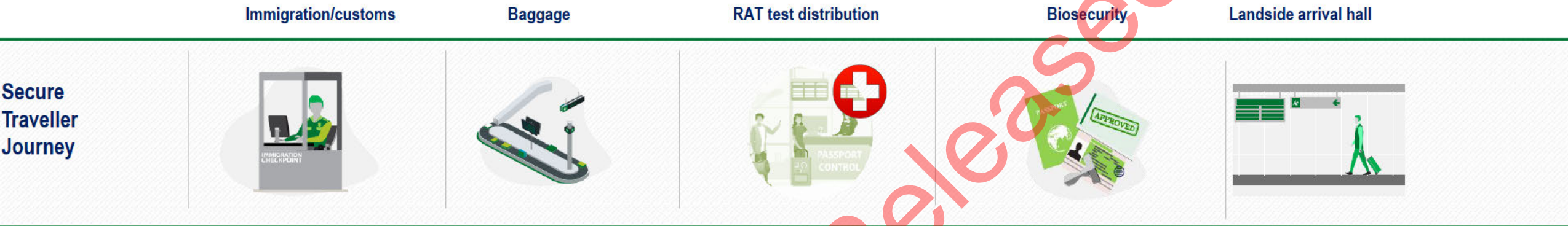
- Finalise Crew Travel Pass requirements
- Continue to iterate industry guidance to help provide clarity
- Collaboration with airlines over on-board announcements
- Install airport signage
- Collaboration with airlines and airports to finalise processes
- Continue to iterate industry guidance to help provide clarity
- Stakeholder engagement and validation of readiness
- Finalise, sign and execute the regulatory levers – Air Border Order, Director-General's Notices, Isolation and Quarantine Order
- Restart standard arrival process

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Detailed traveller journey Border Implementation - Inbound

Working draft 18 Feb 2022- pending final reviews

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STEP 1

- System alerts loaded to assist officers with ensuring Nau Mai Ra is completed and travellers on the high risk pathway to MIQ are separated
- All travellers have their vaccination and pre-departure test status verified
- Pathway identification occurs at the entry to eGates and at the Customs counters
- High risk pathway travellers processed separately, escorted through the remainder of the arrival process and transferred to the MIQ teams
- Medium risk pathway travellers identified to allow RAT kits to be distributed
- Low risk pathway travellers identified and guided to follow the arrival process and enter the community.
- High touch surfaces like baggage trolleys to have high frequency cleaning
- High risk pathway travellers escorted to collect their baggage to allow it to travel with them to MIQ.
- RAT kits with instructions and guidance on living in New Zealand available for distribution
- MPI distributes kits to travellers who have been prior identified as Medium risk pathway travellers
- Health professionals on hand to help answer any Health-related questions.
- High touch areas in the quarantine portal to have high frequency sanitisation regimes
- Passenger arrival card collected and passed over to Customs for scanning
- Airports use digital signage & announcements to encourage download and use of contact tracing app
- Once traveller has exited they proceed to their place of self isolation by the most direct route
- Normal transportation options are permitted and travellers must observe local COVID-19 protocols

NEXT STEPS

- Finalise Border Agency SOP's and training material
- Finalise compilation and distribution of RAT kits
- Finalise airport logistics for storage and replenishment
- Finalise training material for staff.
- Finalise border agency operating procedures and training material
- Operationalise pre-COVID "business as usual"

Border Implementation work stream scope finishes at this point and the baton is handed over to our colleagues who are coordinating the Self Isolation work stream

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