Dear [Insert MLA name]

**Save Future Travel – businesses need a roadmap for re-opening and recovery**

I am writing today as the [owner/director/manager] of [insert business name], in light of the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions being imposed on individuals and businesses across Northern Ireland, to ask you to back the Save Future Travel campaign and urge the Northern Ireland Executive to provide additional support for travel businesses who have been devastated by the current crisis, and to outline a roadmap for the eventual re-opening of the travel industry.

[Insert some information on your travel business – for example, how long have you been in business, how many people do you employ]

While the UK Government has outlined a tentative way out of this crisis for England, it is disappointing that the Northern Irish Executive has not yet provided a clear framework for the restart of international travel. The uncertainty that remains for Northern Irish travel businesses will serve as a hammer blow to an industry that, in normal times, employs over 5,300 people in Northern Ireland and is worth nearly £300m to the Northern Irish economy. Travel is not only viable as a sector, but it will also be invaluable to the economic recovery of the nation – and it is critical that the Northern Ireland Executive does all it can to help businesses and protect jobs.

The Office of National Statistics published data in December 2020 which showed that the travel sector has been the hardest hit service sector in the UK economy as a result of COVID-19. This follows a year of severe restrictions on trade, including constantly changing travel corridors, FCDO Travel Advice against many destinations across the globe, and local and national restrictions, such as ‘stay at home’ orders and closure of non-essential retail, that have decimated the industry and destroyed consumer confidence in travel.

[Consider adding personal circumstances here, e.g. As a travel agency business, we receive most of our income through commission that is paid close to the departure of clients. Having had to refund all monies earned for holidays due this year, and with the outlook for travel appearing bleak in the coming weeks, we need financial support to help us through to the next potential major travel period.]

While it is right that we support the necessary public health measures in pursuit of tackling COVID-19, with the vaccine rollout progressing well, and the increasing availability of other mitigation measures, it should be possible to provide an intention to re-open travel which would provide a much-needed boost of confidence in the travel industry.

The University of Edinburgh’s recent finding that both the Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines have reduced the risk of hospitalisation from COVID-19 by 85% and 94% respectively, and early evidence on the impact of vaccination on transmission of the virus from a report published by Public Health England, is extremely welcome and very encouraging. There is little doubt, therefore, that we now have much firmer grounds for optimism that vaccination, and the other tools at our disposal, offer us a route back to greater normality.

Travel businesses – who were the first affected by COVID-19, and will be the last to recover – urgently need positive news, having been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic. The travel industry cannot afford to lose another summer season, nor can we wait for the full rollout of the vaccination programme before people start to travel again. The Northern Ireland Executive must work to get people travelling in time for the summer, recognising that the return to normal life will never be entirely risk-free. What we would like to hear from Ministers are the principles for restarting travel, including working with the UK Government and the other Devolved Administrations to develop an internationally recognised vaccine certificate. This measure, alongside appropriate testing, is certain to accelerate the safe re-opening of travel.

If, however, it is the intention of the Northern Ireland Executive to keep travel businesses closed and unable to trade for the longer-term, this needs to be made clear as soon as possible, so that businesses can plan accordingly. Considerable additional financial support must also be made available, beyond the levels made accessible to date, including new rounds of targeted funding for both travel agents and outbound tour operators.

I very much hope you will consider the points I have raised above, and that urgent consideration will be given to assistance for travel businesses like mine across Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely,