

COMMONPASS DIGITAL HEALTH PASS AND GLOBAL TRUST FRAMEWORK LAUNCHES TO ENABLE SAFER TRAVEL

News / Airlines



The Commons Project Foundation and the World Economic Forum announced international trials starting this week for CommonPass, a digital health pass for travellers to securely document their certified COVID-19 test status while keeping their health data private. CommonPass is built on the CommonPass Framework that establishes standard methods for lab results and vaccination records to be certified and enables governments to set and verify their own health criteria for travellers.

The purpose of CommonPass and the CommonPass Framework is to enable safer airline and cross border travel by giving both travellers and governments confidence in each traveller's verified COVID-19 status. At present, COVID-19 test results for travel are frequently shared on printed paper - or photos of the paper - from unknown labs, often written in languages foreign to those inspecting them. There is no standard format or certification system.

“Travel and tourism has been down across the board due to the COVID pandemic.” said Diane Sabatino, Deputy Executive Director, Office of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection. “CBP wants to be part of the solution to build confidence in air travel, and we are glad to help the aviation industry and our federal partners stand up a pilot like CommonPass.”

Cathay Pacific Airways and United Airlines will trial the system in October with select volunteers on flights between London, New York, Hong Kong and Singapore, with government authorities observing. Deployments are planned with additional airlines and routes across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East in quick succession.

To use CommonPass, travellers take a COVID-19 test at a certified lab and upload the results to their mobile phone. They then complete any additional health screening questionnaires required by the destination country.

With test results and questionnaire complete, CommonPass confirms a traveller’s compliance with the destination country entry requirements and generates a QR code. That code can be scanned by airline staff and border officials. A QR code can be printed for users without mobile devices.

CommonPass adheres to tight privacy principles and is designed to protect personal data in compliance with relevant privacy regulations, including GDPR.

For governments, CommonPass and the CommonPass Framework provide a more reliable means of assessing the health status of incoming travellers and gives them the flexibility to adapt their entry requirements as the pandemic evolves, including whether and what type of lab tests or vaccinations to require.

“Without the ability to trust COVID-19 tests - and eventually vaccine records - across international borders, many countries will feel compelled to retain full travel bans and mandatory quarantines for as long as the pandemic persists,” said Dr. Bradley Perkins, Chief Medical Officer of The Commons Project and former Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “With trusted individual health data, countries can implement more nuanced health screening requirements for entry.”

Perkins added that the ability to share health information in a verifiable, safe and privacy protecting manner is key to opening borders, whether travelling by land or air.

CommonPass and the CommonPass Framework are being launched by the World Economic Forum and The Commons Project, a Swiss-based non-profit foundation building global digital services and platforms for the common good, in collaboration with a broad coalition of public and private partners around the world, including government representatives from 37 countries across six continents.

"Individual national responses will not be sufficient to address this global crisis," said Christoph Wolff, Head of Mobility at the World Economic Forum. "Bans, bubbles and quarantines may provide short term protection, but developed and developing nations alike need a long-term, flexible, and risk-based approach like CommonPass."

The goal of the trials is to replicate the full traveller experience of taking a test for COVID-19 prior to departure, uploading the result to their phones, and demonstrating their compliance with entry

requirements at their departure and destination airports.

For Cathay Pacific Airways, the first internal trial is planned for a flight between Hong Kong International Airport and Singapore Changi International Airport, using rapid testing technology provided by Prenetics.

“Our goal is to test and refine a system that would best support the progressive and safe re-opening of travel, through the adoption of a trusted and harmonized global framework” said Lavinia Lau, Director Commercial of Cathay Pacific Airways. “The CommonPass framework can incorporate specific requirements of individual countries and governments, and can be used to provide more assurance to travellers as well as the population of destination countries.”

“CommonPass also helps travellers stay up-to-date with and adhere to evolving government entry policies,” Lau added.

For United Airlines, the first airline to trial the platform in the United States, volunteers will use the service for flights between London Heathrow Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport.

“Testing is a key component of a multi-layered approach to safely reopening travel,” said Steve Morrissey, United’s vice president, regulatory and policy. “Trials with solutions like CommonPass are critical to demonstrate the potential for testing as an alternative to blanket quarantine measures or travel restrictions, while we continue to focus on the safety and health of our customers and employees.”

Volunteers undertaking the trials with Cathay Pacific Airways and United Airlines will adhere to all entry and testing rules, adding the additional action of uploading information from their testing before departure into CommonPass.

At London Heathrow, tests from private testing company Prenetics will be administered by the travel and medical services firm Collinson in the dedicated COVID-19 testing facilities set up with their partner Swissport.

“As we come to grips with living with COVID-19, testing is the safest scientific method to reopen countries and borders. However, as each country looks to find the right solution to protect their citizens, we know that the ability to demonstrate the validity of testing done upon arrival or before departure is key to reopening borders,” said David Evans, Joint CEO, Collinson. “The Collinson and Swissport dedicated COVID-19 testing facility at Heathrow will support Common Pass’ trial by testing United Airlines and Cathay Pacific Airways volunteers.”

“For some time now, Heathrow has been calling for the creation of a Common International Standard and cross-border pilots such as these could help governments across the world and the industry to unlock the benefits of testing in aviation,” Heathrow’s Process Improvement Director, Mark Burgess. “We’re looking forward to reviewing the findings of these trials and using the learnings to support the recovery of an industry that provides so many jobs and economic opportunities globally.”

“Partners across the globe are looking for sustainable solutions to keep travel healthy, responsible

and safe,” Dr. Martin S. Cetron, Director, Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, CDC. “CDC is eager to learn from the CommonPass pilot, as it could be one of the many potential tools that may one day contribute to a safe, responsible, and healthy global air travel experience.”

“I am encouraged by how quickly the global travel industry has coalesced around the CommonPass Framework” said Greg O’Hara, Founder of Certares and Executive Chairman of American Express Global Business Travel. “CommonPass can give travelers the clarity and confidence they need to start moving again.”

Following these trials, the CommonPass rollout will expand to additional airlines and routes across Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Middle East in quick succession.

“The government of Rwanda is working with the Commons Project to implement CommonPass as a tool to protect our population’s health as we reopen our borders,” said Dr. Sabin Nsanzimana, the Director General of Rwanda’s Biomedical Centre. “We can make more informed border entry decisions with the ability to trust health information from other countries.”

“Trust through clarity and consistency will be key to restoring confidence to travel,” said Julián Guerrero Orozco, Colombia’s Vice Minister of Tourism. “Instead of having different approaches nationally, we need a standard method like the CommonPass Framework.”

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