

Wee: Passenger Manifest Helps Make Tracing Air Travellers Easier

PUTRAJAYA : It is no longer necessary for airlines to enforce compulsory social distancing as the nature of air travel itself makes it easy for authorities to perform contact tracing, says Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong. Elaborating on the relaxation of requirements for commercial air travel, Dr Wee said airlines would know exactly where each passenger was seated based on the manifest.

“As such, it is easy to locate each individual should the need arise,” he said in an interview at his office here yesterday. “Airlines have also been implementing various standard operating procedures (SOP) to ensure the safety of both crew and passengers in light of Covid-19. “The ministry has met all the stakeholders in the aviation industry to impress upon them the need to rigorously follow the SOP in accordance with recognised international practices.

“Likewise, for express buses, it is also easy to trace passengers as there is a passenger list,” he said after the announcement by Senior Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob that public transport, including flights, express buses and trains, could now operate at full capacity.

Dr Wee said a more flexible approach towards social distancing requirements was necessary as even the International Air Transport Association itself had never made this compulsory for its members. “This pragmatic view needs to be taken as regulators have to balance between the interests of transport operators and the welfare of the people,” he said, adding that if distancing of one metre was to be imposed on an aircraft, the passenger load would be very low, leading to high fares that people were currently complaining about.

Likewise, a bus with a capacity of 40 could only carry 20 passengers, so operators would suffer if compulsory distancing was imposed, he added.