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'Don't expect travel to be part of EU trade deal'

Ian Taylor

Prime minister Boris Johnson "is in dreamland" if he expects to negotiate a comprehensive free-trade deal with the EU by the end of the year, corporate travel leaders were told last week.

Members of the Business Travel Association (BTA) meeting in London on Thursday were warned to expect no more than "a bare-bones deal" with the EU that would exclude services – which comprise 80% of the UK economy including travel.

Britain formally departed the EU on January 31, entering a transition period which Johnson insists he will not extend beyond December 2020.

But Ben Kentish, political correspondent of online media publisher The Independent, told the BTA winter conference: "[Trade] negotiations won't start until March [and] the complexities when it comes to services are vast.

80%

Service sector's share of the UK economy – including travel

"Boris is in dreamland. He has put in law that he won't extend the [Brexit] transition period. I would expect there to be a bare-bones deal that won't cover services."

Fellow political correspondent Nicola Bartlett of the *Daily Mirror* told BTA members Johnson would try to avoid extending the transition "as long as possible", although she noted: "He did extend the withdrawal date."

She said: "If he wants a deal, the EU has made clear there will have to be alignment [on EU regulations]. But Boris does not want that."

Gareth Morgan, BTA public



affairs advisor and Cavendish Communications director, told the conference: "The government is going to have to decide which sectors it opens up [to the EU]. Real decisions will have to be made that will alienate some communities."

For example, Morgan said: "Fishing is 0.12% of the economy, financial services are 6.9%."

EU leaders have suggested a deal on fishing in UK waters will be essential to securing a trade deal.