



**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
To the House of Assembly**

**by
The Hon. Owen K. Darrell, JP, MP
Minister of Tourism & Transport, Culture & Sport**

**Update on the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Event in
Bermuda**

Friday 27th February 2026

Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to rise in this Honourable House to report on the successful hosting of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Board Meeting, Ministers Council Meeting, and the 2026 CTO Air Connectivity Summit, held here in Bermuda from February 23rd to 24th, 2026.

Ninety persons from the following twenty-four (24) countries flew to our shores to attend the event.

- Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, Chile, Grenada, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, Panama, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin, Sint Maarten, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, St. Kitts & Nevis, US Virgin Islands, Trinidad & Tobago, United Kingdom, and US Virgin Islands.

The countries represented nineteen (19) CTO members and nine (9) non-CTO members.

Mr. Speaker, on February 23rd, Bermuda proudly hosted the CTO Board and Ministers Council Meeting, followed by a Ministers' Dinner that evening. That dinner was more than a formal engagement ...it created meaningful space for visiting Ministers and CEOs to connect directly with Bermuda Cabinet Ministers, local tourism stakeholders, and senior airline and airport executives. It was an evening of strategic relationship-building, positioning Bermuda not only as a host, but as a regional leader in tourism and air connectivity dialogue.

On February 24th, Bermuda welcomed regional leaders to the 2026 CTO Air Connectivity Summit, a critical forum focused on one of the Caribbean's most pressing issues: airlift. In simple terms, if we cannot move people efficiently and affordably throughout our region, we cannot grow tourism sustainably. The summit centered on expanding international and intra-regional routes, positioning aviation strategy with tourism growth, and using data to drive smarter decisions about connectivity.

Discussions were dynamic and solutions focused. Leaders spoke candidly about the need to strengthen regional air links, reduce travel costs, and pursue bold partnerships that improve access across the

Caribbean. A key highlight was the presentation of a comprehensive air connectivity study conducted by ASM, providing data driven insights to guide route development and long term planning. Importantly, the summit brought together governments and major airlines: including JetBlue, American Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, BermudAir, and several regional carriers to discuss practical pathways for expanding routes and improving infrastructure.

Panels explored the theme “From Runway to Resort,” emphasizing that aviation and tourism cannot operate in silos. Air access is the gateway to economic opportunity connecting visitors not only to airports, but to hotels, restaurants, attractions, and small businesses. Conversations also addressed strengthening intra-Caribbean travel, modernizing digital identity systems, and navigating high operating costs that affect both airlines and travelers. These were practical discussions about improving the visitor experience and boosting local economies.

Mr. Speaker, the summit achieved tangible outcomes. A significant milestone was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Caribbean Tourism Organization and Airports Council International – Latin America and the Caribbean (ACI-LAC), formalizing strategic cooperation to strengthen regional air access.

Under the MOU, CTO and ACI-LAC may collaborate in the following non-exclusive areas:

1. Joint events including conferences, summits, roundtables, workshops, and forums related to air connectivity, aviation, and tourism.
2. Training and capacity-building initiatives, such as executive education, technical training, webinars, certification programs, and professional development opportunities for tourism and airport stakeholders.
3. Thought leadership activities, including co-authored white papers, policy briefs, research reports, keynote sessions, panels, and other knowledge products.
4. Joint research and studies on air connectivity, airport development, tourism impacts, and regional competitiveness.
5. Collaboration on advocacy and policy engagement at regional and international forums.
6. Exchange of non-confidential data, insights, and industry intelligence, subject to applicable laws and internal policies.
7. Development of pilot projects or demonstration initiatives aligned with shared strategic priorities.
8. Mutual promotion of relevant initiatives, events, and programs undertaken by either organization.

Mr. Speaker, the event also served as a powerful platform for collaboration, bringing together senior airline executives, airport authorities, and government ministers to advance workable solutions. The dialogue helped shape the regional tourism policy direction and marketing priorities for 2026 and beyond.

In terms of participation, the event welcomed:

- Visiting Ministers and CEOs/Directors of Tourism
- Senior airline executives from JetBlue, Virgin Atlantic, American Airlines (virtually), and several regional Caribbean airlines
- Airport representatives from Bermuda and across the Caribbean
- Local tourism stakeholders
- Six Tourism Signature School students and their teacher

Total number of attendees: 166

Breakdown by category:

- Ministers: 13 (10 from overseas and 3 locals)
- Permanent Secretaries: 4 (including Bermuda)
- CEOs/Directors of Tourism: 12 (including Bermuda)
- Airline Executives: 10

- Airport Representatives: 13
- Allied and Affiliate members: 14
- Local Stakeholders: 64
- Other delegates: 29 (includes CTO staff, Market Place Excellence (MPE) staff, other government officials, etc.)
- Students/Educators: 7 (as previously stated 6 students and their teacher)

Mr. Speaker, I must also share that throughout the events, Bermuda consistently received glowing feedback from attendees. Delegates spoke highly of the warmth of our people, the professionalism of our teams, and the seamless organization of the events. Many commented on the beauty of our island from the cleanliness to the charm of our surroundings. Those remarks were not taken lightly. They reflect the pride, dedication, and hospitality that define Bermuda. As Minister, hearing those comments firsthand made me immensely proud...proud of our team, proud of our partners, and proud of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, this summit reinforced Bermuda's role as a serious voice in regional aviation and tourism strategy. We did not simply host a meeting, we hosted momentum. Air connectivity is economic connectivity. When we strengthen our air routes, we strengthen jobs, investment, and opportunity for our people.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, I would be remiss if I did not extend sincere and heartfelt thanks to those who made this summit not only possible but exceptional.

I wish to acknowledge the Secretary General of the Caribbean Tourism Organization and her dedicated team for the seamless execution of this summit. Their professionalism, coordination, and commitment to regional advancement ensured that every session, every engagement, and every detail reflected the highest standard of excellence.

I also extend my sincere gratitude to the Bermuda Tourism Authority for their tremendous organization efforts and for proudly showcasing our island's rich heritage through the curated historical tours, reminding our regional partners that Bermuda offers not only strategy and infrastructure but culture, story, and soul. Good job BTA!

To the Hamilton Princess Hotel and Beach Club, thank you for delivering world class hospitality. The service, presentation, and attention to detail reinforced why Bermuda continues to stand confidently among premier destinations.

Finally, I must recognise the outstanding efforts of the Ministry team, the Department of Communications, and the Cabinet Office's

Protocol team. From logistics to media coordination to diplomatic protocol, your tireless work behind the scenes ensured that Bermuda was presented with precision, dignity, and excellence.

Mr. Speaker, events of this magnitude do not happen by chance. They happen because of dedication, collaboration, and pride in country. To everyone who played a role, thank you for helping Bermuda shine.

Bermuda continues to lead not only with hospitality, but with vision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.