

Dear Chairman and members of the Kingdom Relations Committee, the Commission Public Health, Welfare and Sport and the Committee on Infrastructure and the Environment,

It was with interest that I took note of the main points of the report this week "[Connectivity Caribbean part of the Kingdom](#)". The Committee of the Regions endorses the Commission's recommendation that the region - I live and work on the Windward island of St. Eustatius - to set up the flight transport as public transport (the report speaks of PSOs) naturally appeals to me very much. I would almost say: *do it! by tomorrow, please!*

From the demarcation that has been used (and that, I read, is inspired by the Expert Group Connectivity between the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom), it is understandable that the connections *between* the Windward Islands and Leeward Islands do not receive much attention. Some attention exists for the SXM-CUR connection, but that's what it is. Precisely from the point of view of the 'construction' that the Dutch Caribbean is, would be a *structural* flight connection between Saba and St. Eustatius on the one hand and Bonaire on the other hand I think is actually self-evident (should?) be. For that reason I would like to plead for the design of precisely this *structural* flight connection. I recently - February 8th - mentioned this in an e-mail to you, or at least to the Committee on Kingdom Relations, written below:

[...]

Hurricane Irma in 2017 made everyone aware once again that the dependence on St. Maarten for the small islands of Saba and St. Eustatius is very large and vulnerable. Sounds were then heard of the necessity of greater diversity in connections and in purchasing and supply lines. These sounds are again silenced and the dependence on St. Maarten is again great, since time immemorial. For a moment there was a direct air connection with Bonaire (with the CN Express) but nothing is heard about it now. The impression is that the Dutch government (incl. RCN) does not want to do anything at all to reduce the monopoly position of Winair in order to facilitate mobility with the environment. Here again (in the next paragraph) I will give you a possible look on my part at the longer term.

Note: BES-reporter reports on January 16 that Saba wants to be advised to use the increase and facilitate accessibility (e.g. for tourists). This received message I have immediately after I became aware of it of the government commissioner in order to examine whether, in this respect, there is a can be worked together. On the part of the board, in their response I have only heard it was "picked up". I do not know what that means in concrete terms.

Back to the long term perspective. Without further investigation into this I suspect that two groups of recurring passengers for the air connections can be identified. Here's the thing government personnel (RCN) with a head office in Bonaire and branch offices in Saba and St. Eustatius. These staff regularly fly back and forth and on more than one occasion it involves many delays and detours. It sounds cynically to establish that it is almost faster to get from St. Maarten via

Amsterdam to Bonaire then directly or via Curaçao. It seems as if Winair cannot make sufficient profit on a direct connection between St. Eustatius and Saba on the one hand and Bonaire on the other. Non-rational earning models (I'll try to avoid to name the concept of 'possible self-enrichment by top executives') seem to be a rational one to stand in the way of approach.

A second group of regularly returning passengers are patients who have to pay a fee to be able to travel to and from the airport from the 'ZVK' to treatment centres elsewhere. An important destination Colombia is one of them: many specialist contracts have been concluded with Colombian health organisations. Again, I haven't really done any research on this and I'm also not an expert in the medical field, but it seems to me that the in Bonaire, Curacao and Aruba working doctors - who I suspect are mostly in the Netherlands have been educated - will be no worse than their Colombian colleagues. Isn't it a more efficient use of public funds to make maximum use of them of health organisations on the Dutch Leeward Islands instead of those in Colombia? The language problem too - not everyone has mastered Spanish - is to be coped and the family guidance is also provided may be less intensive and therefore cheaper. After all, in current practice, a family member to accompany the patient; I'm sure I won't tell you a secret when I note that at Christmas time the ZVK-funded visits to Colombia reaches a peak because it's nice to do the Christmas shopping there. In short, when this flow of passengers is also "diverted" from Colombia to Bonaire/Curaçao/Aruba then it is inevitable that also for Winair (or another company) these flights will be or become cost effective. A joint efforts of MinVWS, MinBZK and RCN would, in my view, be a good way to achieve this.

[...]

In addition to this text, I am currently thinking of the recent, financially orientated developments around Insel Air and the international airports on Sint Maarten and Bonaire that in my opinion, there is a need for an increase/expansion of the diversity of air connections in the Caribbean region.

I would like to suggest to your Commission to consider the recommendation in the report "Connectivity of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands" and a *structural* public (flight) transport function according to the model of the PSO (Public Service Obligation) in order to between the three islands of the Dutch Caribbean.

My consideration to write to you is inspired by the following thoughts:

- the *Committee on Kingdom Relations* because of its coordinating role in the interdepartmental consultation as well as the organisation of the RCN;
- the *Committee on Infrastructure and the Environment* because the subject of 'air connections' belongs to it Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management policy area;
- the *Committee on Public Health, Welfare and Sport* because the effective and efficient organisation of the Zorgverzekeringskantoor Caribisch Nederland (ZVK) in policy terms a responsibility of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

With kind regards,

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