

Dear chairman and members of the Infrastructure and Water Commission,

I recently read with interest the Aviation Policy Memorandum 2020-2050 (Luchtvaartnota 2020-2050) and its Implementation Agenda. I was not familiar with the phenomenon but I read that such a memorandum provides a handhold and sets a course. Of course, something like that can never hurt: in that respect a memorandum about many other domains would perhaps be a good consideration. The previous Aviation Policy Memorandum - I did not know that - already dated from 2009 and apparently - so it has been decided - it was time to update the course and the handhold. With regard to the intended time horizon I raised my eyebrows for a moment: who can now look thirty years further into the future...? Anyway, in order to determine a direction in order to interpret and fit in developments, that is perhaps the right way to proceed.

Given my place of residence - St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean - I paid particular attention to what was mentioned about this region in the Aviation Policy Memorandum. Honesty compels me to say that my expectations were not great but I was (fortunately!) deceived. The Dutch Caribbean is indeed addressed in the Aviation Policy Memorandum as well as in the corresponding Implementation Agenda.

In the Aviation Policy Memorandum I read that until now the central government pulled the purse strings when it came to optimizing a Dutch Caribbean airport. Although I do not see it as concrete - after all, it is stated right above that the islands themselves are responsible for their own (international) airport - customization is provided. I want to understand here that *what* needs to be done is in any case done in consultation with the public entities, and is financed by the central government. I also read that in the run-up to this Aviation Policy Memorandum a participation process has taken place with residents, companies, organizations and administrators on the islands. I do not know on which level of abstraction this statement applies, but on the level of individual islands (i.e. St. Eustatius) there has in any case been no involvement of the residents, otherwise I would certainly have been present at such a consultation.

Diversification in supply

In earlier letters I have already explained that the importance of good air connections is absolutely endorsed by me. In fact, there are no other connections! However, where the memorandum speaks of the importance of frequent and affordable connections, I believe to establish that in the case of St. Eustatius (and in my opinion also in the case of Saba) this goes hand in hand with the efforts of the monopolist Winair. After all, a monopolist does not think in terms of (frequent and) affordable connections at all.

In order to be able to freely discuss (and determine policy) about this, the burden of direct involvement must in any case be removed. I am referring here to the ownership of Winair that has been invested in by two parties: The Netherlands and St. Maarten. The share of the Netherlands is only small, but the ownership hinders a (free) discussion that may be perceived as threatening by Winair. After all, the model with open and free competition in the market offers the population the greatest guarantee of an affordable service that suits the customer, but this open and free competition is (possibly) not in the interest of the monopolist Winair. For the time being, discussions in which parties other than Winair can also offer the service appear to be taboo. There have been trials in the past (EZ Air, CN Express), but these have always been premature deaths (mainly due to the actions of the Netherlands, or on behalf of the Netherlands: by the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland).

Ideas are always there, but nothing is realized. An - in my opinion - idea-with-potential concerns a direct connection from Saba and St. Eustatius with Bonaire instead of with (or even via) St. Maarten.

Didn't hurricane Irma teach us all that the dependency on St. Maarten is too great and should be more diverse? ¹ I've even seen a regular timetable in a direct connection between the three BES islands, but I've never seen it go any further than a timetable. Such a direct connection offers opportunities for a more effective and efficient cooperation between the three Public Entities and also offers the prospect of an alternative connection with the 'outside world' (including the European Netherlands).

Note: This week someone went from St. Eustatius to Bonaire for a medical reason. The only Dutch island in this region that was not visited on that one-way trip - of more than six hours - is Saba.

Local involvement in exploitation

Just as Civil Engineering and Logistics were originally military activities that are now fully embedded in 'normal' life, I would also like to draw your attention to the *Integrated Logistics Support*, or ILS. In the development of new (military) equipment, the ILS has become a 'mature' branch of sport in the military world in which effective and efficient operation [criterion is the lowest possible lifecycle cost] is pursued through an analysis of the various failure modes on the basis of which preventive and corrective maintenance tasks are defined, each of which in turn are analyzed for support in the broadest sense of the word (including, for example, the need for training and test equipment). I see a similar way of thinking (in which design, new construction and operation are brought together in one vision) in the way in which the construction world is developing. More specifically, I think of DBFMO contracts in which Design, Build, Finance, Maintain & Operate are 'brought together' in a single contract aimed at payment by the (ultimate) customer during the exploitation period (in the same way as tolls are paid for a road or bridge).

It is not my intention to discuss these types of developments or project or contract forms with you, but to optimally involve the local entrepreneurs in the building or renovation, followed by the operation of the airport (on Sint Eustatius) in the broadest sense, including the installed equipment, instruments and infrastructure. If you want to involve the local entrepreneurs in this, you need to invest in time in the right training courses for the appropriate St. Eustatius people (i.e. training courses at the leading HBO and executive MBO4 level). It may even be necessary to set up companies for this purpose, but then you have to offer 'prospects' of (permanent) employment.

Well, so far a contribution from my hand. I will finish but not without wishing you a lot of wisdom in the decisions to be taken concerning the future of (among others) St. Eustatius, especially concerning mobility and accessibility.

Kind regards,

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cc: Chairman and members of the Commission Kingdom Relations

¹ More recently, it has once again become clear that this dependence is (too) great. Sint Maarten is 'normally' (the dependency has simply crept back in...) also the location of our 'regional hospital'. St. Maarten is during the COVID19 pandemic until now a more contaminated area than St. Eustatius, so Bonaire was (with special flights chartered by EZ Air, which then again was...) necessarily the location of our regional hospital. As far as I'm concerned, this will be the new 'normal' location of our regional hospital with regular and direct connections between Sint Eustatius (and Saba) and Bonaire. In that case one can rightly speak of a 'BES-bubble'.