

Dear chairman and members of the

- Infrastructure and Water Management Committee and
- Committee of Economic Affairs and Climate,

On rereading my most recent letter to you (from yesterday [to the Commission of Infrastructure and Water Management]), I noticed that I forgot to mention two more points to bring to your attention:

- the function of public transport, and...
- a closer look at Winair's intended services.

### **Public transport**

When in the European Netherlands a train ticket from Den Haag CS to Amsterdam CS (return ticket) costs more than 200 euros per person, the proverbial house would - in my estimation - be too small to accommodate all the explosive and emotional arguments. Yet that's what happens elsewhere in the Netherlands (here). Of course, it's not a train but a (small) airplane, but for the rest the comparison is fairly valid. It is the transport that is flown from Sint Eustatius to Sint Maarten, about fifty kilometers away <sup>1</sup>.

As far as the function is concerned, it is no different than a bus or train connection in a perhaps less crowded area. The transport intensity here will not exceed that of East Groningen or Zeeland, I estimate. Nevertheless, it is your aim to keep mobility above a certain lower limit throughout the (European) Netherlands. Not all lines are equally profitable, I can imagine. The Aviation Policy Memorandum also recognizes that. After all, it speaks - on page 43 - of a "vital importance for the economy, transport of residents, goods, tourism and patient transport", as well as of "guaranteeing accessibility" and of "affordable and frequent connections" (in the context of the Dutch Caribbean).

That there should be a self-evident mutual accessibility between the BES-islands is still felt by the administrators (here and in The Hague), but otherwise all empathy is lacking. After all, an amount of about 200 euros (about 250 US dollars) is excessive in relation to the not too generous monthly income of the local Static (and, in my estimation, also of other inhabitants of the Dutch Caribbean, but I limit myself in this letter to Sint Eustatius).

It seems to me that in the development of transport policy in this region the function of affordable public transport should be kept in mind.

### **Closer consideration of the intended services**

In the present image, a weekly connection will be organized which - it cannot be emphasized enough - is temporary in nature (the plug must of course always be pulled out, let that be said especially early enough). I try to form a picture of the product-market-combination in which 'a week' is a self-evident and profitable periodicity. The current ZVK transport for patients visiting a regional hospital is currently based on two return flights per week (between Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten). So it will not be this.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no other regular and equivalent transport to the nearest international airport on Sint Maarten than the flight from Winair.

In the (RCN) transport of civil servants a return flight on one and the same day may be unusual and undesirable, but a lower limit of one week seems a bit on the long side (also considering the costs involved outside the transport itself: the stay and the extra fee). With tourist traffic I can imagine something like a week, but that market is not that wide. A peak in the summer and around Christmas and perhaps a revival in school vacations, but a weekly deployment of a 40-person airplane seems a bit too much for that.

Of course I'm not an aviation specialist but I don't make a very special analysis, I think. So it seems to me that we are almost certainly heading for failure (which I thought I anticipated in my previous letter).

Wouldn't a more frequent service with smaller devices - from the point of view of the desired product-market combinations and affordability - be a much more obvious alternative? Winair does not have the equipment to set up this service and has to hire it, probably from Air Antilles, in any case from outside the BES or even from outside the Kingdom of the Netherlands. While EZ Air (based on Bonaire, with the 'B' of BES) with its own personnel and equipment, can probably set up this service more sustainably and competitively.

*So is it really the case that Winair's monopoly position is "rewarded" as a result of government participation in it? Is it really the case that the individual islander will have to pay too much for the monopoly held by the government? It is this pressing question that makes me decide to include the **Committee on Economic Affairs and Climate** in addressing this letter.*

I would like to conclude by wishing you - as usual in my letters to the Lower House - a lot of wisdom. In particular I ask you for a 'fair' treatment of the case with an eye for the function of public transport in a region where there is already a certain poverty. I also wonder whether, where KLM is surrounded with priority in the European Netherlands, this should not also be the case for a transport company - EZ Air - which is based in the Dutch Caribbean (which is still closer than a company based in another country, even though that country is part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and even though the Dutch central government has a [minor] interest in it). It may be legally correct, but from a central government that values 'corporate social responsibility', I can probably expect more...

Kind regards,

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cc: *Chairman and members of the Commission Kingdom Relations  
Government commissioner on Sint Eustatius*