

St. Eustatius, April 7, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committees I&W and KR,

Much has been written about intra-island connectivity but very little is actually happening. The impression exists that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management has no interest in or responsibility for the Dutch Caribbean.

For a lot of money passengers can travel from St. Eustatius to elsewhere. In practice this "elsewhere" is limited to St. Maarten, from where people can travel on to various other destinations, including the Netherlands and the United States, but also St. Kitts & Nevis and other islands in this area.

Winair is the airline that in principle gives shape to this connectivity (to and from St. Eustatius). Three comments on this:

1. Winair knows itself to be a monopolist and behaves like one: outrageous fares (for a relatively poor population) in return for a very unreliable service.
2. Where a few years ago the trip to St. Maarten v.v. could be made several times a (every) day, it is now a lottery with many staples and changes (which moreover are often only announced at the last minute).
3. Recently there is the much talked about ferry of which the good observer can see that in practice the crew of the boat is a significant part of the number of people on board. In other words, there are almost no (paying) passengers. However, this letter is mainly concerned with connectivity by air.

And so it can happen that already for the second time a delegate from Fontys college has to cancel his trip to St. Eustatius because he has no chance of being transferred from St. Maarten to St. Eustatius.

But then again, *who cares*. After all, it's only St. Eustatius. There are prospective students on the island who would have liked to have had contact with this Fontys representative but - thanks to Winair, the monopolist maintained by the Dutch government - that visit is now cancelled for a second time.

In the European Netherlands there is always the possibility of a real-life orientation to the new school when preparing for a follow-up study. On St. Eustatius one has to rely on the Internet and information. The latter is now again denied to our students-to-be.

The task neglect law of February 2018 aimed for better governance with an eye for the needs of the residents. The notion that at some point it doesn't matter if you get bitten by the dog or the cat makes residents, who on average may not be highly educated but have certainly developed a razor-sharp sense of whether leaders are really there for them or are more focused on themselves (and their own wallets).

For example, I don't know exactly how things work but I understand that a can of 'influencers' have been opened up to talk favorably on the various social media about the investment being made by Mr. Barnhoorn on the island. I can't imagine that this group of 'influencers' will be hindered in any way. Problems with transportation to and from St. Eustatius? With a lot of money and a focused island government, these inconveniences will surely be prevented.

There is a chance that you - the reader of this letter - think that I am setting a somewhat sour, frustrated tone. However, I can assure you that my feelings are not frustrated, and that they don't really matter. Furthermore, I am of course also one of those Dutch people who are not directly affected by this connectivity issue.

What matters to me is the prevailing feeling that the Dutch and local government is actually not making any effort to stand up for the Statian people. Winair's interests rank one, two and three; the interests of the Statian people rank nine, twelve, twenty-three or much lower.

The only thing I am aiming for with this letter is for you to understand how The Hague policy is being implemented on our island and to what undesirable result this leads. I say undesirable because in my view good governance should lead to broad, social gains for the residents in particular. But maybe I am just witnessing a very refined policy whereby the small group of elite is enormously benefited in line with the policy set out by The Hague. Well, who knows...

May I once again wish you much wisdom with your supervision of government policy?

With kind regards,

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