

The Hague, October 16, 2022.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee on Kingdom Relations of TK and EK,

Today a bill about public transport. I read in the answers to Parliamentary questions by State Secretary in response to questions about this that public transport is a matter for the island government and not for the government in The Hague.

As you have come to expect from me, I zoom in on St. Eustatius, assuming that things are not very different on Bonaire and Saba. After all, I know the situation on St. Eustatius best (compared to the other islands in the BES-area).

When the Secretary of State refers to the local island government, of course she is talking about buses and similar public transport in the European Netherlands. But on Statia, the Makana ferry was "pushed through" by the national government. There is nothing local about that. Although the exact figures are not known to me, I cannot imagine that this ferry - which in practice has been taken out of service quite frequently because of repairs - is profitable. Without the subsidy promised by The Hague, I believe this service would have been bankrupt long ago with which this ferry would no longer exist. It does not seem to me a difficult prediction that this will still happen when the subsidy source ceases to exist. And should I be wrong, at least the price will develop to unaffordable proportions.

Another form of public transportation on the island is intra-island travel. Winair (97% owned by the country of St. Maarten and 3% by the country of the Netherlands) provides this, at least for St. Eustatius, in a monopolistic market position. Simply because other providers are not tolerated by Winair (and in its wake, therefore, neither by the country of the Netherlands). In my opinion, the market system so applauded by this Cabinet does not tolerate monopoly as a market form but yes, the Caribbean Netherlands seems to be hidden from the eye of media that are considered mainstream in the European Netherlands, so the Cabinet also seems to be turning a blind eye here for its own role stability. It is my personal belief that a little investigative journalist is bound to encounter more disturbances when he or she dives into cases like Makana and Winair.

When I think about Winair, automatically another half-baked and especially unsound document (when a serious competitor of Winair is emphatically left out, I call the investigation unsound) from two years ago pops into my head. The project in question was Titan¹, whose document (Oct. 14, 2020) addressed Phase A of a project. Titan was the chosen code name by which Winair was referred to (not much imagination required for that) and I never heard of either Titan or any other phase of that project.

¹ <http://statia.nu/bibliotheek/Titan.pdf>

Another document that comes to my mind in this context is one that the drafter had already completed in 2018 but the government chose not to present it to you until spring 2019. It is about "Connectivity Caribbean part of the Kingdom" ². This document speaks of thin routes and market failures and cites the PSO (public service obligation) as the preferred policy option. But yes, to a cabinet unwilling to develop the Caribbean Netherlands, good advice is like pearls before swine. Therefore, nothing seems to have happened with this report. In March 2019 - partly as a result of this report - I have already written to you with the suggestion to set up public air transport on the basis of this PSO (whereby, by the way, I think others than Winair should also be able to bid for it) and - in one fell swoop - to understand air transport in medical cases below (with the knowledge of today I am thinking of both Bonaire and St. Maarten, with the possibility of landing as close to the hospital as possible). A previous Rutte administration did not show much enthusiasm or receptivity; perhaps things will improve now (although my hopes are also a bit vain, given the experience to date...).

Note: Consideration could be given to setting up the ferry under PSO as well.

For completeness, I refer you to my earlier letters I have written over time regarding the intra-island connectivity (of St. Eustatius) ³.

Finally, a thought: Perhaps a law should be amended to include intereiland traffic as public transportation. I understand that for the purposes of the Makana, a trick was performed to this end (which, incidentally, I do not know the content of). Particularly for transport between the public entities of Saba, St. Eustatius and Bonaire, it seems to me perfectly defensible to designate intra-island traffic - both sailing and flying - as "local" and "public."

Sincerely,

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W <http://stata.nu> of <http://stata.nu/nl>

cc: *National Ombudsman*

² <http://stata.nu/bibliotheek/connectiviteit-caribische-deel-van-het-koninkrijk.pdf>

³ <http://www.stata.nu/nl/24.php>