

Juliette Selby  
Committee Secretariat  
The National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA



10<sup>th</sup> October 2001

Ref. air22

Dear Juliette

**Environment, Planning & Transport Committee  
Policy Review of Public Transport; Consultation Report  
Response from D A B St George, Director, Celtic Dimensions**

I have prepared our response to this consultation. It has been based on previous responses to DETR and NAFW

I note from your document that you have not included air travel and I believe this to be an omission. Even if long term objectives can be achieved through improved road and rail services, these will take time, effort and huge amounts of capital investment. Improved air links can happen within weeks. These would give instant benefits to sections of Wales and the business & administration communities. Wales is already improving air travel with the developments of Cardiff & Swansea airports and there is a general move to develop regional airports within the EU.

My issues have largely been around the development of regional air services and I have used NW Wales as a worked example of how services could be developed. If it comes across as a lobby case I can assure you that I am not employed or retained by any of the interested parties. My understanding of the issues has developed from wanting the service as a potential user and trying to persuade stakeholders to study the project on a co-operative basis. As there is no Project Champion this has not happened but, as I have developed a large amount of knowledge and understanding of the NW Wales issues I wanted to put this to good use. I believe that all the commercial information I have used is in the public domain and I am not breaching any confidentiality.

I hope this contribution is helpful and look forward to the final report. If you feel this is outside the scope of your enquiry may I suggest that the committee consider air travel as topic for discussion and consultation anyway. Please contact me if you want further information and clarification

Yours Sincerely

David A B St George  
Director, Celtic Dimensions

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**Environment, Planning & Transport Committee  
Policy Review of Public Transport; Consultation Report  
Response from D A B St George, Director, Celtic Dimensions****Introduction**

The consultation document is an excellent basis for most forms of transport. It lacks any significant detail and imperative for **air travel** and our submission largely concentrates on this issue. We accept that air travel will benefit relatively few people but it will be a great competitive strength for local business. Air travel and the attendant facilities (hotels, roads, service organisations, bus & coach services) become economic generators and attract investment. Put another way, lack of air services is a barrier to investment. Additionally anything that can improve social, cultural, administrative and business connections can only benefit the Wales as a whole

Changes to air services can be done very quickly and need not involve costly infrastructures. Wales could derive benefits within months of the decision to start new services.

**The North West Wales Model and its application to air travel in the UK**

(This is based on our response the DETR consultation The Future of Aviation in the UK 14<sup>th</sup> May 2001 & The Transport Framework for Wales, NAFW Consultation for 18<sup>th</sup> May 01)

There follows a description of what is happening and could happen in NW Wales. This could be adopted as a template for similar regional issues within the UK. It would also be helpful to study comparable models of success within the EU and see if there is scope for transferring best practices to Wales. Model markets could be Isle of Man, Ireland, Scotland, Iceland, Finland and possibly Brittany.

**NW Wales Issues**

Wales achieved devolution in 1998 elected members to the National Assembly for Wales in May 1999. The administration, major public bodies and trade organisations are based in Cardiff and a large proportion of the population live within one hour of the city. The country is large but not uniformly well served for transport systems. The north coast has the A55 from Chester to Holyhead. The east has dual carriageway and motorway from Chester/Wrexham to Newport. The south coast has the M4 from London to the Swansea area and dual carriageway some way into SW Wales. All of these sectors have rail routes that service the same geography.

NW Wales has no good road or rail links to the south. From Bangor it is nearly 200 miles to Cardiff and the main road is the A470. Typically it will take 4½ to 5 hours of white knuckle driving and either means a hotel stop in Cardiff or punishingly long, hard days for business. Some attempts for coach travel are available but these are even longer than car journeys. NW Wales feels cut off from much of Wales culturally, economically and politically and would like to gain inclusion through improved transport links. There are plans to develop the A470 and to improve rail services, which is welcome and will be a great benefit to many people. These developments will be costly and take many years to complete and Wales does not have time to wait. Air services could be developed within weeks or months provided there was an integrated plan to make it happen

The nearest major airports are Liverpool and Manchester and are realistically at least two hours away, not quick to check in and expensive to park. There are no regular coach services to get to these airports nor is there a simple train link

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## **NW Wales Aerodromes**

NW Wales is well served for suitable airports having a legacy of first class MOD aerodromes going back to WWII

RAF Valley on Anglesey is equipped to handle large modern planes. It is quite accessible and is reasonably central for many people and, since the A55 developments on Anglesey is an easy journey. It is however an operational RAF station and it is difficult to see how it could cope with scheduled civilian air traffic when its first priority is to the MOD

RAF Llanbedwr near Harlech is similar to RAF Valley in facilities. It is not very accessible for many people in NW Wales and is not well served by road and public transport. As with RAF Valley it is difficult to see how it could accommodate scheduled civilian air traffic, as it is an operational RAF station

Caernarfon Airport at Llandwrg near Caernarfon is a private air park and is currently used for flying schools, pleasure trips, occasional air charter and infrequent private business use. It does not currently have all the facilities one would want for scheduled air services. The proprietors are seeking funding to improve the airport and make it attractive to airlines. It is conveniently located for NW Wales, has easy access, plenty of room and, being based on the coast has reduced environmental issues if services are expanded

## **NW Wales Air Services**

There are no regular air services but attempts have been made to start them

The BillyPickles organisation, proprietors of Caernarfon Airpark offers air taxi charters for specific events such as international rugby matches. There are no scheduled services but recently a twice weekly 9-11 seater service by Dragon Air Charter has started from Caernarfon to Cardiff. We have no information on its progress

Air Wales has considered doing an all Wales air circuit of Cardiff-Hawarden (NE) to Valley (NW) to Pembrey (SW) to Cardiff as a twice daily service. For a variety of reasons they are not pursuing it at this stage and have started a Cardiff-Manchester shuttle from April 2001. This stopped September 2001

Other groups may be considering starting flights but their plans are not known. This consultation may very well unearth other plans

## **NW Wales Air Service Needs**

There are a number of reasons for wanting air services based in NW Wales

- Links with Cardiff for economic, administrative, social inclusion and business connections
- Travel within Wales
- Links with Dublin, Belfast, Isle of Man
- NW Wales solution which can be implemented very quickly
- Easy access to international hubs, especially European destinations
- Improve attractiveness as an area in which to invest and to stop disinvestment

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- The National Assembly for Wales has substantially increased the need for people all over Wales to go very frequently to Cardiff
  - Allow genuine same day return travel to Cardiff rather than arduous drives and hotel living
  - Many people want the service and will use it. Although not a survey, informal polling of business, political and professional associations has shown unanimous support for the concept of an affordable service and a very strong likelihood of using it

### Actions Required

- The only thing seeming to hold this back is a **project champion** to make things happen.
- There seems to be a lack of dialogue between potential players and we recommend that all interested parties be brought together to **plan** what can be done. As a minimum this it to consist of airlines, airports, local authorities, AMs/MPs, Business Support organisations
- Commission **studies** of demand, use, planning requirements, finance sources of funds and other activities to evaluate the project. There is already a model in the way Swansea airport has studied how it could be developed
- Apply to the EU to see if this idea comes within the remit of **Public Service Obligation (PSO)** to allow initial funding and on-going support for the good of NW Wales. NW Wales is an Objective One area and as such is committed to economic regeneration so PSO could be justified
- Consider starting basic **air taxi charters** as a means of **assessing demand** and have this supported by EU and local grant funds for a test period
- Discuss the ideas with the **National Assembly of Wales** and gain support within the various transport and economic initiatives being planned. The NaFW has air planning powers including aerodrome matters
- Use the NW Wales test as a means of developing an **all Wales/UK model** for regional air travel

### Celtic Dimensions

Celtic Dimensions is a policy consultancy established in January 1999 to assist the newly devolving Celtic countries in, health, social, economic and political policy. Initially this has been restricted to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but will be expanded to include The Isle of Man, Brittany and Cornwall. This will represent some 22 million people.

Initial projects are concentrating on Wales and specifically on health care matters. The main focus for 1999/2001 is improving quality of procurement of medicines and medical supplies and ensuring good Value for Money (VFM) for both public and private sectors

This remit has been enlarged to encompass social exclusion and economic development. We believe that a thriving economy is a positive contribution to health and social well being along with other determinants of health i.e. housing, employment, education, public health and healthcare

Dr Gillian Wade has had public sector experience in University Research (culminating in a post as Honorary Research Fellow, University of Kent), NHS/Social Services, and the Audit Commission where she led the Welsh VFM studies' team as Senior Manager. During the

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last decade she has also been with private healthcare consultancies and latterly spent 2 years with a major pharmaceutical company as Director of NHS & Industry Affairs

David St George has had 27 years experience within the Pharmaceutical, Diagnostic Agricultural and Veterinary industry in commercial roles with two major multi-national corporations. This has included strategic planning, healthcare policy research, public affairs and issue management. Latterly, this has included UK and EU responsibilities.

Our consultancy has been involved with trying to develop North-South airlinks within Wales and we have developed a good understanding of local needs and how the local model could be applied throughout Wales, the UK and the Celtic Countries