

Inquiry into international connectivity through Welsh ports and airports

Evidence from David Oates

Memorandum to the Enterprise and Business Committee on Welsh ports and airports

I cannot comment on your general points but only CWL. Let me first give you my background:

Managing Director of AB Automotive Electronics Ltd in Cardiff until my retirement in Dec 2007: now defunct as HQ decided to move the business elsewhere after I had gone. At our height we had 6 businesses on 4 continents.

With 91% of turnover in exports, you can imagine that travel was common. Indeed I don't think a single week passed when some of us were not abroad, across the world.

CWL via AMS was our main link to the world – Detroit, Raleigh-Durham, Sao Paulo, Shanghai etc. When Continental introduced its BRS-EWR service, we found that convenient too but it has closed for lack of support.

Some of my staff always preferred LHR, arguing that 2 flight hops were more dangerous than one. I let them do that if they wished but I reminded them that 140 miles of M4 each way carried risks.

I have used CWL for abt 15 years and will use it again on 4 trips this year with KLM.

But enough of me, let's turn to the questions:

Observations on key issues

- I have no idea what role the Welsh Govt plays in the development of Welsh Airports apart from subsidising the CWL-Anglesey trip. No information, no publicity. What function does this trip serve to improve the economy of Wales? Looks more like a convenience to me for people who don't wish to drive. We need a clear economic analysis here on the benefits of the subsidy.

- Decline of Cardiff Airport? You have to ask yourself why:

* Look at the logistics. Terrible road past Culverhouse Cross, easily blocked - and I have had that on several occasions, escaping down Five Mile Road to get to the airport on time. Poor bus service from Cardiff Central which seems to wander through the suburbs of Cardiff for ages. (But then I have only used the 95.) I use a taxi @ £25 each way from the Heath. How on earth people get there from the Valleys I can't imagine unless their friends bring them. And how do people from Swansea get there? Interconnectivity – don't see any.

* Appalling X-ray service. Only one machine usually working. Loads of people standing around doing nothing. Reminds me of Milton's Paradise Lost – 'They also serve who only stand and wait'.

* Miles of walking to the KLM gate – going past so many empty gates. Compare with BRS.

- * Fewer and fewer charter flights – why? Analysis required. Ask the airlines.
- * Suspect CWL is not promoted heavily enough to the people of South Wales so they vote with their feet.
- * In depth analysis of why BMIbaby quit is required with no excuses. In my time at work, I took their early morning flight to Paris every month – always full, say 50% on business, the rest being noisy families going to Euro Disney.
- Welsh Government activity, involvement and support.
- * Little or nothing as far I can see and being retired I am an even more avid newsreader every day. This call for ideas is the first I have ever seen.
- * Prior to last elections, Jonathan Morgan said the Conservatives would fight for a direct link to the USA, blithely ignoring Continental's experience at BRS. More recently, Carwyn Jones talked about a direct link to China. Now that needs a heavy jet – how on earth does he think can find the passengers to fill one? Cloud cuckoo land.
- * No sign of Welsh Government talking to the UK Government on ports and airports.
- * Find ways round EU regulations. The Continent does, except when it suits them.
- So what can be done?
- * Encourage freight for a start. Luxembourg has a population of c. 550,000 and the city say abt 100,000. Nonetheless Luxair is a major freight airline. But of course as noted above, you'd have to upgrade access roads all the way to M4. And create a bypass for the Bryn Glas tunnels which are a perpetual bottleneck.
- * Lower parking charges. Lower airport charges. Ask Westminster to exempt us from Airline Passenger Duty. It is not hypothecated anyway, my MP tells me.
- * Far more promotion of CWL. Time was you got a regular timetable showing Cardiff's connections to the world. More advertising – never seen an advert for CWL apart from the internet.
- * Dedicated buses down the Rhondda & Cynon Valleys stopping at major towns. Add in Newport too.
- * Consider a subsidy to KLM – Cardiff's only gateway to the world at large. Well, not exactly because Flybe go to CDG and are codeshared with Air France. But Flybe are not part of Skyteam so if they are late into CDG and you miss your onward flight, you are on your own. It always pays to book your through trip with an airline alliance. Maybe the Welsh Government should help Flybe to get into Skyteam.
- * Maybe consider encouraging an inexpensive airliner to LHR.

No idea what to say about ports.

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