# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Passport e-Gates at Cardiff Airport** |
| **DATE**  | **06 March 2019** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy and Transport** |

Today I announced the Welsh Government’s investment in new passport e-gates at Cardiff Airport.

The latest-technology e-gates will permit travellers with biometric passports to bypass manual inspections, allowing for a quicker entry into Wales.

Although Cardiff International Airport Limited (CIAL) was one of the first airports in the UK to introduce e-gate technology, the three original gates were removed by the UK Border Force in 2017 as the initial technology was superseded.

UK Government allows e-gates to be fitted free of charge by UK Border Force only at airports with more than two million in-bound passengers a year, such as Bristol and Heathrow, so UK Border Force required a substantial capital payment from Cardiff Airport to install replacement e-gates.

The Welsh Government has provided funding of up to £1m for the latest technology e-gates to be installed at Cardiff Airport.

Passenger numbers at Cardiff Airport have increased by 60% since Welsh Government purchased the airport in 2013. The number of destinations has also increased significantly with over 50 direct route destinations and links to over 900 connecting destinations being offered, including a scheduled daily long-haul Qatar Airways flight to its Doha hub.

The new e-gates are an important part of our No Deal Brexit planning. They will ensure queuing in immigration is minimised should the UK Government not secure a seamless departure from the EU.

This smoother entry to Wales, and subsequently the UK, enhances the customer experience, whilst meeting all UK Border Force requirements.

The Welsh Government stepped in to grant fund the e-gates when the UK Government refused to do so. Westminster’s decision not to fund e-gates in Cardiff whilst funding them in competing regional airports in England needs to be seen alongside its decisions to block our attempt to establish a network of Public Service Obligation air routes to cities across the UK and not to support devolution of Air Passenger Duty (APD) to Wales based on deeply flawed economic analysis.

As we have said many times we want the UK Government to stop seeing devolution of APD to Wales as a barrier and more as an opportunity, as they have done in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Devolution of APD would be a win for Cardiff Airport, for Wales and for the UK. Devolution will allow us to focus on our key Economic Action Plan goal of better connecting Wales with the rest of the UK and the wider world. As I said in my statement of the Williams Commission into Rail Devolution, the result of the decisions by the UK Department for Transport, means Cardiff has the worst rail connectivity of any of the UK’s core cities. Devolution of APD would allow us to take control of our own destiny and improve this situation for ourselves.

I have also previously advised members that we are also looking to reverse the perverse decision of the UK Government to prevent us from creating a network of domestic air routes, aimed at better connecting Cardiff to other parts of the UK.

The UK Government has for too long distorted the market in favour of larger airports. Future devolution of APD would go some of the way to levelling the playing field, which has been skewed in favour of other large airports in England.

We should not have needed to invest in these new e-gates. Unfortunately this is another example of the UK Government putting the interests of a few large English businesses ahead of the needs of the people and businesses of Wales.