

Minister launches new ePassport gates at Cardiff Airport

The latest-technology e-gates have been funded by the Welsh Government. They will permit travellers with biometric passports to bypass manual inspections, allowing for a quicker entry into Wales.

Although Cardiff International Airport Ltd (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e-gate technology, the three original gates were removed by the UK Border Force in 2017 as the initial technology was superseded.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 ePassport 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 ePassport gates to be installed at Cardiff Airport.

Visiting Cardiff Airport to launch the new e-gates, Economy and Transport Minister, Ken Skates said:

“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 ePassport gates are an important part of our No Deal Brexit planning. They will help 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.

“We 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 flawed economic analysis.

“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. In fact, my colleague Rebecca Evans, the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, will stand before the Welsh Affairs Committee tomorrow

(Thursday 7th), to give oral evidence in favour of our case for devolution of APD to Wales.

“We are also looking to reverse the 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.”

Cardiff Airport chief executive officer Deb Barber said: “Cardiff Airport has been on a continuous journey of transformation over the past few years, during which time we have seen incumbent airlines such as KLM, TUI and Ryanair adding capacity, welcomed new airlines and seen new routes added to our route network – including a regular flight to Doha with Qatar Airways which creates vital links between Wales and the Middle East.

“Significant developments such as these, plus the extensive improvements we have made to the terminal and infrastructure, reflect our long-term vision to deliver a successful airport for Wales and a key gateway to the UK.

“It is essential therefore, that we have modern and efficient technology in place at the UK Border to create a safe, secure and seamless entry point into Wales for international passengers that is on a par with other larger regional airports in the UK. The unveiling today of our new ePassport gates is a very positive step forward in our long term strategy for growth and we are grateful to the Welsh Government for their support.”