

New evidence reveals strong case for devolution of flight tax

The amount of tax paid on flights (APD) for Welsh customers is currently set by the UK Government, while Scotland and Northern Ireland are able to cut the cost of longer haul flights by reducing APD.

The Welsh Government has long called for the devolution of APD, supported by the findings of the Holtham and Silk Commissions. However, the UK Government has resisted calls, saying any reduction in APD in Wales would negatively impact on Bristol Airport.

The peer reviewed independent evidence published today reveals that despite well publicised commentary suggesting that such a move would cause Bristol Airport serious detriment, the impact would in fact be negligible.

More importantly, devolving and then reducing APD in Wales would directly result in a significant positive benefit for the economies of both south Wales and the south west of England and would result in more choice for passengers throughout both regions. These joint benefits for the south west of the UK offer the Westminster Government an important opportunity to begin to rebalance the UK economy.

First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“This new evidence dispels many myths and presents an economic case for giving Wales control over Air Passenger Duty which is overwhelmingly compelling. As we prepare for a future outside the EU, it is essential we are able to take action to promote Wales to the world and support growth in our aviation sector and wider economy.

“Once devolved, the Welsh Government would reduce or even scrap the tax paid on flights – not only benefitting passengers, but providing a huge confidence boost for Cardiff Airport and Wales’ aviation industry, while also complementing Bristol Airport and providing a more competitive service. Devolving APD would also improve connectivity across Wales, boost investment and help business.

“I look forward to working with the UK Government to make this a reality. Continuing to blankly refuse to devolve APD in the face of such strong evidence would show a discriminatory disdain for Wales, constrain our ability to promote Wales oversea and undermine our economic interests.”

New organ donation campaign highlights a family's role in the process

The hard-hitting advertisement shows an individual's choice to donate his organs being over-ridden by family members, because he didn't talk to them about his decision or his registration on the organ donor register to become a donor.

In 2016-17 data published by NHS Blood and Transplant showed there were 21 cases in Wales where families either overrode their relatives' decisions to donate organs, or didn't support the deemed consent.

With an average of 3.1 organs retrieved per donor in Wales in 2016-17, this could have resulted in as many as 65 additional transplants.

On 1 December 2015, Wales was the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. This means that if a person has not registered a decision to become an organ donor (opted in) or a decision not to become an organ donor (opted out), they will be considered as having no objection to being an organ donor – this is known as deemed consent. However, if individuals don't tell their family of their decision to donate, the family may not honour that decision and over-ride the organ donor registration or not support deemed consent.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

"We want to encourage everyone across Wales to talk with their loved ones about their organ donation decision. We know awareness and understanding is increasing, but it is really important we reach the Welsh public on this issue.

"We have seen huge improvements in our consent rates, in March 2013 they were just 50% but in March 2017 they increased to 64%, however while there are people dying waiting for their transplant we must work harder to further increase the consent rate to have a significant impact on reducing transplant waiting lists.

"Your family will be involved in any discussions about organ donation if, when you die, you are in a position to donate your organs. This could make an already difficult time more stressful if families have never discussed organ donation.

"I encourage everyone across Wales to talk to their loved ones about their organ donation decision to ensure they will honour it."

Simply having a chat can help benefit the people of Wales and the UK by

reducing the number of people dying whilst waiting for a suitable organ to become available, and transforming the lives of others.

You can register a decision at any time by calling 0300 123 23 23 (Calls to this phone line will be answered by NHS Blood and Transplant) or visiting organdonationwales.org or by telling your family (and friends).

[Wales continues to bathe in excellent waters](#)

The [Bathing Waters in Wales results for 2017](#) show 80 of Wales' 104 bathing areas were excellent. This includes popular bathing waters in Porthcawl, Tenby, Prestatyn and Barry.

In total, 103 of 104 bathing waters in Wales were compliant with the European standards making Welsh bathing water some of the best in Europe.

Welcoming the results Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths said:

“Wales has some of the most beautiful coastline which attracts thousands of visitors every year. Maintaining our bathing waters to these high standards is essential if we are to continue selling Wales as a holiday destination.

“But this is not just about those visiting Wales. A healthy environment helps to sustain our economy and improves our quality of life. With clean bathing waters, our coast and natural environment will continue to provide huge benefits to people across Wales – from rural West Wales to more urban South Wales.

“It is disappointing that despite a lot of hard work and some improvement one area still has not met the European standards but work will continue to address the issues in that area.”

Kevin Ingram, Interim Chief Executive for Natural Resources Wales, said:

“Welsh bathing waters are considered to be some of the best in Europe and once again our beaches have maintained their position with 80 out of 104 beaches achieving excellent status and 99 per cent rated as sufficient or higher.

“This is especially pleasing as the wet summer had a direct impact on water quality across the UK.

“We understand how precious our beaches are to those living or visiting the Welsh coast and we will continue to work with communities, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water and local authorities to maintain and improve the results at all our bathing waters.”

Economy Secretary opens new facility at Creo Medical in Chepstow

The medical device company specialises in the emerging field of surgical endoscopy, which aids minimally invasive surgery by applying microwave and radio wave energy.

In 2016 Creo Medical received a £2m investment from the Welsh Government supported Finance Wales – now the Development Bank of Wales which helped it to secure a £20m investment, facilitating the creation of 22 high quality, well paid jobs. In addition the company has received investment advice from the Welsh Government’s Business Wales Accelerated Growth Programme, part funded by European Regional Development fund, to support this investment.

Creo Medical has also received support from Welsh Government through a £3m equity investment from Finance Wales which secured the relocation of its head office from Bath to Chepstow and has provided crucial investment to aid the company’s expansion.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“It is a pleasure to be in Chepstow to open the new facility here at Creo Medical.

“Not only will the new facility enhance Creo’s role as a key player in the life sciences sector both in Wales and internationally, it will also enhance the company’s ability to develop new products to address the ever increasing challenges within the health sector.

“I am proud that both the Welsh Government and the Development Bank of Wales have played their part in supporting Creo’s growth.

“That support has contributed to the company’s headquarters moving from Bath to Chepstow and has provided a real boost to the local economy, delivering an additional 22 high quality, well paid jobs to Chepstow.”

Craig Gulliford, CEO of Creo Medical said:

“We have been delighted to have the Economy Secretary formally open our new facility in Chepstow. Our facility has been designed to allow us to expand into as we continue to deliver on our milestones. With the continued support of the Welsh Government, the Development Bank of Wales and our other investors, we believe that we have the right platform to allow us to reach our ultimate goal of bringing a suite of innovative, minimally invasive, surgical devices to market all operating from our ground breaking CROMA electrosurgery platform, with the aim of reducing the costs and risks involved in GI procedures while improving patient outcomes.”

Dr. Richard Thompson from the Development Bank of Wales said:

“We are proud to be a long standing equity investor in Creo Medical. It’s been great to work with such a passionate management team over the last five years. Since relocating to Wales Creo have gone from strength-to-strength, raising multiple funding rounds and listing on AIM in December last year. Their cutting edge technology and products have the potential to deliver patient benefits and ultimately to save thousands of lives.”

[Welsh experience on offer to help England with changes to their organ donation system](#)

On 1 December 2015, Wales became the first part of the UK to introduce a soft opt-out system.

People aged 18 and over who have lived in Wales for more than 12 months and who die in Wales are now regarded as having consented to organ donation unless they have opted out. This is called deemed consent.

People who want to be organ donors can register a decision to opt in or do nothing, which will mean they have no objection to being an organ donor. Those people who do not want to be organ donor can opt out at any time.

Vaughan Gething said:

“We firmly believe the benefits of a soft opt out organ donation system to those needing a transplant are literally, life changing.

"I was pleased therefore to hear the Prime Minister announcing her intention to follow our lead by consulting on a new opt-out system for organ donation in England.

"I'm extremely proud of what we've achieved so far and along the way we have gained a wealth of experience in implementing our own opt out system in Wales. We are on standby to help England in any way we can as they take forward legislation on this important issue.

"On Wednesday [1 Nov 2017], I'll be launching a major new campaign focusing on the role of families in the organ donation process. While we are always happy to offer our advice and expertise to England, and other nations considering making a change, we know there is still work to do in Wales to raise awareness of the changes to our organ donation system. We want to ensure there are as many organs available for those in need of a transplant."