

## 2 Background to the Project

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### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to the Penzance Harbour project in terms of the importance of the harbour, the need for the scheme and the process by which the Harbour project has been developed.

### 2.2 The Importance of the Harbour

Penzance town was originally formed around the harbour. However with time the harbour's importance has reduced as the town and other commercial activities have grown. The harbour remains a visual focus of the town and it maintains the essential task of supporting the sea link to the Isles of Scilly, as well as facilities for the Penzance Dry Dock and recreational users.

#### 2.2.1 The Isles of Scilly Link

Penzance harbour provides the only ferry link to the Isles of Scilly which lie 28 miles (45 kilometres) to the south west of Lands End, Cornwall. Currently there are two vessels, the Scillonian III and the Gry Maritha that carry passengers and cargo respectively to the Isles of Scilly for distribution. The transport link is provided by the Isles of Scilly Steamship Group (IoSSG).

In 2003 the number of passengers using the Scillonian III rose to 95,757; an increase of 13.7% on the previous year, and the amount of freight carried by the Gry Maritha rose to 12,759 metric tonnes; an increase of 15.2% on the previous year.

The importance of the harbour for the Isles of Scilly Link is recognised in policies and strategies. Penwith is part of the South West Region and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Objective One Area and Connecting Cornwall is the Objective One Task Force's action plan for strategic infrastructure improvements in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to overcome communication barriers. Action Programme 3 concerns Inter-modal Links to Ports and identifies Penzance as an essential port for communications with the Isles of Scilly. It is presently the only public service by sea from the mainland to the Islands.

The Cornwall Local Transport Plan 2001 – 2006 submitted in July 2000 outlines approaches to tackling current problems and future challenges for the transport system within the County, providing a basis for developing a coherent set of strategic transport policies which will meet economic, social and environmental requirements. The redevelopment of Penzance harbour and associated infrastructure is part of Cornwall County Council Local Transport Plan (2001-2006) of which the Isles of Scilly Link forms a major scheme bid.

The Penwith Local Plan (adopted 2004) states in Proposal TV-B that the provision of improved facilities for cargo handling and passengers to the Isles of Scilly is proposed within the Penzance harbourside area. Proposals for such development will be required to: (i) utilise a location, which does not inhibit or interfere with other harbour uses; and (ii) avoid adverse impact on the visual setting of the harbour.

## 2.2.2 The Penwith Economy

Penwith has a fragile economy that is heavily dependent on a single industry, tourism. It is important, therefore, both to promote diversification and to avoid any downturn in tourism activity. Penwith suffers from peripherality, and its economy is heavily dependent on the maintenance and improvement of transport links.

Penwith's tourism market is interdependent with that of the Isles of Scilly. The two areas provide a joint attraction for many visitors, while significant numbers of visitors to Scilly stay in Penwith en-route to or from the islands. A recent survey of visitors to Scilly by Hyder found that 22% stay in Penwith for at least one night as part of their trip.

Atlantic Consultants (2003) estimated that the Penzance hotel trade supports 750 jobs, and that 10% of these are dependent on trade with Scilly, providing annual revenues of £3.75 million. Atlantic estimated that around half of this activity is dependent on the sea transport route.

Cruise ships, of which four visited in 2003, are estimated to bring Penzance tourism revenues of £40,000. There is potential for growth in this market, but a significant threat of decline without investment in the harbour.

The transport links to the Isles of Scilly from Penzance are therefore important to the economic future of Penwith, in particular in helping to support the tourism industry. Reductions in the capacity to transport passengers and freight to the Isles of Scilly would be expected to reduce the number of visitors to Penwith, and cause a loss of tourism revenue. Job losses in transport and distribution would also be expected.

## 2.3 The Need for Improvements

Penzance Harbour suffers from a number of current problems, which are in summary:

- A lack of covered passenger facilities meaning that passengers must walk along and wait on the quayside in all weathers;
- Passenger baggage is exposed to the elements as there is no covered handling facility;
- There is little separation between pedestrians and vehicles leading to potential health and safety issues;
- There is little separation of freight and passenger handling and also from other port activities, leading to issues of passenger safety and security of freight and of the port as an entry point to the UK;

- Localised congestion occurs with commercial vehicles waiting to gain access to the quay side and cars/ coaches dropping off/ picking up passengers;
- Methods of freight handling and storage lead to exposure to elements and damage; and
- There is a poor level of access for those with disabilities to the quayside.

In the future it is anticipated that both the passenger and the freight vessel will come to the end of their economic life and will require replacement. The Gry Maritha is anticipated to reach the end of its economic life on the route by 2009. The Scillonian III underwent a refit in 1999 with the hull receiving adequate maintenance to increase its potential life to 2014. However, due to the increasing costs of maintenance it will become uneconomic to run the Scillonian III much later than 2014.

The multi-modal study undertaken on behalf of the Isles of Scilly Route Partnership considered what would happen in a do-minimum situation and all future options. It was concluded that the most appropriate way forward is for there to be investment in replacements for the existing vessels, with a combined passenger and freight vessel being preferred for operational and economic reasons.

The proposed replacement vessel is intended to be of a similar size and draft to the existing Scillonian III but there is a need for dredging to facilitate turning of the vessel, as a result of extending the Lighthouse Pier. It is also necessary to address the existing operational and passenger issues of the harbour if the benefits of investment in the new Isles of Scilly vessel are to be realised. It would not be appropriate for example to provide a faster more comfortable journey time if passengers are still waiting in the rain and baggage is exposed to the elements, nor to expect businesses to tolerate existing freight handling methods.

## 2.4 Scheme Development

The Penzance Harbour project has been managed by Penwith District Council, who are the owners and operators of the harbour. The range of options brought forward have arisen out of a number of studies and sources, notably the Penzance Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan (WS Atkins, 2001), a study by Beckett Rankine Partnership and from the Harbour Master.

The options have been considered and the preferred scheme developed to concept design, in the context of the requirements for the Isles of Scilly Link, for which the Isles of Scilly Route Partnership has been the vehicle for decision making. It has also involved consideration of the needs of other harbour users, determined through consultations.

The Isles of Scilly Route Partnership was established in 2003 to bring together the local authorities, mainland link transport operators and key landowners to address the issues facing transport links to the Isles of Scilly in a co-ordinated manner. The Partnership comprises;

- Cornwall County Council;
- Council of the Isles of Scilly;
- Penwith District Council;
- Isles of Scilly Steamship Group;
- British International Limited; and
- The Duchy of Cornwall.

## 2.5 References

Atlantic Consultants: "Impact of an improved transport link between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly on the Local Economy" Phase 1 Report and Appendices, August 2003.

Cornwall County Council, Cornwall Local Transport Plan 2001-2006, July 2000.

Penwith District Council, Penwith Local Plan, 2004

WS Atkins: "Penzance Harbour and Town Regeneration Phase 1 Action Plan" August 2001.