

[Cornwall Council statement]

Statement re Isles of Scilly sea link

1 April 2011

Cornwall Council recognises the importance of the sea link between the Isles of Scilly and the Cornwall mainland. However, as the link has been designated as a "lifeline" service, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Government and not the Council to ensure that it is maintained.

The then Cornwall County Council was asked by the Government in 2002 to lead the bid to improve the harbours at St Mary's and Penzance and a new vessel as the Council of the Isles of Scilly was unable to make a formal bid to the Department for Transport as it is not a transport authority.

Since then the Council has worked with the other members of the Route Partnership to develop a cost effective scheme which meets these aims and secure the necessary funding. This included reducing the costs by £26 million and the Council agreeing to borrow an additional £5 million to increase the amount of local funding available for the scheme on March 16. Unfortunately, despite the Minister Norman Baker reconfirming conditional approval for the scheme in December, it has now been decided not to provide funding support for the Route Partnership project.

Both the Council and the other members of the Route Partnership did everything possible to deliver this much needed scheme and are extremely disappointed by the Government's decision. We always knew that the scheme would not meet the traditional value for money criteria because of the size of population of the Isles of Scilly which is why it was designated as a lifeline service by the Government. It was also clear that the opposition of the local MP and his influence with the Minister were a major obstacle to delivery.

We note the suggestion by the Minister of the need to develop a new project but are unclear where the funding for a new scheme would come from. Mr Baker is

calling for a new scheme to be developed speedily. However, as developing a viable alternative scheme would take a number of years, it will be impossible to deliver a new scheme within the time scale needed to secure European funding.

The funding must now be reallocated to other projects within Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. There is also no funding available from the Council for any new scheme as all available funding is fully committed to delivering other projects in Cornwall.

As well as presenting a real risk to the Isles of Scilly and west Cornwall, this decision will be viewed by many as a great missed opportunity. It is now up to those promoting any alternative schemes to work directly with the Government, which is responsible for ensuring this vital sea link is maintained, and with the local MP. We wish them well.

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