



North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

NPTF Comments on the Fishguard & North Pembrokeshire Regeneration Proposals, February 2003

INTRODUCTION

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum is an independent association, set up with the twin objectives to promote public transport and to work for the provision of effective, integrated public transport systems. The Forum supports the policies for integrated transport laid down by the Welsh Assembly Government and believes that, without such provision, government policies with regard to sustainability, social exclusion and rural development are unlikely to succeed. A key aspect of our work involves the ongoing liaison with governmental, quasi-governmental and other bodies/groups that share our desire to promote these objectives.

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum welcomes the review of local plans and strategies and the focus on creating a sustainable base for employment that form the basis of the Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire Regeneration Proposals. Among the key objectives in the Joint Unitary Development Plan are the aim to: [1] Promote economic prosperity from a diversified and expanding economy, [2] Address the needs of those who lack resources and the disadvantaged, and [3] Develop an integrated network of sustainable communities with a long-term future. The implementation of the final Action Plan will undoubtedly play a vital role in the achievement of these objectives, and the development and provision of effective transport systems should play a vital role in the process.

Dissatisfaction with public transport services and support for improvements have been reflected in community appraisals, surveys and consultation exercises:

- The Fishguard, Goodwick and Pencaer Community Appraisal (1999). 55.1% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the train service and with limited transport in general. Many noted that they were totally dependent on the car due to limited transport services. When asked what they disliked most about Pembrokeshire, the top response was 'Geographical isolation / poor transport links'.
- The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Survey of Rail Services to Fishguard and West Wales (2000). 55% of the comments made by respondents were negative. The top two complaints were about limited frequency and fares.
- Pembrokeshire County Council Local Transport Plan consultation (2000). 37% of respondents to a household questionnaire were in favour of improved rail links; 35% would use buses and trains more often if there were more frequent and reliable services; 28% were in favour of cheaper fares. Although the issue of fares was a cause for concern, there was a greater demand for the increased frequency of buses and trains along with an extended timetable of services throughout the day. These were seen to be the biggest obstacles to a willingness to use public transport. The rail network was heavily criticised for inadequacy of service and unreliability.
- Pembrokeshire County Council Local Transport Plan Annual Report (2002). Poor frequency and speed of rail services, high public transport fares, poor rail infrastructure, poor public perception of available public transport, difficulties in achieving the frequency and cost of public transport that is socially desirable, and

a high level of car dependency are identified as transport weaknesses and constraints.

The Joint Unitary Development Plan recognises that transport improvements are essential to the regeneration of Pembrokeshire's economy and employment base, and recognises the need to ensure a more effective use of the transport network and to develop an integrated transport system. The document notes that a significant number of people in Pembrokeshire do not have access to private cars and consequently are reliant on public transport services to meet the majority of their travel needs and that others use public transport by choice rather than through necessity.

Among the strategies to address transport issues that the JUDP has identified are: 1] Improvements to the strategic transportation network, 2] Provision of adequate access for local communities to essential facilities, work opportunities and the strategic transport system, and 3] Reduce reliance on the use of the private motor car, encourage alternative means of travel, ensure a more effective use of the transport network, develop an integrated transport system. The Local Transport Plan sets out detailed strategies and action plans for all aspects of transport within the county.

COMMENTS ON THE REGENERATION PROPOSALS

The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum provides the following comments relating to the transport aspects of the proposals as part of our contribution to the development of the final Action Plan.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths. Add:

- Local authority committed to transport improvements.
- Existing bus and community transport systems.

Weaknesses. Add:

- Settlements outside of the semi-rural town centres in North Pembrokeshire with few if any of the services required to meet their local needs and not well served by public transport.
- Integrated transport facilities at Fishguard Harbour underdeveloped and underutilised.
- The 2 trains per day to Fishguard Harbour only designed to connect with ferry services and of no value to the local community or to visitors to/from Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire.

Opportunities. Add:

- Already established integrated transport facilities [rail-ferry-bus-taxi-cycle track-coastal path-car parks] at or within close proximity of Fishguard Harbour.
- Plans to improve the standard of bus service provision through the development of Quality Bus Partnerships.
- Plans to introduce walking and cycling routes through the utilisation of grants from external sources.
- The Pembrokeshire "Greenways" project [which includes the coastal shuttle bus services] to assist in promoting more sustainable transport provision.
- Newly introduced community transport services, such as the Preseli Green Dragon project.
- Forthcoming Wales and Borders Rail Franchise and plans to introduce a Community Rail Partnership for West Wales with potential to provide improved rail services to Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire.

Threats. Add:

- Limited funds for the expansion of transport services.
- No proposals at present to increase the frequency of rail services to Fishguard to meet the needs of locals and visitors.

Key Objectives

Communications infrastructure

- The railway line should be the corridor for sustainable development and tourism in the area, the gateway to Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire, as well as to/from Ireland.
- The Forum endorses the comments provided by the Fishguard, Goodwick and Lower Town Civic Society that: 'Road and rail enhancements should aim to facilitate travel to as well as through or away from Pembrokeshire. The effects of road enhancements on Anglesey should be closely monitored, as there is anecdotal evidence that the A55 has merely encouraged new Irish business to locate in Bangor and in other centres further to the east'.
- The Forum also endorses the Civic Society's comments that : 'Greater promotion and use should be made of the underutilised ferry-rail-bus transport infrastructure, with adjacent car park, at Fishguard Harbour. Serious attention must be given to improving the particularly inadequate rail service to Fishguard and the North Pembrokeshire area. The integrated transport facility at Fishguard Harbour should also be promoted as a hub of the Pembrokeshire Park Coastal Path and Celtic Cycle Trail'.
- Local bus and community transport services should be linked to rail and ferry services to provide a seamless integrated transport system.
- There is potential for the development of the Goodwick Station site. The site has been reserved in the Joint Unitary Development Plan for the development of new transport infrastructure and for related employment uses.

Port development and diversification

- The Forum endorses the view of the Civic Society that: 'The port and marina infrastructure should be closely linked with the rail-bus-walking-cycling facilities in the Fishguard Harbour area'.

Enhancement of Fishguard town centre

- The Forum endorses the proposal to construct a town centre relief road and one way system and traffic calming in order to improve safety and the environment and to enhance trading in the town.
- The Forum has also written to Pembrokeshire County Council expressing its support for the proposed access road from Vergam Terrace to Ysgol Bro Gwaun and the proposed leisure centre.

Support for innovative, high quality tourism projects

- The value of the integrated transport facilities at Fishguard Harbour should be fully exploited within tourism strategies. This should include effective marketing and promotion of transport/tourism links.