

## PROPOSAL FOR FAST FERRY IN TORBAY

I would like to go back to the beginning and the submission by Torbay Council for funding from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

I refer to the section C4. Community Support. I am a member of the Torbay Local Access Forum and there is an obligation to consult with us on any issues concerning access, footpaths, bridle paths, public rights of way and open spaces. We were not consulted AT ALL before this submission was made, not have we been consulted now the funds have been made available. I am also a long-standing member of my community partnership, and this has not come anywhere near us either. However I find the most puzzling of all the fact that no consultation was done with Seatorbay. Do the council officers not know that this very important group exists?

I was shocked when I read this document to find that nowhere is there any mention of the Marine Environment, when the majority of the funding granted is for sea-based transport. Are the transport planners not aware of the high value of the marine environment in Tor Bay, or have they very carefully avoided mentioning it? Either way, this makes the bid document fundamentally flawed for the Fast Ferry section.

Then we get down to the reasons for having a Fast Ferry, crossing from Brixham to Torquay – and the lack of data showing precisely which groups of people would be using it, how they would get to and from the ferry at either end, and the length of journey time including these vital links.

To suggest that residents in Brixham would use the ferry to get to Torbay Hospital is naive in the extreme. Firstly let us consider staff – they work shifts, and looking at the ferry times, they would be unable to get both to and from Brixham as there would be either no connection early morning, or alternatively, late evening. Then we look at visitors. The majority are pensioners, many of whom have mobility problems. To take in total **SIX** separate public transport vehicles to visit a friend or relative would not be acceptable to many, and then they would have to consider the cost. As far as patients with appointments are concerned, they need to have the least connections so that they can guarantee arriving on time. Using the fast ferry would not help at all. Lastly, the statement is made that the journey through Paignton increases journey times – the vast majority of trips to the hospital from Brixham go via the ring road, avoiding the bottle necks in Paignton.

Next we take the new Work Hubs, to be based by the harbours in Brixham and Torquay. These are a fantastic idea – but I would doubt if anyone will be using the ferry to go to them. If you live in Torquay you are hardly likely to go to Brixham, and vice versa, so rule out that source of passengers.

The ferry will not be used by those in who are suffering from deprivation – they will be looking for the cheapest way of getting to work, if they have a job. There are very

few jobs round the harbour areas, and those who obtain work inland will be looking for land-based transport.

One of the big problems in Torbay is the number of cars transporting students to school. Having the ferry will not help at all with this as none of the schools are near the harbours, neither is South Devon College.

The statement that "journey distances will be reduced by up to 50%" is false – they have not compared like with like, comparing harbour to harbour, not destination to destination.

I would like to see the statistics on the trial in September 2008, a very short period when Torbay still had many visitors who welcomed the chance to try out the ferry. How many residents used it to get to and from work? How many people were given free tickets? How many chose the ferry when the weather was wet and windy? Where have they drawn the figures of 400,000 trips per annum from? How many of these would otherwise use the current ferries?

Questions that need to be answered in public immediately are: Precisely where will the new ferry pontoon be installed? Where are the proposed waiting facilities to be sited and where are the planning applications for these? Where is the proposed Torquay Town Centre bus interchange to be sited? I have been involved with the Neighbourhood Plan consultation for Torquay from the outset, and we have had absolutely no information on any of this.

I now come to what might seem on the surface to be a minor issue, but is actually the most important. As you are all on the Harbours Committee I presume you are all familiar with the council's Marine Habitats policy, the Tor Bay Marine Biodiversity Action Plan, and the very stringent protection that Tor Bay now has as a Special Area of Conservation. Within this area there are very many protected species, and more are being discovered all the time. A substantial number are so delicate that any change in their environment would lead to their demise. Within this group are included the seahorses and their environment around the Torquay harbour areas. Seahorses have one of the highest levels of protection, and to damage them or their environment is a crime under Environmental Law. As this is the case, and the running of a fast ferry from Torquay would irrevocably damage this environment, I urge you most strongly to put these plans on hold until you have seriously researched the consequences of going ahead with this part of the sustainable transport project.

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