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Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR

5th August 2010

Dear Mr Hammond,

Mismanagement could result in massive waste of taxpayer's money

We are two distinct organisations in the far west of Cornwall with a common interest in a misguided Cornwall Council project that is seeking millions of pounds of DfT funding.

Cornwall Council has applied for funding for a "Route Partnership" scheme to improve the sea link between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly. The Route Partnership (made up of Cornwall Council, the Council of the Isles of Scilly and the Duchy of Cornwall) was set up to secure "lifeline" transport links between the Isles of Scilly and Penzance and ended up concentrating solely on the sea link.

Our concerns arise from the following:

- The sea link scheme is hugely controversial and the proposed "improvements" to Penzance harbour (which will cost c.£25m) involve land reclamation, development in an extremely sensitive location and the burying under infill and concrete of the historically most important parts of the town's precious Grade II* listed pier.
- The scheme also involves replacing a private-sector ferry operation with a Cornwall Council owned ship (which will cost c.£25m) despite the private-sector operator of the service for the last 90 years stating that their ships (freight and passenger) had years of life left in them and that they would continue their privately operated service regardless of whether public funding was available or not. The current anticipated total cost of the scheme is in excess of £65million.
- In contrast to the situation with the ferry service, the operator of the helicopter service (which is the preferred transport option for Islanders and carries 47% of all passengers) has made it clear that unless they are allowed to move their operation from Penzance into an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty nearer to the Islands and sell their Penzance heliport land to a supermarket chain they will have to close the service.

- Amongst the various proposed alternatives to the Route Partnership scheme for the sea link is a fast passenger ferry and separate freight ship operation. This option has not been properly assessed by the Route Partnership despite it holding the possibility of providing a fast passenger service to replace the failing helicopter and requiring a lighter touch to developments in Penzance Harbour.

Cornwall Council and others set up the Route Partnership to secure the lifeline links to the Isles of Scilly. They are on the verge of spending millions of pounds "improving" one lifeline service that has survived perfectly well in private hands for the last 90 years, while another vitally important lifeline link to the Islands is about to fail with no plan in place for an alternative service.

The operator of the helicopter service claims that they can deal with their financial problems by selling off the land they inhabit at Penzance, but all the evidence points to this being only a temporary solution. Rising fuel and spare parts costs for their ageing helicopters will almost certainly result in the service closing for good in a relatively short time. And in the meantime an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Heritage Coast and the many businesses that rely on it and trade between Lands End and the Lands End aerodrome will suffer, perhaps permanently.

At best Cornwall Council and the Route Partnership are guilty of taking their eye off the ball. But the circumstances surrounding other aspects of the scheme, and in particular their choice of location for new passenger and freight handling facilities in Penzance, suggest that the body is not fit for purpose.

If the above involved only Cornwall, its council and residents it would be a local tragedy, but large sums of EU and DfT money are at stake and for this reason we ask you to intervene and ensure that a full and comprehensive review of the transport issues facing the Isles of Scilly is undertaken urgently. Only in this way we believe can a local tragedy be averted and scarce government funds be spent wisely.

Yours sincerely,

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cc. Andrew George MP
EU Petitions Committee
District Auditor