

## **PE1657/A**

P&O written submission of 7 September

P&O Ferries began operating a ferry service from Cairnryan to Larne in July 1973, following the purchase of part of the old Cairnryan Military Port at the end of the 1960's. Since the route started, there have been significant developments with newer and better vessels introduced and better port facilities and infrastructure to enhance the customer experience.

During this period both tourist and freight traffic volumes have increased significantly while the local road infrastructure has been slow to change. Although some investment has taken place both the A77 North and the A75 South remain as mostly single carriageway 'A' class roads. The Stranraer end of both routes is the most problematic, with the section going North between Cairnryan and Ballantrae and going South between Glenluce and Newton Stewart, particularly poor.

Apart from Springholm and Crockettford most towns and villages have now been bypassed on the A75 going South, this is not the case on the A77 as the road still passes through Cairnryan, Ballantrae, Lendalfoot, Girvan, Kirkoswald, Maybole and Minishant. Maybole is a particular pinch point where delays are common when HGV traffic meets in the centre of the town.

Freight traffic is a major part of our business with a significant proportion of our weekly freight volume moving between Scotland and Northern Ireland. This is mostly retail traffic (M&S, ASDA, Tesco, Argos and numerous others) originating mostly from Retail Distribution Centres in the central belt and bound directly for stores in Northern Ireland. This is mainly 'just-in-time' traffic which is very time sensitive with tight delivery deadlines. Other non-retail traffic also uses the A77 which is not so time sensitive although deadlines are still tight and the old adage, 'you are only making money when the wheels are turning', still applies.

We have recently closed our seasonal tourist service from Troon to Larne which has resulted in further pressure on the A77 with additional tourist traffic heading for the Lochryan Ports. Although the route ultimately proved unviable, because of the type of craft used and the cost of fuel, one of the main drivers for the Troon service was customer demand and the reluctance of customers to travel down the A77 to the ferry ports in Cairnryan.

The Lochryan Ports compete with various other ports servicing the island of Ireland most of which enjoy much better road infrastructure than we do in this part of the world. Holyhead is accessed by the A55 which is dual carriageway for its full length, Liverpool has excellent motorway connections with the M58 and M62 both major routes into the ports and access to Heysham has recently been improved with the opening of a new dual carriageway connection from the M6.

On the other side of the Irish Sea, significant improvements to the A8 means we now have a high quality dual-carriageway link from the Port of Larne into the all-Ireland motorway network. Prior to the upgrade of the A8 an increasing number NI customers were driving south to ship out to the UK mainland via Dublin putting further pressure on the Lochryan ports. Since the opening of the A8 dual

carriageway we have seen that begin to change with positive freight growth last year and further growth evident this year.

The A75 and A77 are lifelines to the Lochryan ports and carry all the tourist and freight traffic which travel via our ports. We need transport links on this side of the Irish Sea similar to what is enjoyed on the other side to retain and grow this traffic and to develop commerce and trade between Scotland and the Island of Ireland