

Response to:

All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Visitor Economy

CALL FOR WRITTEN EVIDENCE:

**The economic potential of Coastal Communities and the Visitor
Economy**

1. Please introduce your organisation/company and outline your interest in the coastal communities' agenda.

Campaign for Better Transport is a charity whose vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

Many coastal communities lie on the periphery and as a result can suffer poor transport and connectivity. Campaign for Better Transport is keen for this to improve but in a way that respects communities and their surroundings.

2. How successful is the Government's current investment strategy for coastal communities?

The inquiry is looking to investigate the role and successes of current and future economic measures to support these areas, such as the Coastal Communities Fund, Coastal Enterprise Zones and Tourism VAT.

3. What are the key challenges for coastal communities, in particular for businesses operating in coastal areas?

The APPG is interested in submissions with reference to:

- Availability of skills and workforce
- Quality of transport connections (private and public transport)
- Quality of broadband connections
- Quality of education
- Promotion of area as a destination
- *Investment in housing provision and public realm*

Many coastal communities rely heavily on tourism, while places such as Brighton that are relatively successful, but still face challenges, have also benefited from their proximity to London and having relatively good broadband connectivity. This has allowed Brighton to diversify into knowledge based industries where being slightly peripheral geographically is less of an issue.

However, the challenge for many coastal communities which are predominantly reliant on tourism is the variability of the quality of the transport infrastructure which is often unreliable and rarely provided for the benefit of local communities. It can also be expensive.

For example, weekends and bank holidays are the most important days for seaside resorts in terms of tourism, yet on these days the public transport network is at its worst. Network Rail often schedules engineering works on weekends and bank holidays making access by rail unreliable and unattractive. Even if trains are running, there are normally fewer services, making the prospect of travelling by rail less appealing. Bus services are also often scaled back, although there are a few exceptions to this.

Rail fares have risen by 25% over last six years, and the high price of train travel (particularly compared to driving - fuel duty has been frozen for several years) deters many from taking public transport to the seaside. Bus services, where they still exist, can also be expensive.

All these factors reduce the number of people who might visit, while forcing more people to drive than would otherwise do so, creating congestion and pollution which undermines the attractiveness of the resort. This in turn, can lead to calls for more and bigger roads to these locations which fuels this problem as well as potentially harming a resort's environmental setting. For many places, the surrounding countryside can be of high quality and a great asset and adds to their tourism offer if properly protected and marketed.

4. What role can the hospitality and tourism industry play in addressing and overcoming these challenges? *Traditional maritime industries, including those dependent on ports and harbours, have declined or become less labour intensive. How important is the role of the visitor economy as a driver of investment, employment and opportunity?*

The visitor economy is important in overcoming the decline in traditional industries but it does need to be developed as part of an overall strategy.

5. How do you think central and local government can contribute further to supporting coastal communities?

There needs to be far greater investment in public transport, integrated ticketing and giving coastal communities a say in how the rail network and services are managed to ensure they are acting in the public interest and serving the needs of those communities.

We would like to see the Government commit to fares reduction, to make them more affordable. Many fares for seaside outings at weekends are bought as walk-on and are not regulated means that they can be increased above inflation with impunity. We would therefore like to see walk-on fares brought under the Government's fare regulation structure.

Greater investment in walking and cycling infrastructure along with good information and linking into the England Coast Path, a new National Trail which will fully open in 2020, and the National Cycle Network would also help expand tourism and improve public health. This fits with the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy.

Improving broadband is also a major requirement, not just because it will help with diversification, but because tourists increasingly expect good connectivity when visiting places.

6. With more than one in six people having an 'activity limiting' health problem or disability, how can central and local government improve accessibility to the British seaside?

- As a business what steps do you take to ensure accessibility?
- What more would you like to see being done? How can this be achieved?

In addition to making locations and transport provision more accessible to serve the needs of those with health problems or disabilities, consideration also needs to be given to places of tourism also promoting physical activity. This would allow them to act in a preventative role and contribute to improving the nation's health.

Many coastal resorts are surrounded by or close to high quality countryside, often Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. They are places people love to visit but can be put off doing so by the quality of the access or a lack of information. By improving walking and cycling infrastructure and bus services into these areas, the offer of the coastal resort can be greatly enhanced and bring in new business. With the growth in the popularity in cycling in recent years, increasing on and off-road cycle infrastructure as part of a broader network could be a real boon to these areas and to public health.

Encouraging more people to become active by offering them high quality routes to walk and cycle would result in a healthier and happier population, reducing pressure on the NHS.

7. *Optional* – Request for case studies: The All Party Group would welcome submissions of case studies on projects and initiatives that have made a significant improvement in the performance of coastal areas as places to live and visit.

30 September 2016

Chris Todd
Campaign for Better Transport

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