

Ministry of Tourism and Transport's Cruise Ports Master Plan - Bermuda National Trust input to the Ministry.

There have been several articles in the press recently and some public concern indicated about the Ministry of Tourism and Transport's Cruise Ports Master Plan and the proposal for Bermuda to accommodate "mega cruise ships". The Bermuda National Trust has been asked for its input on the Plan and the following is the content of a letter sent on July 20 to the Ministry's consultant, Larry Jacobs. The letter reflects the position of the Trust on the information made available so far.

Contact – Steve Conway, Bermuda National Trust

Letter dated July 20, 2005 to Larry Jacobs, Ministry of Tourism and Transport.

In February 2005 the Bermuda National Trust viewed a presentation of the "2005 Cruise Ports Master Plan Update". The Trust was informed that due to the age and condition of those vessels currently serving Bermuda their operators intended to replace them with larger "Panamax" type ships. We were told that these ships would be somewhat wider, up to the maximum width possible for a vessel to transit the Panama Canal, and as much as 300' longer than most current callers. To accommodate these new vessels major changes were proposed for each port. At that point in time, with the plan mostly conjecture and with several scenarios for *each* port under review, the Trust was asked to comment.

The Trust responded by letter on February 11, 2005 seeking answers to several questions we felt had to be addressed prior to commenting on the plan:

1. What is the "carrying capacity" of Bermuda and how do these initiatives affect that number?
2. What is the objective evidence to support the premise that we will not have a viable cruise ship presence without these changes?
3. How does this initiative coordinate with other strategies to revive the whole of Bermuda's tourism industry?
4. How does this plan fit with the strategies of the Sustainable Development Initiative?
5. Has a cost/benefit analysis been done to show that the extreme measures contemplated will actually provide a proportional benefit to Bermuda?
6. What impact would this plan have on the marine and terrestrial environments in general and specifically what would the effects be on:
 - A) Higgs Island and Two Rock Passage
 - B) Bermuda's transport system and ability to provide other visitor services
 - C) Areas affected by dredging and movement of larger ships through inshore waters
 - D) The islands water and sewage systems

To date those questions remain unanswered. In light of that fact, and in the face of growing public concern, the Trust wishes to make the following comments on the Cruise Ship Initiative.

The Bermuda National Trust agrees that the cruise ship industry is a vital part of Bermudas tourism portfolio. We do not agree that the model for the future should be mega-ships, with all their associated difficulties, in each of our major ports. We are strongly opposed to any alteration of Town Cut to allow for Panamax ships. Widening Town Cut will inevitably alter the dynamics of the harbour, increasing its vulnerability to storms and

diminishing its value as an anchorage; the effect on the marine environment will be both detrimental and irreversible. We also question the wisdom of altering the essential character of a World Heritage Site to accommodate larger cruise ships. It is hard to imagine how this could be accomplished without leaching away the delicate charm that is St George's greatest attraction.

A discussion as to the suitability of Dockyard as the mega-ship hub is hobbled by the numerous unanswered questions surrounding that proposal. Could Bermuda adequately absorb that many cruise visitors without the experience of all visitors and residents suffering? What are the specific plans to deal with the transport issues that would arise from two mega-ships in port, when the current system seems woefully inadequate with just one at present? What would the environmental effects of these ships be within the harbour and inshore waters? How much sediment would spread and how much coral would die? The Trust feels that these are questions that must be answered *before* we decide to build a facility for mega-ships, *not* as we build it.

We also feel that as we explore the above issues we should also entertain other possible solutions to the cruise ship question. Have we made every effort to attract smaller ships, even ones not affiliated with the major cruise lines? We know that these ships exist, what would it take to bring them to Bermuda? Could we ensure that St. Georges is not left out of the program by guaranteeing enough dedicated fast ferries to deliver visitors from Dockyard to their doorstep? Environmental impact studies of these proposals, and we are shocked that this has not been done by this point in the proceedings, could provide a wealth of possible solutions. We believe that the results of these studies are what Bermuda needs to make an informed decision on this issue. We cannot be too careful when making a decision that will shape the face of the island and with which Bermuda will have to live forever.

We look forward to hearing the answers to the above questions and to being involved in the continuing consultation process.

Bermuda National Trust
July 20, 2005

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