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**“Review of the use, scheduling and financing of the RMS St Helena
and wider shipping options for the Island 2012-2016.” Julian Morris, November 2010**

Commentary on the report by the St Helena Chamber of Commerce

This commentary has been prepared by the St Helena Chamber of Commerce following consideration of the above report. However the Chamber is disappointed that, although this report was prepared in November 2010, no copy was furnished or communication made direct to the Chamber despite many of its Members giving up substantial amounts of time to input into the process, particularly at the two day Jamestown workshop last August. The Chamber is also concerned that we have only 12 months of operating schedule left and that business and commerce will suffer the consequences of a lack of forward planning.

1. General: The Chamber welcomes this report which displays a professional and comprehensive analysis of future scheduling options to meet estimated passenger and cargo requirements. It contains a detailed financial analysis and looks at the wider related issues such as the airbridge and cabin configuration and other matters. Most significantly the conclusions and recommendations are **evidence based** and point the way forward for the Island leading up to the future provision of air access. It is crucial that the supply of passenger space on the RMS for access to St Helena is not a limiting factor to the successful progression of the airport project. Most of the proposals in this report, through increasing access to St Helena, focus on the most effective way of ensuring this outcome whilst meeting the continuing needs of the business and wider community on the Island.

2. Specific comments:

2.1 The Chamber particularly welcomes the proposal to discontinue calls to UK and Tristan Da Cunha. The UK voyages absorb 33% of the annual schedule but carries only 6% of the passengers. Cargo from the UK is adequately served through the transshipment arrangements. There is very little benefit to St Helena in the ship going to Tristan, either for Tristan or St Helena.

2.2 The Chamber notes that most of the current spare passenger capacity on the RMS exists on the calls to and from Ascension. There is also the potential for reallocating the airbridge quota to

increase the maximum number of allocated civilian seats to coincide with flights that fit with the RMS calls. This would mean that more people could access Ascension from Brize Norton or the Falklands at more convenient times minimising waiting time on Ascension. Given the continuing forecasted high demand for access to St Helena to/from South Africa, consultants and HMG/SHG officials should be required to travel via Ascension Island.

2.3 Although in the longer term the report recommends the inclusion of Walvis Bay as a destination due to the fact that its inclusion will increase the access opportunities, the potential passenger and cargo opportunities offered by Walvis Bay do not appear to be fully researched. One of the main reasons for the lack of passenger and cargo take up, according to the Walvis Bay Chamber of Commerce when it met with representatives of the SHDA in recent years, is the irregularity of calls to the port. Both the Namibian tourism sector and Namibian grocery suppliers were unable to fully exploit transport links with the island due to the schedule's erratic nature, the unwillingness of SHG to make any longer-term commitment to using WVB and the lack of lead-in time for forward planning. They were of the view that substantial mutual benefits to both STH and WVB businesses were possible with a regular scheduled service. The report also comments on shipping as the main means by which South African goods arrive in Walvis Bay. However there are good road links with South Africa which are heavily utilised and many cargo items are produced many miles north of Cape Town, closer to Walvis Bay. The Chamber however is content with the relevant recommendations.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The St Helena Chamber of Commerce strongly supports all of the recommendations contained within the report. The report is a very welcome document for St Helena and has been many years overdue. It is noted from the SHG press release that the Governor will make the final decisions on the recommendations contained in the report following its consideration by the Access and Transportation Committee and Informal Legco and Executive Council.

3.2 It is essential that any changes to the recommendations are “**evidence based**” as was the stated purpose of the review in the consultant's TOR's at 2.1 (Page 80 of the report). Any changes based on subjective judgements or personal preferences will not do the review justice and will not be properly serving the community on St Helena.

JS 6 January 2011