

Case Study:

Dover Priory

Introduction

Dover is the historic gateway linking Britain with the rest of Europe and the busiest passenger port in the world.

Dover's economic role has nonetheless changed over the years. The town has lost its military role and dock-related employment has plummeted. There is little diversification in the local economy, with low skills and high unemployment. Deprivation statistics for parts of the town indicate some of England's worst child poverty, housing stock, education, skills and training, unemployment and low income.

Dover had some success as a Victorian seaside resort, and recent attempts to regenerate the town have focused on leisure and tourism – making it a place worth visiting rather than just travelling through. The enhancement scheme at Dover Priory station is one of the key projects in Dover's renaissance.

The problems

Over the years, Dover Priory station has suffered from a general run-down in its fortunes. Dover Harbour station was closed as the nature and location of the harbour's operations changed. International travellers were then routed via the formerly domestic Priory station, with the ferry companies providing coach links between the station and harbour. International travel still accounts for about a quarter of the station's million passengers each year, but new travel options to the continent have benefited from a higher priority and greater investment. A distinct lack of



Restored art deco frontage

PHOTO: TRANSPORT REGENERATION LTD

maintenance during the first rail franchise contributed to a station very much 'down at heel'.

Particular issues identified include:

- A domestic station poorly equipped for its role as an international interchange
- Poor quality international bus-rail transfer facilities
- A lack of multi-lingual signage to help non-English-speaking visitors at this most international of UK rail stations
- Difficult onward access by foot, bicycle or local bus, deterring good links with the town centre and Dover Castle
- Inadequate information about local attractions and how to reach them, particularly on foot or bus
- Poor access for pedestrians from the Priory Hill area of Dover, which remains one of its most deprived areas



Refurbished and remodeled booking office with ramped access to new waiting facilities

PHOTO: TRANSPORT REGENERATION LTD

Overall, Dover Priory presents a very poor first impression of the UK for overseas visitors and functions inadequately to support the local community and regeneration initiatives.

The solution

Dover District Council, as part of its commitment to the development of the town, formed a partnership with Network Rail, South Eastern Trains and Kent County Council, with Transport Regeneration acting as the county council's funding consultant. Following a series of meetings the partnership agreed a number of initiatives, strongly supported through local consultation. They included:

- New high standard waiting accommodation within the main station building for domestic visitors and international travellers transferring to buses
- Multi-lingual resigning of the station and forecourt
- Restoration of the station's 'heritage' appeal, within the booking hall and across the building facade
- A new drop off/pick up point for cars and taxis
- Better foot access to Priory Hill
- Improved CCTV coverage for better security

Kent County Council, as both transport authority and an organisation with a track record in delivering European schemes, took the lead in building a financial case for the project. Dover District Council provided expertise on local consultation and on regeneration, tourism and

social inclusion. The Port industry and visitor attractions were particularly interested in station improvement proposals. South Eastern Trains and Network Rail provided information about the operation and management of the station.

The proposed new interchange, in addition to transport benefits, was marketed as the catalyst for regeneration and social inclusion. From detailed discussion and consultation with local visitor attractions, the port industry and transport providers, the partnership built up a full picture of a broad range of requirements.

The funding

It was evident that the various elements of the Dover scheme would, collectively, demonstrate synergy, with numerous outputs beyond transport and accessibility. Maximising the range of outputs increases funding opportunities.

Marketing the station as an attractive interchange with tourist attractions and ferry operators has helped to justify providing improved transport facilities for the local community and potential visitors.

The project could be seen to contribute to area regeneration, tourism development, social inclusion, protection of the built heritage, transport integration, environmental enhancements and improved safety.

A commitment was given to explore the use of renewable energy and sustainable building materials as an innovative measure. Local architecture students were involved in the design process, through Kent Institute of Architecture and Design. It also provided additional innovation – important for securing many forms of European funding.

The Dover Priory project fitted with HST Connect, a wider European funding partnership scheme led by the regional development agency SEEDA. HST Connect aims to link areas to the European high-speed rail network. This wider project was key to the funding package as a whole. The Dover Priory scheme fitted with HST Connect and wider European objectives, and Dover's international role was seen as beneficial to the European scheme.

A financial package of around £350,000 was developed, using the Kent Local Transport Plan, regeneration funding from Dover District Council and Kent County Council, the Railway Heritage Trust, European funding (Interreg IIIb for the North West Europe Region), and support from South Eastern Trains.

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Attaching the Dover project to an existing European funding partnership under development facilitated the project's transition through the Interreg IIIB application process.

Lessons learnt

Key to the development of this project has been a focused, pro-active local partnership, aided by a wider enthusiastic partnership, including the rail industry and the regional development agency SEEDA. Reflecting partner interests, the project aims to bring social, economic and environmental benefits, and this is reflected in the funding achieved.

Kent and its rail network has benefited from other Interreg-funded schemes too. Other examples are major investment in the station and interchange upgrade at Ashford International station, and links with the Fastrack guided bus serving Ebbsfleet and local stations on the North Kent line. These schemes have brought to Kent an unparalleled level of benefit. It shows what can be done by building up the knowledge and networking necessary to overcome barriers to successful European funding applications, together with the support of the regional development agency.