



# Agenda Item Introduction

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Committee	<b>CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
Date	<b>16 JULY 2024</b>
Topic	<b>CROSS-SOLENT FERRY OPERATORS</b>

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### Background

1. The committee expressed concerns regarding cross-Solent ferry operations as the services provided by the ferry operators have a direct impact on the economy and residents of the Island.
2. Isle of Wight ferry services play a pivotal role in the transport of people and goods between the Island and the mainland. As there are no scheduled air services or a fixed link the Island is dependent on its ferry links with the mainland for the delivery of, or access to, many essential goods and services.
3. Island residents use the ferries to travel for work, family, health, and social reasons and can be impacted by high fares and disruption to services.
4. The Isle of Wight Council is the Local Transport Authority for the Island. Decision making for major transport infrastructure spending is devolved to these bodies from the Department for Transport.

### Focus for Scrutiny

- What is the remit of the Local Transport Authority (LTA)?
- What powers do the LTA have in influencing cross Solent ferry operations?
- What level of interaction does the LTA have with each ferry operator?
- What is the LTA doing in making representations to improve cross Solent ferry operations in relation to fares, timetabling and service disruption?
- What is the LTA doing to engage with Island residents on improving cross Solent ferry operations?
- What are the barriers to influencing and improving cross Solent ferry operations?
- How can the committee assist in improving cross Solent ferry operations?

- What financial support is provided to ferry operators by the government, and any benefits they may receive (such as tax relief), to understand the wider context of how and why those organisations operate in the way that they do?

**Outcome(s)**

5. Set out the expected outcomes for the committee.

**Document(s) Attached**

6. Scrutiny Report on Cross Solent Services
7. Appendix 1 - Cross Solent Contingency Plan

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# Scrutiny Report

## ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Committee	<b>CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
Date	<b>16 JULY 2024</b>
Topic	<b>CROSS-SOLENT FERRY SERVICES</b>
Report of	<b>LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE, HIGHWAYS PFI, TRANSPORT STRATEGY, STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS</b>

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### Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to respond to the questions posed by the committee in relation to the cross Solent ferry service provision for residents of and visitors to the Isle of Wight.

### Recommendation

2. The committee considers the responses to the questions that have been asked and give further strategic direction if necessary.

### Background

3. This section will respond to the questions previously posed by the committee:

#### **What is the remit of the Local Transport Authority (LTA)?**

4. A local transport or highways authority is a statutory function devolved from central government to the county council or unitary authority and allows those authorities to regulate, manage, or administer transportation-related matters, such as the maintenance of roads and transportation infrastructure and traffic management.
5. In addition to those functions the role of the local transport authority is to:
  - Promote sustainable transport including all forms of public, passenger transport and the conveyance of freight by rail or water.
  - Identify and safeguard land required for transport.

- Determine local non-statutory concessions policy and administer both statutory and non-statutory concessionary fares.
- Identify and consider funding socially necessary bus services.

### **What powers do the LTA have in influencing cross Solent ferry operations?**

6. The LTA does not have any statutory powers that it can use to influence operators with regards to the cost or frequency of cross Solent ferries.
7. Although there is not currently a public service obligation, there are examples of the operators making changes to schedules when requested to do so by the council in response to issues raised by residents.

### **What level of interaction does the LTA have with each ferry operator?**

8. All the public transport operators attend the monthly Transport Infrastructure Board which includes Red Funnel, HoverTravel, Southern Vectis, South Western Railways and Wightlink. Board members also include Cllr Phil Jordan (as Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Transportation), IWC officers, and a representative from Island Roads.
9. The operators submit monthly statistics of availability and reliability of services which are presented, discussed, and challenged (if necessary) at the Board.
10. Operators also have individual 1-2-1 sessions with board members on a quarterly basis to discuss overall performance. Individual meetings about specific matters will also be scheduled outside of the Transport Infrastructure Board if required.

### **What is the LTA doing in making representations to improve cross Solent ferry operations in relation to fares, timetabling and service disruption?**

11. On a local level, the LTA will challenge the operators through the Transport Infrastructure Board when their reliability and availability data is submitted and ask for explanation and further detail about if and when the frequency of services will increase.
12. On a national level, the Department for Levelling Up and Housing have set up an Islands Forum to recognise the importance of infrastructure investment and reliable services to enable islands to increase tourism, trade and support jobs. The Isle of Wight Council is a member of this forum.
13. The purpose of the forum is to bring together transport and infrastructure experts from the islands around the United Kingdom to share information and best practice and identify common denominator issues.
14. The authorities within the group are working together to collate data on connectivity challenges to produce a country wide picture. The type of data being gathered is Demand profiles for services, passenger numbers, population forecasts, population type, vehicle type, vessel model, type and age, and operational costs.

15. It is important to note that there is currently no central government funding attached to the Islands Forum, although the identification of common connectivity challenges that could be improved via a funding package could result from membership of this forum.
16. The Islands included in the forum are:
  - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar / Western Isles Council
  - Orkney Islands Council
  - Shetland Islands Council
  - Highland Council
  - North Ayrshire Council
  - Argyll & Bute Council
  - Isle of Wight Council
  - Isles of Scilly Council
  - Ynys Môn/Isle of Anglesey County Council
  - Rathlin Development & Community Association
17. The Isle of Wight is most closely aligned to the Isles of Scilly as they are the only other island/group of islands that do not have government subsidised or operated ferry services.

**What is the LTA doing to engage with Island residents on improving cross Solent ferry operations?**

18. The Isle of Wight Council is currently drafting the Local Transport Plan 4, which will be the basis of the council's transport strategy for the next 20 years.
19. Residents will be consulted on the draft document before it becomes an agreed strategy by the council. It is the aim to get the Local Transport Plan approved and published by March 2025.

**What are the barriers to influencing and improving cross Solent ferry operations?**

20. The main barrier to influencing the cross Solent ferry operations is that all the operations are privately owned companies who are answerable to shareholders and not central government or the Isle of Wight Council.
21. The second barrier is the limited number of transport operators meaning that each operator has a monopoly in certain parts of the Island and competition is only available to those residents who can change routes.
22. The MP for the Isle of Wight, Dr Robert Seeley, wrote to the Transport Secretary, the Right Honourable Mark Harper MP citing the 2009 Office of Fair Trading Report that concluded there was limited opportunity for competition in cross Solent ferry operations.
23. The third barrier is the limited infrastructure available to support additional operators.

**How can the committee assist in improving cross Solent ferry operations?**

24. The committee can provide evidence from their residents about how cancellations and delays directly impact on their lives and ability to cross to the mainland for vital medical appointments, leisure or for connecting travel.
25. The committee could support the MP if they call for a review into ferry travel if they choose to take that course of action.

**What financial support is provided to ferry operators by the government, and any benefits they may receive (such as tax relief), to understand the wider context of how and why those organisations operate in the way that they do?**

26. Ferry operators do not receive tax relief from central government. The government provided £6.5 million to the operators to maintain lifeline service during the COVID pandemic in January 2021.

**Appendices Attached**

27. Appendix 1 - Cross Solent Contingency Plan

**Background Papers**

28. [DUTIES OF LOCAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES \(Hansard, 10 July 2000\) \(parliament.uk\)](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/2000/jul/10/duties-of-local-transport-authorities)  
<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/2000/jul/10/duties-of-local-transport-authorities>
29. [Local Transport Act 2008 - Explanatory Notes \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/26/notes/division/2)  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/26/notes/division/2>
30. [Government safeguards vital ferry services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
31. [New group to consider transport links agreed at Islands Forum - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

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