



Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport

Summer Newsletter 2014

INTRODUCTION

There has been a long interval since the last newsletter, sent out in autumn 2013, but the silence does not indicate any inaction on the part of FRIST in pursuit of its goal of affordable, reliable, all year transport to and from the Isles of Scilly comparable to that provided to the Scottish Isles. Since last year, FRIST activities have been many and various, and we are keeping awareness of the islands' transport situation alive in the consciousness of government departments and politicians and using any opportunity to stress the need for improvements to transport services if Scilly's economy is not to decline further.

Although there hasn't been a recent newsletter, up to date communication and news are maintained frequently on the website www.frist.org.uk. Printing and posting the newsletter is expensive and many thanks to the supporters who have donated towards costs. These have been the only expenses claimed against our funds – the whole cost (travel, accommodation etc.) associated with attending meetings in London has been met by individual members of the FRIST Advisory Group themselves.

FRIST SUPPORTERS

Most weeks there are a few new supporters including those joining the Facebook group. The latter are not counted into the main body of supporters who have joined via the FRIST website and Facebook Group members are urged to sign up via www.frist.org.uk in order to provide contact details, receive newsletters and be kept up to date with the latest transport news.

The numbers currently stand at around 2,500 and participation and input is always appreciated. In addition to the approximate 45% of the islands' adult population, there are a lot of supporters on the mainland – families and friends, visitors, and business links too. Members of the Advisory Group do 'what it says on the can' and if you live on Scilly and believe you have the time and ability to join the group, please step forward!

Follow Scilly Today as well as the FRIST website and Blog, and please participate with your views.

2014 NEWS and EVENTS

Meeting with Baroness Kramer, Minister of State, Department for Transport

On 23 January, FRIST Advisory Group members Marian Bennett, Nick Jenkins and Lord Berkeley attended a meeting with the Transport Minister Baroness Kramer at the DfT in

London, also attended by Andrew George MP and Nigel Blackler, Cornwall Council's Head of Transportation. FRIST outlined the whole transport scenario: personal and economic examples of the impact of delays and disruption; the impact for the health services; the decline in passenger numbers; airport closures; potential for replacing the Scillonian III etc.

The Minister did not rule out revenue support, but said that support should in the first instance be sought locally through the LEP, but there must be a clear and unified view from Scilly on what was needed. It was agreed that a round-table meeting between all stakeholders in Scilly be called and that a request for funding be put forward as soon as possible.

FRIST gives evidence to the Commons Transport Committee.

At a hearing of the Transport Committee on 3 March as part of its Inquiry into passenger transport to isolated communities, Marian Bennett and Tim Guthrie represented FRIST; FRIST also invited Robert Francis of the Island Partnership. Theo Leijser, Cllr Chris Thomas represented the IOS Council and Nigel Blackler for Cornwall Council. FRIST did focus the minds of the Committee and those giving evidence of the problems and possible solutions, with interesting discussions about the need or otherwise for a subsidy for some or all of the services.

Martin Vickers MP expressed surprise that 'Transport to the isles was as bad as it is. I am amazed to find that, unlike most of the Scottish islands where ferry services are heavily subsidised, your ferry service has none at all. Has it ever had one?' Martin Vickers asked if there had ever been an alternative structure looked at in terms of a franchise that would receive some sort of public support. Marian Bennett replied – 'we would love it, but no' but Isles of Scilly Chief Executive Theo Leijser said that the islanders were proud of delivering their own solutions, that the 'current operator is commercially viable' and that the problem was with resilience.

FRIST report to TC Sep 2013: <http://tinyurl.com/ohwd2dn>
FRIST supplementary report: <http://tinyurl.com/nafv8od>

Public Meeting in St Marys on the future of transport links to the mainland, 16 April.

The purpose of the meeting was to inform the community of the IOS COUNCIL's efforts on what they are doing in transport'. The stakeholder panel included representatives from the IOS COUNCIL, Duchy of Cornwall, Cornwall Council, the Steamship Company and Tresco. FRIST asked the final question during the session was 'what was the

unified message to be taken forward to the minister?' There was no response from the panel.

IOS Council Task and Finish Group

The IOS Council set up a 'Task and Finish' group to look at options to improve transport. Tim Guthrie represents FRIST on it, and there is also representation from the Islands Partnership, Healthwatch and the Steamship Group.

In its submission to the Group, FRIST urged that revenue support via an operating deficit subsidy should be strongly pursued by the Council. In addition, FRIST supported:

- A review of the sailing timetable and of changes in direction and timing of travel to/from the mainland with flexibility to link with train services
- Scheduled Sunday sailing throughout the visitor season
- Improvements to Penzance quay particularly for disembarkation and luggage handling, with waiting accommodation for passengers, and increased safety from vehicles
- Provision of an air link to London (by connection with Flybe link at Newquay)
- Installation of navigational improvements (EGNOS) to improve air services and reduce bad weather cancellation rates
- Re-instatement of Southampton as flight destination
- Review of timetable to accommodate early and late mainland appointments for residents and to optimise day trips for visitors
- Provision of guides (the human variety) at meet and greet points in addition to updated information (digital or static) at focal points
- Website provision of comprehensive inter-island boating information published on daily basis to maximise flexibility of travel at all times of day for both local and tourist travel

In its submission to the Task and Finish Group, the Islands Partnership states: 'It was agreed unanimously that it would be sensible to pursue the option of a route subsidy.'

No further progress has been reported.

IOS Council meets minister

The Chairman of the Council and the Chief Executive were invited by the Minister to provide an update on Thursday 26 June. The meeting provided an opportunity to explain how discussions were progressing. 'The Minister endorsed the approach of partners moving towards a better transport solution by focusing on three key themes: reliability, integration and cost of transport. The delegation made a strong case for continued departmental support on current projects and shared with the Minister that the community has asked to explore further options to reduce the cost of transport.'

The Minister welcomed the Chairman's invitation to visit the Isles of Scilly later in the year.'

See full IOS Council statement on FRIST website at: <http://tinyurl.com/pendkdu>

The Peninsular Railway

FRIST supports measures to improve the links to the mainland and for better integrated with mainland services. The Dawlish closures for three months last winter exemplified the perception of Cornwall and Scilly being cut off. A report on alternative routes has recently been released by Network Rail and is available at <http://tinyurl.com/l57ody3>

The Prime Minister's announcement on 2 July of a £146m package of rail improvements is a very welcome first step to allow the planned half hourly stopping service and hourly faster services on the main line from Penzance through Cornwall, and for an enhanced sleeper service. More coaches will be required in the future, but there should be some spare from Scotrail when Scotland gets new sleeper coaches, and the Train Care Centre in Penzance will create many job opportunities as well as safeguarding the services to that important town.

FRIST has also been lobbying First Great Western and Cross Country Trains to reschedule the sleeper from Paddington arriving at Penzance on Mondays one hour later than on other days, thus missing the departure of the Scillonian III by five minutes.

There are other poor connections with the incoming Scillonian to Penzance, giving some very long waits before the first connecting train to Plymouth and beyond. Worse still, there is no sleeper service on Saturday evenings after the busiest changeover day.

However, It is only a short time ago that we were fighting for the survival of the sleeper service; look what successful lobbying can achieve!

Helicopter

Helicopter manufacturer Augusta Westland commissioned Price Waterhouse Cooper to investigate the viability of a new helicopter service to Scilly. Tim Guthrie, Mike Peaker, Dick Cliffe and Marian Bennett were all interviewed as part of the consultation. Although we understand an initial report has been received by Andrew George MP, no further information is available.

Infrastructure Developments

The airport development project - new hard surface runways at Lands Ends and resurfaced runways and terminal improvements at St Mary's - are progressing. At St Mary's, the Council states that the runways will be complete by the end of August and the terminal by the end of October. The Land's End project includes runway lighting and should be complete by the beginning of October.

The St Mary's harbour quay extension project is awaiting a decision on funding. The deadline for completion of the work is June 2015. The project is linked to a major dredging of Penzance Harbour. Both projects will either be funded or neither.

Isles of Scilly Steamship Group

Rob Goldsmith took up his post as Chief Executive of the Group early in the New Year on the retirement. FRIST wishes Jeff a long and happy retirement.

With the appointment of Rob and with Honour Burrows appointment, there is a new and welcome emphasis on customer service.

Parliamentary Answers.

In January, Lord Berkeley received the following answers to Written Questions:

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the private sector operator of search and rescue helicopter services will (1) continue to provide cover for medical emergency evacuations from the Isles of Scilly on the same basis as the current search and rescue operation; and (2) use helicopters with the same or better capability of undertaking sea rescues using winches.[HL4321]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Kramer) (LD): Bristow Helicopters, the operator that will provide the new UK search and rescue helicopter service, will continue to provide cover for medical emergency evacuations from the Isles of Scilly to the same standard as the military provides today. Bristow Helicopters will operate Sikorsky 'S92' helicopters from Newquay Airport that can reach the Isles of Scilly. The S92s are some of the most modern search and rescue helicopters available globally. They will each be fitted with a dual winch and can fly further and faster than the Royal Navy Sea Kings they will replace.

To ask Her Majesty's Government (1) what is the status of state aid applications, (2) when full authority to start construction will be given, and, (3) what is the amount and funding source of state aid, for (a) improvements to St Mary's port quay, Isles of Scilly, (b) improvements to Penzance Harbour quay and dredging, (c) improvements to St Mary's airport runway, Isles of Scilly, and (d) construction of an all-weather runway at Land's End airport.[HL4393]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Kramer) (LD): State Aid notifications to the European Commission for the harbour, dredging and airport works are being prepared in collaboration with the Council of the Isles of Scilly and Cornwall Council, and will be submitted once sufficient evidence has been obtained to support the notification.

The Department for Transport is minded to provide at least £8m for the quay improvements at St Mary's and dredging at Penzance Harbour, with an additional funding contribution of £7m being sought from the EU Convergence Programme, administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Final approval of the Department for Transport's proposed contribution will be considered once European state aid clearance has been obtained and once the promoters have secured the necessary funding contribution from the EU Convergence Programme.

The Department has not been asked to provide funding for either of the two runway schemes, which we understand are the subject of bids for EU Convergence Funding, supplemented by an additional bid to the Regional Growth Fund, in the case of St Mary's airport, and by private funding in the case of Land's End airport.

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Earl Attlee on 29 November 2013 (WA 78), whether they have received an application from the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company for Skybus to carry bio-hazardous goods such as specimens for testing; and, if so, when a licence was granted by the Civil Aviation Authority for such a service.[HL4322]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Kramer) (LD): An application for a Dangerous Goods Approval was received by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on the 20 December 2012. The CAA is assessing the application in consultation with the operator. Once the operator has demonstrated compliance with the relevant requirements the CAA will grant the approval.

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/dallfiles/peers/lord_hansard_3972_wad.html

FRIST Comment

Slow progress

Since FRIST's first meeting with Baroness Kramer in January, and at subsequent meetings including at the Select Committee, the message from ministers has been quite clear – give us a clear message of what the community needs and we will consider it; a subsidy is not ruled out. The IOS Council however maintain that the only problem is with the resilience.

FRIST welcomes the later recognition in the IOS Council's report on its June meeting with the minister, that 'the community has asked to explore further options to reduce the cost of transport.'

Six months after our first meeting with Baroness Kramer, it is sad that little progress has been made in establishing a consensus view among the stakeholders as to what is needed and how it can be achieved – as she has requested at every meeting.

FRIST's objectives remain 'to campaign for an affordable, reliable all year round transport service to the Isles of Scilly comparable to that provided in the Scottish islands.' FRIST has always maintained that, whilst it could be specific on how this objective could be achieved (Catamarans, Ro-Ro, airships etc!), it thought it best not to create a debate about the detail of 'how', rather wishing to get the principle established.

Now that the IOS Council appears to have accepted that 'cost' can be considered as an issue, it is hoped that we are seeing a consensus emerging, with partners including FRIST working together.

A good example to follow

An excellent example of success when organisations pull together came on 2 July when the Prime Minister, on a visit to Penzance, announced £146m improvements to the rail network and services in Cornwall. This is entirely the result of Cornwall Council, the LEP Network Rail and FGW along with others sending a consistent and well-argued message to ministers and parliamentarians.

A lot of hard work went into this, led by Cornwall Council, with good lobbying and publicity material and an exhibition in London of the sleeper mock-up and other proposed improvements, attended by the Secretary of State for Transport and Baroness Kramer as well FRIST's members Dick Cliffe and Marian Bennett.

The Isles of Scilly could do the same, if all parties built on the statements in the IOS Council press release after their meeting with Baroness Kramer on 26 June proactively together.

Fixed assets and moving parts

FRIST commends all those involved in and responsible for the imminent completion of improvements to the fixed infrastructure of airports at Scilly and Land's End and harbours at St Mary's and Penzance. These are necessary improvements to be appreciated by passengers, and it is hoped that improvements to the passenger experience at Penzance Quay will follow although they are not part of the present plans. A dry, pleasant waiting place on the quay, better luggage handling and vehicle safety are all long overdue. However, although these will improve conditions for travellers, FRIST has always contended that the priority should be 'the moving parts'. An affordable, reliable all year transport service continues to be FRIST's objective, and it continues to be our belief that to achieve this, a revenue subsidy is necessary. The government recognises the need for investing in capital transport projects to support jobs and growth.

Our airport and harbour will benefit from this policy but as the Local Government Association's publication FIRST quoted in April its opinion column, *'The challenge now is to ensure that local transport outside London gets its fair share of the overall transport pot, and that a solution is found to the increasingly unsustainable mismatch between government enthusiasm for transport capital spend and local transport revenue destitution.'*

LGA news item here: <http://tinyurl.com/q3yfdvh>

Some, including IOS Council, view the injection of capital grants into fixed assets as subsidy, in that resultant fares and charges may not have to be as high as they would otherwise be had the transport operator had to pay for these improvements without outside funding. It is FRIST's belief that only through an operational deficit subsidy that any reduction in fares will be possible. This is the formula by which the operator could offer affordable fares increase the number of passengers and provide a suitable replacement new vessel while being publicly accountable for a service specification to some degree. FRIST is hoping to invite Bill Davidson, formerly of David McBrayne, to Scilly to explain how this model works.

THE 'S' Word

In his evidence to the Transport Committee, Isles of Scilly Chief Executive Theo Leijser said that the islanders were proud of delivering their own solutions, that the 'current operator is commercially viable' and that the problem was with resilience.

What seems to have been missed is that there is a direct connection with falling visitor numbers (17% in 2 years), rising fares (18% average in 2 years), more visitors saying they will not come back because of high fares (IOS Council commissioned Travel Preference Survey) and a lack of resilience in the services, mostly because there is no fall-back service in the winter when air services are frequently disrupted.

We understand that Cornwall Council is seeking a Public Service Obligation (PSO) to retain the Newquay Gatwick flights, and that Augusta Westland is exploring support for a

PSO to operate a new helicopter service, so why not a PSO for a ferry or air service, or both? There are of course

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Feedback from, and dialogue with, supporters is always welcome (E mail frist.hub@gmail.com). You can keep in touch with important developments by signing up for e mail alerts at the website www.frist.org.uk - you will then automatically be notified of new posts on the website.

precedents for PSO support to some Scottish Islands for both ferry and air services, as well as for ferry alongside commercial air services.

It is a pity that, in the eyes of IOS Council, the idea of subsidy seems to have a stigma attached. Villages with populations this size on the mainland frequently have a subsidized bus service, and access to subsidized rail services. Scilly has received significant amounts of capital grant for infrastructure (harbours, airports, etc) which are welcomed and which may help the transport links – the authorities can be grateful that this village doesn't need a B road to its closest town which would require a spend of approximately £250 million! Per capita, the capital grants received in Scilly are substantial, but revenue support may be necessary to sustain an affordable, reliable and all year transport service and thereby the economy and welfare of Scilly.

For FRIST, representing 45% of the adult island population, the issues are clear: we need 'an affordable all year round reliable service.' The Council's policy hitherto appears to concentrate on infrastructure – airport runways and port improvements – which, although welcome, will not bring in more visitors or improve the lot of islanders unless there is reliability and lower fares.

However, with a new ship needed very soon, and very unreliable services in winter, the inference that 'we don't want subsidy' may sound brave, but for those struggling to afford visits to or from the mainland, for those with empty beds because visitors can't afford to come, it is an interesting but risky message!

Next steps

The message to the minister for transport needs to include issues of affordability and reliability of all year round services, including:

- lower fares for all to sustain the island economy by encouraging visitor numbers, and particularly in the winter months for residents when they have time to go to the mainland, to access services not available locally, to visit families and friends and to take holidays.
- increased reliability by always having two modes of travel (air and sea, all year round) and by reducing bad weather cancellation rates by continued investment in infrastructure (including better air navigation aids an upgraded ferry and harbour specification).

We believe these measures will only be achieved by the reintroduction of an all year passenger sea service and significantly lower fares. If the transport operator cannot undertake to achieve this, then the IOS Council should seek an operating deficit subsidy on condition that the cost does not fall on the local rate payer.

Time is running out! We first met Baroness Kramer six months ago and there is a general election in May 2015; many of the present ministers have shown positive support for Cornwall and Scilly, but they are unlikely to be all there after the election. Let's get on with it now!