

## FRIENDS OF ISLES OF SCILLY TRANSPORT

### FRIST Newsletter Spring 2021

#### Happy Springtime to all our readers!

Much has happened to Scilly travel since our Spring 2020 Newsletter. After three months plus of lockdown in the early summer, business more or less resumed from July onwards. The Scillonian III, Skybus, Penzance Helicopters and other services all operated but sadly the loss of bookings for the autumn half term caused services to be curtailed early.

In December, Scilly was pleased that it became the only Tier 1 area of the UK but any expectation of a visitor invasion for the Christmas and New Year break was dashed when police at the airport turned back potential visitors from London which was in Tier 4 by then.

We have been locked down ever since until the gradual reopening, which is planned to happen imminently, and we look forward to welcoming our visitors again.

#### Transport to and around Scilly – an urgent and new opportunity to modernise!

In the last budget, the Chancellor announced a Levelling Up Fund to help the more remote communities improve their infrastructure.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/966138/Levelling\\_Up\\_prospectus.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966138/Levelling_Up_prospectus.pdf)

Scilly is in Tier 1, the tier with greatest need, and the funding can include links to the mainland and shore facilities there, as well as within the Islands themselves.

Capital grants of up to £50m are possible, and the funding would go to the relevant local authority, in this case the Council of the Isles of Scilly (COIS). We understand that Derek Thomas MP has indicated his support hope that the Council will do so as well. Closing date for the first round of applications is mid-June 2021 and, as with many similar applications, a lot of information is required.

In a helpful letter to Tony Berkeley, Shipping Minister Robert Courts MP, wrote *'I would strongly urge all interested parties to take advantage of the opportunity created by the Levelling Up Fund and develop a high-quality bid to ensure the maximum opportunity for success.'* This is as near as one can get to an invitation to sort out the IOS transport issues once and for all!

You will recall that discussions about new ship(s) and facilities have been ongoing for some years. At a conference organised by FRIST in 2016, Bill Davidson<sup>1</sup> gave us an eye-opening presentation about the benefits of RoRo (roll on roll off) achieved in Scotland. His paper on how it could be applied to Isles of Scilly shipping services is attached.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Davidson, CEO NorthLink Ferries 2002 – 2012, Director David MacBrayne Group – CalMac Ferries,

Management Consultant – 13 years with E&Y, PwC and KPMG, Corporate Finance Project Finance

The Scillonian III and the freight ship the Gry Maritha are getting to the end of their lives, so the Council and others are now scrambling to submit a bid in the first round. It can include onshore works at Penzance and St Mary's, new passenger and freight ships for Penzance-St Mary's and an inter-island freight boat.

There are at least two options:

**Option 1: LoLo:** Proposed by the Steamship Group, a replacement for the Scillonian III and the freight ship using the same quays, steps as at present, but with a more modern ship. Freight to continue to be lifted on and off by ships' cranes (LoLo).



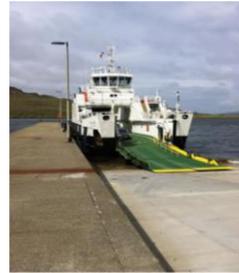
**Option 2: RoRo:** A combined passenger and freight RoRo ship as proposed by many people including FRIST, advised by Bill Davidson. For passengers at Penzance, a terminal building with luggage drop-off and waiting room, covered walkway to the ship. At St Mary's similar arrangements to the present, but step-free access to the off-island boats. Two round trips a day in summer and at least three a week in the winter.

We find it hard to understand why the Steamship Group wants to continue to use a LoLo system, when most other ferry services, large or smaller, have long ago adopted RoRo as being safer, cheaper to operate and more flexible. LoLo is out-dated now and it seems perverse to want to retain such a system for perhaps a 20- to 30-year life of this vessel.

One modern RoRo ship can do two round trips a day in the summer also carrying freight, so there would be no need for a separate freight ship.



### *RoRo in Scotland*



We have established that RoRo can be accommodated at Penzance with a concrete ramp, and at St Mary's with either a pontoon and link span opposite the Harbourmaster's office or concrete ramp, although more detailed work needs to be done. Restrictions on private vehicles would of course be essential.

One of the problems raised by people is that, if a new RoRo ship were delivered without the necessary shore works being completed, then how would freight be handled? The answer is that the ship would have a crane on it, so that it could continue to operate as LoLo until the RoRo facilities were in place. The operation would take longer, however, so it might be that the freight ship would have to continue to operate as well in this interim period.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that a modern system of transport is essential to the ongoing economic well-being of the Islands. People expect all year reliable passenger and freight services, step free access and safe working of all the various services that they may come across. Only RoRo can provide this; it is also a more resilient system in the event that something goes wrong. This should be part of the **high-quality bid** to provide **'maximum opportunity for success'** that the Shipping Minister is encouraging the Council to provide.

This current debate is purely about the types of vessel - which might have to last a long time. RoRo with a crane or LoLo. It has nothing to do with who operates it; that is for the Council to arrange with government and whichever entity owns the vessel(s) and ensures that they are operated on behalf of the community in return for receipt of tax-payers money.

Between everyone, there is an essential need to agree and come up with one solution to input to the bid. If readers have a preference for either of these options, it would be useful if they could send comments to the COIS ([paul.masters@scilly.gov.uk](mailto:paul.masters@scilly.gov.uk)) and Derek Thomas MP ([derek.thomas@parliament.uk](mailto:derek.thomas@parliament.uk)) as soon as possible.

### **Government supported some transport services.**

We reported in our Summer 2020 Newsletter worries about the future of services of the Scillonian and Gry Maritha freight ship, the inter-island freight ship, and the inter-island passenger boats, along with Skybus. Following strong lobbying by Derek Thomas MP and many others, Government finally offered some welcome financial support to keep services operating in April, May and June of 2020. Penzance Helicopters did not receive any support as officials decided that the service was too new to qualify.

During the second half of the summer, the operators were able to keep going without government support because they had more passengers and freight. Unfortunately, they have been exposed in the winter months to keeping skeleton services going – in a normal year, the profit from the summer months supports losses in the winter. But in 2020 there was not enough profit from operating for only half the summer, so the operators have sought further government support to keep them alive during the winter. We have heard warm words from ministers, but so far, no cash. Derek Thomas MP has again been fighting hard on this issue, and we hope that something will materialise sooner rather than later.

At present, operators are taking bookings for a normal summer season in 2021.

### **Isles of Scilly Transport Board**

The IOS Transport Board (TB) has been in existence for over two years, having been set up at the encouragement of the then Shipping Minister, Nus Ghani MP, to provide a single voice to ministers from the islands and mainland communities on matters relating to transport. Membership includes the two councils (Council of the Isles of Scilly, Cornwall Council), the Duchy of Cornwall, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP, the Islands Partnership (island businesses), transport operators together with Bryher resident Lord Berkeley and Derek Thomas MP, who chairs the Transport Board.

The TB has been debating how best to improve transport links to, from and within the Isles of Scilly, and a year ago submitted an Outline Strategic Business Plan to the Department for Transport seeking support for new craft and facilities, including a replacement for the 43-year-old Scillonian. The start of the Corona Virus pandemic made the TB turn its attention to more pressing issues such as the survival of the services at a time when there were very few passengers. The TB has set up a stakeholder group to advise on the needs and wants of the customer community, be they passengers or freight customers, islanders or visitors. Meetings have not been easy with the lockdown, but the first remote one happened a few weeks ago to discuss the future transport needs of the community and possible responses to the Levelling Up project. Marian Berkeley, FRIST Co-ordinator, is a member of the Stakeholder Group.

### **Isles of Scilly Steamship Group**

The IOSSG operates the two ships servicing the islands from Penzance, the Scillonian III and the freight ship, the Gry Maritha, as well as the inter-island freight service and Skybus air services from St Mary's Airport, and

Newquay and Exeter in the summer.

At its AGM on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the company reported a profit of £1m for the year ending April 2020, compared to a loss of over £4m the previous year. Many believe that this successful turnaround was related to the arrival of the new Chairman, Ian Howard, and some new Board members.

<https://www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk/agm-presentations/>

The above presentations include some initial ideas for vessel replacement which has been submitted to the IOS Transport Board for consideration.

Skybus services now use only the Twin Otters, with one Islander remaining for the postal service contract.

Skybus and Scillonian fares have been increased by a little above the inflation rate, but of concern to families are the changes to age limits for children. Going to Scilly, you are only an infant up to your 2nd birthday,

whereas on Red Funnel, Calmac and the national railway you are an infant until your 5<sup>th</sup> birthday and travel free. Similarly, going to Scilly, you are a child until your 12<sup>th</sup> birthday whereas on Red Funnel, Calmac and the national railway you are a child until your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. So for some families with children, this could put over £150 extra on their return fares.

### **Penzance Helicopters**

The new helicopter services from Penzance heliport to St Mary's and Tresco has been welcomed by many residents and visitors. It restarted in July and had a successful few months before the autumn lockdown caused the service to be suspended again until passenger demand returned. It is planned to restart services on 12 April 2021.

### **The railways beyond Penzance**

Despite carrying very few passengers, Great Western has kept up a near normal service during the pandemic and restarted the sleeper service in August and again in this Spring.

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*If you would like to receive this FRIST newsletter regularly, please go to [www.frist.org.uk](http://www.frist.org.uk) or contact Marian Berkeley.*

## **Friends of the Isles of Scilly Transport**

*Members of the FRIST Advisory Group are Tim Guthrie, Richard Larn, Nick Jenkins, Mike Peaker, Dick Cliffe, Tony Berkeley and Marian Berkeley (Co-ordinator).*

*Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport (FRIST) is a campaign group, set up in 2011, to press for improvements to the Islands' transport links to the mainland.*

*Advisory Group members meet their own expenses. However, contributions towards the cost of newsletter production will be gratefully received.*