



Island Link Forum, Wednesday 20 September 2023

Fishbourne

Attendees from Wightlink

Phil Delaney – Commercial Director

Sara Howden – Head of Customer Experience

David Williams – Head of Marketing

Dan Haynes – Head of Retails

Kirstie Higgins-Day – Head of Commercial Sales

Chairperson – Tom Stroud

Agenda

5pm – 6pm Drop-in session, opportunity to talk 1-2-1 with the Wightlink.

6pm – 7.30pm Forum session consisting of short presentations and Q&A sessions.

1. Opening address by Tom Stroud

Island Resident and BBC journalist Tom Stroud chaired the session. Tom introduced the team from Wightlink and talked through the format of the session with attendees.

2. Update on previous actions from the last forum – Phil Delaney

Action 1: Attendees requested that consideration be given to the cost of travel for friends & family visiting them at busy times, specifically those loyal customers purchasing Multilink Passes.

Since the last forum in April, Wightlink has run two, month long promotions during which any new Multilink passes purchased or existing passes are topped up, the pass holder received 2 x 1/3 off discount codes to share with friends and family. Wightlink are currently reviewing the take up of the promotion and usage of the discount codes to help inform future promotions of this nature.

Action 2: A request was made to confirm later night Fast-Cats for 2024?

The Fast Cat evening service has now been confirmed that it will run throughout 2024.

Action 3: Parking on the Ryde Pier and traffic calming hump was raised?

Wightlink raised the matter with Island Roads (who ultimately are responsible for the traffic calming hump). Island Roads assured us that the hump is of the correct size and dimensions.

Action 4: Can train departure information be provided on the screens at Yarmouth?

Yarmouth waiting area and office will be undergoing a refurbishment in November and a screen showing train departure information will be installed as part of the refurbishment.

Action 5: Future Island Link Forums to be advertised online.

A dedicated page for the Island Link Forums has now been added to the website, detailing the dates and locations for forums through to the end of 2024. Customers will also be able to register for future forums at this web page.

The registration form will also be updated giving customers the opportunity to say what topics they are interested in hearing about at the forum.

Additional Note: We ask customers to register so we have an idea of the number of people that are likely to attend. This helps to ensure we have the right sized venue and can provide sufficient refreshments. We chose the larger venue of the Royal Yacht Club in Fishbourne as we had 109 customers registered to attend. We ask attendees to confirm they can come along about 1 week prior to the forum, we received fifty-four confirmations.

<https://www.wightlink.co.uk/community/island-link-forum>

Action 6: Customers were invited to submit topics for discussion at future Forum meetings.

The registration form will also be updated giving customers the opportunity to say what topics they are interested in hearing about at the forum.

3. Projects update - Sara Howden

Ryde Pier Head

- Ryde Pier Walkway opened 14 June.
- Shelters installed 10, 11 & 12 July.
- Improving the appearance of the customer areas continues

Yarmouth

- Port improvements for 2023
- Accessible height CSP
- Flooring replaced.
- Customer Information Screen moved to customer area.
- Mainland train departure information to be included.

Fishbourne Fenders

- Last phase of works 26-30 September.

Several questions were asked about the railings on the new walkway at Ryde Pier, with concerns raised that the gap in the railing could lead to potential accident. Sara explained that the design was agreed by Historic England, accepted by the Health and Safety Executive, not just by Wightlink's Health and Safety team. The Broxap Weaver railings are designed for use in waterside locations. Broxap are ISO9001 (Quality), ISO14001 (Environmental) and OHSAS18007 (Health and Safety) certified through BSI. Recommended signage is in place at the dry and wet end of the pier and throughout the walkway itself.

All the appropriate planning processes had been undertaken with the works being signed off by the Health and Safety Executive. It was further commented that the new walkway was a significant improvement on the previous part of the Pier where pedestrians had to walk alongside vehicles.

4. . 2024 Timetables – Phil Delaney

Fishbourne - Portsmouth

- The Portsmouth to Fishbourne car ferry schedule for 2024 is as per 2023.

Ryde - Portsmouth

- The Portsmouth to Ryde 2024 catamaran includes late night fast-cats throughout the year.

Yarmouth - Lymington

- The Yarmouth to Lymington route includes later night sailings by adding a 21:05 from Lymington returning from Yarmouth at 21:50.

Questions were asked about arrangements with Hovertravel, where the Hovercraft had been unable to operate due to high winds, Wightlink commuters were not given priority over Hovertravel customers when boarding, leading to concerns that there may not be sufficient space on-board for our regular travellers. Conversely on the rarer occasions the FastCat customers need to use the Hovercraft, Hovertravel staff prioritised boarding their own customers first.

Wightlink stated that FastCat customers should get priority to board the FastCat first and we would raise this with staff at both Ryde and Portsmouth Harbour to ensure this happens.

5. Punctuality and Reliability – Phil Delaney.

Wightlink presented the full Punctuality and Reliability stats for the period January – August 2023, broken down by each route. Punctuality stats are measured on ferries departing within 5 minutes of the departure time, unlike airlines which measure 15 minutes from departure.

Wightlink's also commissions an external company (Menzies) to audit our Punctuality and Reliability stats to ensure the public have trust in the information that we publish.

Sveral questions were asked about train connections and whether these could be further improved. Phil responded that Portsmouth Harbour is a busy train station with frequent departures to several destinations, whilst we endeavour to run the best possible timetable, it will never be possible to fully align with the rail network.

One Forum member requested the later FastCats delayed their departures from Harbour if trains were delays but others at the meeting said that would be unfair to customers who had arrived in time and may have connections on the Island.

6. Health Travel – Sara Howden

Current NHS Provision

- Book through Contact Centre through public number 0333 999 7333,
- Complete Accessible Travel and Customer Assistance if required.
- 50% off booking (since 2010). Produce appointment card/letter/SMS at check in

Feedback Received

- NHS Focus Groups – July and August: private citizens, charities, and organisations with vested interests
- Direct customer feedback – Email feedback/monthly post travel surveys, phone/live chat reports
- NHS service users - Direct feedback survey planned.

Planned Improvements

- Improve visibility on the website.
- Prioritised phone number
- Dedicated, experienced, trained operators.
- More information to claim travel cost refunds via IOW Council and NHS

- Greater information on SIV requests
- Liaise with charities & organisations for training & improvements.

Fares for Islanders travelling for mainland NHS appointments.

Forum members asked if Wightlink was considering changing its fare structure for people with health issues as more residents are crossing the Solent for mainland appointments. Wightlink gives patients 50% discount off foot passenger and vehicle travel and is considering fixed fare and price cap options. A decision would be announced shortly.

There were also requests for clearer information about accessible travel on the website and a dedicated phone number for NHS patients.

Update:

Wightlink have introduced a new fare's structure for NHS appointments, whereby a customer travelling with a vehicle at any time of year/time of day will pay no more than £35 per single leg for their crossing. Should the 50% discount lower the fare below the £35 single leg ceiling prices, then the customer would pay the lower fare. This new policy is effective from 28th September 2023.

7. Wightlink's winter refit programme

Wightlink outlined its £7million programme to keep its fleet in good condition. Each ship and FastCat is withdrawn from service in turn for refitting and dry docking.

Questions were asked around an number of topics including:

What would happen if a FastCat develops a fault when the other vessel is in refit. Wightlink responded that reciprocal arrangements to travel with Hover would be put in place. If Hover was non-operational then foot passengers had the option to travel on Fishbourne-Portsmouth route. Depending on the nature of a fault, a charter vessel could potentially be utilised.

Wightlink's ESG framework would be published by the end of this year.

New ships, no confirmed date for a new vessel, although much work had been done already to spec out a replacement vessel for St Faith.

8. Additional questions

Multilink bookings – the son of an attendee turned up 3-hours ahead of his booked Multilink sailing and was advised he would need to pay an additional £200 to travel on an earlier sailing. Sara Howden from Wightlink stressed that this should not have happened, and our Port staff are advised to show some flexibility towards Multilink customers.

Ownership structure – a question was asked about the ownership structure of Wightlink that meant the company was driven purely by profit. Phil Delaney responded that there were three companies serving the Isle of Wight and customers had choice of which operator they chose to use. Wightlink also offer a range of fares, such as Multilinks, Afternoon Flyers and would soon be sending discount booklets (Island Link) to every residential address on the Island.

Motorbikes – one customer queried why motorbikes were always loaded behind lorries? Whilst waiting to disembark, lorry drivers would typically turn on their engines, which Motorbike riders

would then be exposed to the fumes. Wightlink will investigate raise this concern with their Operations team.