



Island Link Forum

Wednesday, 24 April 2024

In total forty-seven customers attended the forum, including a sizeable percentage of travellers on the Yarmouth to Lymington routes. Representatives from Wightlink included Island Operations Manager, Martin Gulliver, Head of Customer Experience, Sara Howden, Head of Fleet Operations, Captain Sam Mitchell and Commercial Director, Phil Delaney.

BBC journalist, Tom Stroud, functioned as the Independent Chairperson for the evening.

The Wightlink team presented upon action points from the previous forum in Fishbourne on 7 December, including the introduction of additional member of the same household onto Multilink Vehicle and Foot passes.

Marin Gulliver provided an update on Service Performance for the prior 12 months, broken down by reliability and punctuality by each route. Specific details were also provided in March 2024, which saw nine cancellations on the Fishbourne-Portsmouth route, six on Yarmouth-Lymington and 42 between Ryde – Portsmouth.

Adverse weather was the cause of twenty-six of these cancellations, while the remaining thirty-one were there result of mechanical issues. Overall reliability for March 2024 was 98.4% and Punctuality 92.6%.

Phil Delaney went on to present upon the utilisation of the new winter timetable introduced on 2 January 2024. The additional later crossings between Yarmouth and Lymington had low uptake during the period January-March 2024, however some increased demand was seen post-Easter.

Captain Mitchell gave an overview of the recently completed refit schedule. The refit investment for this year was £8 million across the fleet, covering refurbishment and replacements of various components, including vital maintenance tasks to ensure Wightlink operates in full compliance with MCA regulations.

A number of projects have been undertaken to further enhance port facilities, with Sara Howden providing an update on the refurbishment of Lymington and Yarmouth customer buildings which includes new flooring, accessible-height Customer Service points and refurbished toilets.

New automated check-in gates are being introduced at Ryde and Portsmouth Harbour to make check-in quicker and easier. Wightlink port teams will still be on hand to assist all customers. New customer seating is being introduced at both Ryde and Portsmouth Harbour.

During the presentations, the Wightlink team took questions and feedback from attendees including comments around connections with the train in Lymington and Portsmouth Harbour, the lack of an

08:00 sailing on the Yarmouth-Lymington routes and the difficulty of booking as a foot passenger on the 11:00 sailing.

Suggestions for improvements to the customer experience included lighting on Ryde Pier, assistance for foot passengers with luggage travelling on the car ferries, allowing more parking space for customers with dogs/pets and the ability to pay a supplement for a bike on a vehicle (rather than having to upgrade to a larger vehicle size).

A further 45 minutes were available for a Q&A session, where a range of topics were discussed, in the main around, pricing, Multilink Passes, discounts for people travelling with Warner Leisure, lobbying the Government to subsidise cross-Solent travel, last minute cancellations and the level of dividends paid to shareholders.