

Introduction

Passenger ferries form vital links in Hampshire's public transport network. Whilst usage varies from route to route, each of them is a strategic link either within the county or across local authority boundaries.

Existing situation

There are four local ferries operating in Hampshire:

- Hayling Island - Portsmouth (Eastney)
- Hythe - Southampton
- Hamble - Warsash
- Gosport - Portsmouth

The above services accounted for 4.17 million passenger journeys in 2004/05, and whilst these journeys are over relatively short distances their significance is that they eliminate the need for much longer road journeys.

Revenue support is provided for the Hayling and Hythe ferries. The Hamble-Warsash and Gosport-Portsmouth ferries operate commercially, although investment in capital infrastructure has been provided when justified.

During the first Local Transport Plan (LTP1) a number of actions have improved Hampshire's local ferry services. Passengers using the Hayling Ferry can now make use of a shared taxi feeder service on Hayling Island and an integrated through ticket for use on the taxi and ferry, and on connecting bus services in Portsmouth. LTP funding has enabled vital repair work to be carried out to Hythe pier in partnership with the ferry operator, ensuring the immediate future of the service. These actions have helped to consistently increase passenger numbers on Hampshire's ferries during LTP1.

Other ferry services provide essential links to and from the Isle of Wight for residents of Hampshire and of the island itself, and for visitors from further afield. This includes the ferry service between Lymington and Yarmouth, as well as routes from Portsmouth to Ryde and Fishbourne; Southsea to Ryde and Southampton to Cowes. These are provided on a fully commercial basis.

Meeting the second Local Transport Plan's objectives

The severance of communities caused by Hampshire's coastal waters can lead to accessibility problems, economic disadvantages and traffic congestion on the nearest alternative road crossings.

The measures outlined will contribute in several ways to achieving the second Local Transport Plan's (LTP2) objectives, by helping to reduce the impact and effect of congestion on the road network, improve accessibility to services and widen travel choice.

All three aspects of the overall LTP strategy – to **reduce** the need to travel (by shortening the length of journeys), **manage** existing resources (by improving the attractiveness of current services and increasing awareness of them) and **invest** (in interchange facilities, new vessels and services) where appropriate - are addressed.

Southern Hampshire features in the South East Plan as an area designated for additional housing and economic growth. The case for investment in, and expansion of, the current range of ferry services is strengthened by the need to encourage commuters to consider shorter, more direct routes for their journeys, in preference to circuitous journeys between the same points by road (such as via the A326 between Hythe and Southampton). There is a need to evaluate the potential of “river bus” type services which are able to serve intermediate points along a coastal or estuary corridor, although these will need substantial investment in new berthing facilities if they are to be feasible.

Vision

The County Council’s vision is of a ferry network that increasingly becomes the mode of choice for many journeys by local residents and visitors. Ferry services will be fully integrated into the local transport network, offering reduced journey times and a reliable and realistic alternative to a longer road journey.

To achieve this the County Council and its Solent Transport partners will seek to work closely with the harbour authorities and ferry operators.

Objectives and targets

Much of the county’s ferry network is provided on a commercial basis, so the role of the County Council and its Solent Transport partners will focus particularly on providing better access to ferry services and improving facilities at the interchange locations. Recent experience has shown that ferry usage is susceptible to economic fluctuation and therefore specific targets for passenger growth would be inappropriate.

A study under the title “Access to Waterside” has been commissioned by the County Council to look in more detail at issues affecting the area to the west of Southampton Water, and this will include the options for future development of the Hythe ferry service. Other actions that can be highlighted as early priorities are identified in the following list of objectives.

By March 2007

- Extend the validity of Solent Travelcard to provide discounted fares on local ferry services.
- Develop long-term funding strategies for services on the current Hayling -Eastney and Hythe - Southampton ferry routes, and secure future investment in new vessels.

- Develop and implement local signage strategies to increase awareness of all local ferries.

By March 2008

- Investigate feasibility of new ferry links in South Hampshire, including potential new routes to and from Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton.

Other objectives for the duration of LTP2:

- Ensure existing ferry links are maintained and, if appropriate, enhanced.
- Provide improved interchange facilities for all local ferries, and improve the passenger environment throughout the journey. This includes pedestrian and cycle routes, and short-term “kiss & ride” car parking.
- Provide improved access to ferry services for cyclists and wheelchair users.
- Include ferry information in town centre/major employer electronic departure boards (see Passenger Transport Information Strategy) and real-time information systems where appropriate.
- Develop an effective ferry marketing strategy with ferry operators.
- Identify opportunities to promote river ferries (linked to tourism opportunities where applicable).
- Improve access to international ferry services where possible.