

National Trust Response to the Counter Proposal to the Ferry Company's Toll Increase Application

The National Trust notes that the rationale behind this alternative proposal was to attempt to align the toll increases with the Consortiums goals for sustainability in terms of transport, highways use and infrastructure. The National Trust as a conservation charity, recognises this and shares these aspirations. We very much look forward to engaging with Local Government to improve these aspects of Purbeck for the benefit of locals, visitors and the environment.

We also note that one of the key objectives of the Consortium's proposal was to demonstrate that there was an alternative way for the Ferry Company to achieve its' financial targets (Whether the need is disputed or not). The National Trust agrees with this exploration of options and believes, that wider issues such as sustainability and utility of the ferry, should be considered when understanding the financial goals of the Ferry Company.

Our differences with regards to this proposal and the NT proposal are based more around the impact of the toll rise on local car users, also the wider practicality of their proposals at the current time.

The Consortium quotes a number of key policy statements that they are obliged to implement that effectively inform their suggestion of a maintenance of toll fees for walkers and cyclists but increases to be borne by all vehicles. Whilst the aspiration for sustainable travel is shared by the NT, we feel this approach will not deliver this outcome for the following reasons.

The Ferry was created to be of local and public advantage and the co-operation of the Bankes Estate in granting interests in its land, at no direct cost to the company, reflected its support of these original purposes and the rights it did grant reflected its concerns of the risk that later incarnation of the ferry operations would begin to diminish these. The rights conferred on the Ferry Company to have an easement over the ferry road and the ability to occupy land free of charge for the purposes of the ferry on condition that it returned them to the original owners or their successors should the operation ever cease have already been eroded by actions of the Ferry Company in its various ownerships since the first Act in 1923.

The Studland side of the ferry is located a couple of very exposed miles from the nearest village and facilities. The road is narrow, often significantly congested and with a speed limit of 60 mph. The ferry company have yet to share council and NT aspirations for a cycle lane in place of parking along one side of the road. They are also not wishing to seek a reduction in speed limit to 40 mph along the private road section. It is currently not clear if cycling infrastructure improvements can be achieved without Ferry Company consent, as the legal situation over who has what control is complicated. The original intent was for the road to pass into Public Ownership in 1988. The local authority declined to take on this responsibility at this time, so Ferry Road responsibility and liabilities remains with the Ferry Company. As the road is in a SSSI, a new cycle lane is unlikely to be legally possible without loss of current road width, which could be problematic. The Consortium quote that Active Travel England have power to inspect Highway Authorities. Ferry Road is operated by way of an Easement on privately owned land, so would not come under Active Travel England scope.

The road is fundamentally unsafe to cycle upon and it will take some time to resolve this situation. Beyond the ferry road itself, there is no continuing cycle infrastructure, so the ongoing journey

continues to be less than ideal. Whilst the NT would be very supportive of achieving improvements, the wider challenges to this are recognised.

It is unrealistic to expect many regular users to adopt bike or foot travel as an alternative to the car to reach either Bournemouth, Poole or Swanage. As described the road is exposed, un-lit, hilly, over five miles to population centres either side and dangerous. It is highly unlikely that families with children or those not in great physical health could walk or cycle to reach the ferry, let alone continue with their onward journeys on either side. The time factor for walking is also a deterrent for those needing to use the ferry for general life purposes such as commuting, shopping, healthcare, family visits etc. In terms of equality, the consortium proposal does not seem to be fairly weighted towards those who cannot cycle or walk. Those that can for regular journeys, already do so as it is so much more affordable. The 2011 census data shows that around 85% of people coming to and from Purbeck for work do so using vehicles, this reflects the reality of living and working in rural areas with large distances to reach workplaces. The current hourly public bus service is not regular enough or has any flexibility in route or timings to support the hospitality sector, so is not a realistic option in many cases.

In terms of NT staffing and local community engagement, I do not feel the bike / foot toll reduction will create more regular users or indeed have much of an impact on leisure users, who do not seem to find the current toll unacceptable.

Thus, locals seem to be unfairly bearing the weight of the Consortiums toll proposals.

The price for car travel is already seen as beyond the affordable point by most regular users. This can be evidenced by local feedback, low year-round usage of the ferry, also difficulty in recruiting staff. Using information extrapolated from the Ferry company submission, the ferry is only around 50% full across the year. This figure drops to 22% in the winter months. 2011 Census data indicates that around 7000 cars each day travel for work each way in and out of Purbeck. The ferry runs at least half empty between 7.00 - 9.00am and 4.30 – 6.30pm during the off season. Thus only 576 vehicles on average use the morning or evening commuter slots each day. Whilst it is unlikely that all 7000 commuters are likely to need the ferry, only 576 more of the 7000 would be needed for it to be full. An additional 1152 cars each day avoiding the 44mile detour would have a more significant environmental benefit than reducing bike and foot passenger tolls. It would also contribute to reducing congestion on the alternative route, which during the period of extended ferry shut down in 2019 was considerable at times.

The charges are also out of line with other similar ferry crossings across the country.

Whilst we share with the Consortium the belief that single car users should probably pay the higher fee for ferry use, and regular users benefit from a discount, we differ in how in practice as to what these charges should be.

The current price is £4.50 one off use and £3.40 with maximum discount for a car. The Consortium proposal is for this to rise to £6.50 one off and £4.61 with maximum discount.

| Ferry | One off cost | Regular user cost |
|------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Dartmouth Higher Ferry | £11.50 return | £1.55 single |
| Dartford Crossing | £2.50 single | £20 a year or £10 for 50 crossings, plus 20p for each additional crossing |

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|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Falmouth (Falmussel) | £7 single | £2.30 single |
| Tamar-Torpoint | £2 single | £1 single |
| Cowes Floating Bridge | £2.40 single | £1.80 single |

Although many are in public ownership, the NT are keen to understand why the current and proposed tolls for the Sandbanks Ferry are so high in comparison? Even those in public ownership would not be able to run with significant deficits in their operating costs.

It would seem logical that greater affordability for regular users would create increased ferry usage year-round, which would bring in more income in the non-visitor season. An extension of this logic would be that the current toll proposal may create a net decrease in income for the ferry company. As the price becomes less affordable there may well be less usage by locals.

To conclude,

- The use of land associated with the rights to run the Ferry was given without charge by the Bankes Estate (now NT) to improve local communications. This is a material factor in the setting of any new toll charges. It is not equitable to justify any toll increase on a notional return on asset values when those assets were freely given at the outset.
- We object to the Ferry Company proposal and the alternative proposed by the Consortium on the grounds that neither are in the local interest and now are actively reducing the ability of people living on either side of the harbour to link across, creating greater traffic on the alternative route, more car based pollution, difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and real hardship and reduced opportunities for many as a result.
- With advances in technology a smarter charging approach including the use of number plate recognition to improve efficiency of charging is much more possible.
- Investment in cycling infrastructure should be part of all of our obligations as landowners and business operators in the area.
- Greater environmental improvements could be achieved by moving earlier to a more sustainable propulsion fuel for the ferry.

We admire the aspiration of the Consortium to increase sustainable travel but feel that because of the challenging rural location and no current onward safe biking network, this aspiration cannot be achieved through manipulation of ferry charges to encourage change to cycle use. We do however feel that significant reduction in fees for regular users would contribute to greater overall use of the ferry and a net reduction in car miles travelled and therefore pollution and carbon created. We welcome however the opportunity to work further on sustainable transport, particularly with reference to the design of the new ferry and future onward safe biking routes.

We therefore ask if an off-season trial period could be used to understand if a significant reduction in ferry fees for potential regular ferry users would help the company achieve its' financial goals.