

Launch of Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport (FRIST)

Support a lifeline service for islanders and visitors to the Isles of Scilly by joining FRIST - 'Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport'

FRIST has been established to create a powerful local community and business voice with one single objective: to establish an all year round daily transport link between the Isles of Scilly and the mainland at an affordable cost to users.

The helicopter service is under threat of closure, the Scillonian III ferry only operates in the summer, and the air service is prone to cancellation due to fog or high winds leaving the islands cut off for days on end in the winter.

FRIST believes that the islands have a right to a lifeline service which is affordable and available at least once per day, all year round. Comparisons with what has been achieved for the islands in Scotland demonstrate how successful such a policy has been there, with increasing visitor numbers and a thriving economy.

The UK Government must be persuaded to do the same for the Isles of Scilly. FRIST's objective is to make this happen.

If you are concerned about transport links to the Isles of Scilly you can do something about it by supporting FRIST and signing up for our newsletter at www.iostransport.blogspot.co.uk

There will, from time to time, be opportunities to support our work. We may seek your help writing to MPs, ministers or other influential people. There may be opportunities to speak to the media. FRIST is pursuing Europe-wide regional policies to improve communications for remote communities. Your support can help ensure success.

Join today and be part of the campaign for a better future for the Isles of Scilly!

Background

Transport is the very lifeblood of remote island communities like the Isles of Scilly. The availability and cost of transport governs every aspect of island life. Since the decision by the Department of Transport, at the eleventh hour, not to fund the Route Partnership Project, there has been a vacuum at the heart of IOS transport strategy. This vacuum is undermining confidence in the economic future of the Islands and is a threat to the economy of Penzance and West Cornwall. The stark reality of the situation has been illuminated by the announcement on 1 Aug 2012 of the permanent closure of the BIH helicopter service to the Islands from 1 Nov 2012 following several years of shrinking passenger numbers and financial difficulties.

The aim of FRIST is to promote the case for the Isles of Scilly to have dependable and affordable transport links to the mainland all year around. It is seeking no more and no less than what every other island in the UK already has. The most effective

way to provide this is likely to be re-establishing an all year round daily ferry service to supplement the remaining air link which is susceptible to extended disruption by adverse weather in the winter months.

Following the decision not to fund a vessel to provide an all year around service the DfT has offered limited funding for improvements to St Mary's and Penzance Harbours. The Isles of Scilly Council is also planning some improvements at St. Mary's airport. Whilst we welcome these long overdue and essential improvements, none of the projects addresses the central issue of infrequent, unreliable and expensive transport links with the mainland threatening the Isles of Scilly economy which serves over 100,000 visitors a years and generates a gross value added (GVA) of over £30 million/year.

The Isles of Scilly has a population of approximately 2000 which is insignificant in electoral terms. As a result vital transport needs are easily ignored. The Isles of Scilly needs friends in making its case for comparable treatment with other islands in the UK. We are therefore seeking the support of friends, people who have an empathy for the islanders' dilemma, and people who value what the Isles of Scilly contributes to the rest of the nation.

What will FRIST do?

FRIST's objective is to see established an all year round daily transport link between the IOS and the mainland at an affordable cost to users.

FRIST will:

- Take forward the finding and comparisons in the Scottish Report with meetings with ministers, Council members and officials, as well as UK parliamentarians and interested groups.
- Develop a dialogue with the relevant Directorates of the European Commission and Commissioners, European Parliament and other groups such as the Council of the Regions, to obtain formal support to put pressure on the UK Government to deliver.
- Explore the potential for the route to be designated as a Public Service Obligation
- Support and, if necessary, participate in further studies to provide the necessary justification and funding for such a lifeline service as well as contribute expertise to the choice of options.
- Encourage visits by opinion formers to the IOS to get first hand experience of the current services
- Lobby in support of realistic interim solutions, including the survival of the helicopter service, and works to improve the port structures, dredging, improved passenger and freight facilities to improve the passenger experience as well as an alternative ferry.
- Provide regular reports and suggested actions for supporters.

Issued by the FRIST Advisory Group

The membership of our FRIST advisory group reflects the range of interests affected by the transport issue.

Islanders:

Robert Dorrien-Smith (TRESKO)
James Francis (Star Castle Hotel)
Clifford Freeman (St. Mary's Hall Hotel)
Marian Bennett (Cllr for Bryher)
Chris Savill (Cllr for St. Martin's)
Sam Guy (marine pilot and ship's captain)
John Peacock (St. Agnes boatman)
Alasdair Moore (Tresco Estate)
Richard Larn (Maritime historian and author)

Mainland

Lord Tony Berkeley
Dick Cliffe (Penzance Chamber of Commerce)
Mike Adams (Business campaign group Future Penzance)
Ged Wright. (Marine Project Engineer)
Rex Cowan (Lawyer, shipwreck explorer, author and broadcaster)
Roger Boughton (long term visitor and logistics expert)

For regularly updated information and to sign on as a FRIST supporter, visit:

www.iostransport.blogspot.co.uk

Points of contact:

Isles of Scilly: Marian Bennett 01720 422411 email marian.bennett@btconnect.com

Penzance: Dick Cliffe 01736 331734 email dick.cliffe@gmail.com

Tuesday 16 August 2012

Notes with Press Release

1. Problems with the commercial viability of transport links to the mainland were foreseen by the IOS Council and resulted in the Fisher Report dated 2003. The Report's conclusions formed the basis for the Route Partnership scheme. The current Scillonian III passenger ferry came into service in 1977 and was 60% funded by an interest free Government loan of £1 million (since repaid). The vessel was refurbished and given a life extension in 1999 and a further refurbishment and life extension to 2018 has been proposed by the IOS Steamship Company. In 2018 the vessel will be 41 years old.

3. Following the decision Norman Baker MP, Under Secretary of State for Transport on 31 March 2011 not to fund the Route Partnership Scheme (which included an all year around ferry/freight vessel), the IOS Council commissioned a comparative study comparing IOS transport provision with provision for the Scottish Islands. The Isle of Islay has a similar journey time but passenger pay £12.35 for an open return ticket whereas visitors to the IOS pay £85 on the ferry or £120 on Skybus (there is no

ferry in the winter). The IOS Transport Report can be found here:
<http://tinyurl.com/cs2y5d4>