

**SUBMISSION TO TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY FOR  
PASSENGER TRANSPORT IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES**

**Supplementary evidence from Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport (FRIST) 25<sup>th</sup>  
February 2014**

**SUMMARY**

1. This note updates the submission dated 1 September 2013 made by the Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport to the Transport Select Committee Inquiry into Passenger Transport in Isolated Communities. References to this document are in italics.
2. The fares charged by the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company have risen significantly since 1 January. Land's End Airport has again been closed for long periods due to waterlogging; it has not been open this year. Passengers have been obliged to use Newquay airport where onward transport links are minimal, and particularly difficult for those attending medical appointments on the mainland.
3. Experience over the full 2013 season has shown that visitor numbers are continuing to decline. The results of a Council of the Isles of Scilly travel survey show that visitors are dissuaded primarily by the increased costs of getting to the islands and the decreased convenience and reliability of travel. Comments made to FRIST confirm these findings

**FARES**

4. *Para 11.* See also schedule 'Passengers to and from the Isles of Scilly – 2002 to 2014 – numbers and fares' attached. While the minimum fare from Land's End in 2014 remains at £70 only a minimal number of tickets are available at that price. The maximum charge is £80. The minimum fare from Newquay is now £90 (6% increase). Newquay airport charges Skybus passengers a higher fee per head than those using Flybe, which does not help. The minimum fare from Exeter has risen from £100 to £127.50 in the past two years. The maximum fare, at which the majority of tickets are sold, is £137.50.
5. *Para 12.* Concessionary air fares for members of the IOS Travel Club have risen by up to 12% this year.
6. *Para 14.* Fares on the Scillonian III now range from £42.00 (12% increase) to £49.00, again with few tickets available at the lower price. The Travel Club fare is now £12.50, a 19% increase.
7. *Para 22.* The concessionary fare to Land's End, the cheapest way to the mainland in the winter for island residents, is now £68 (6% increase).
8. Overall, fares have increased over the period 2012 to 2014 by between 17 and 27.5%.
9. FRIST is not suggesting that the IOSSC have been making vast profits or huge dividend payments. There has been essential expenditure by the company to expand capacity to fill the void created by BIH, and to improve facilities at Land's End Airport. This means the fixed costs of the air and sea routes have to be spread over a smaller number of passengers. One consequence is that St

Mary's Airport, owned by the Council of the Isles of Scilly, have had to raise their charges to increase revenue.

10. **The worry is the past two years' alarming record of shrinking visitor numbers coupled with an average fare increase of between 17 and 27.5% over the same period will be replicated in this and future years, becoming a descending spiral. .**

#### **LAND'S END AIRPORT**

11. *Paras 26 and 27.* Bad weather this winter has again caused Land's End Airport to be closed for extended periods. From 1 November up to the third week of February, the airport has been closed or partially closed on 51 of the 95 days; 54% of the possible flying days . During the winter, of course, there is also no ferry service. The hardening of the two runways at Land's End has not yet taken place; construction was planned for the period 10 – 23 March 2014 but there is now doubt as to whether it will go ahead then or even during the summer..

#### **HEALTH AND DISABILITY**

12. *Para 34.* Over Christmas, at least one of the severely disabled people mentioned was enabled to travel (escorted) by air at the normal fare. We are informed that disabled passengers will be assessed for travel on an individual basis.
13. Bio-hazardous products (blood samples) were being permitted to be transported to the mainland only by freight ship, which operated two or three times a week, weather permitting. This situation has resulted in great difficulty for patients in the timing of blood tests (travelling from outer islands to the Health Centre for 8.00 am before the ship sailed), and in the storage of samples. Many representations were made over the past 18 months to enable these products to be transported by air and, within the past two weeks, it has finally been resolved.

#### **ECONOMIC IMPACT**

14. *Paras 36 and 37.* Although precise figures are difficult to obtain (Scillonian III passenger numbers are regarded as commercial in confidence by the IOSSC) it is very clear that overall visitor numbers for the 2013 season continued the downward trend. The transport preference survey by the Isles of Scilly Council found that a principal reason for visitors not visiting is the high cost of fares. Similar concerns are expressed by those paying for travel for business, family, medical or other reasons.
15. *Paras. 39 and 40.* To our knowledge, there has only been one proposed second-hand ship that the operator considered as a replacement passenger vessel. It was, however, quickly and widely recognised as unsuitable for the route and would have offered an inferior service and less capacity than the Scillonian III.
16. FRIST's discussions with Scottish operators and a well-known ship broker led us to understand that there are no suitable second-hand vessels (with a specification of maximum 2.9m draft, capable of taking the bottom, to carry 450 – 600 passengers, and suitable for the Western Approaches sea conditions) on the market. The present vessel is 37 years old, much older than that used on any similar service within the EU. Time is of the essence with replacement due in 2018 and severe doubts that the private sector operator will be able to afford a

new bespoke vessel to sustain a good level of service and thereby the economy of the islands. A formula by which some of the new Scottish ferries has been financed has been made available to the operator, local authorities and the DfT.

17. It is increasingly evident that the economy of Scilly, hugely dependent as it is on tourism, is not sustainable in its present form unless there is a significant reduction in fares and better resilience with more reliable services all year round.
18. **FRIST thinks this can only be achieved with Government revenue support – for which there is a precedent in the Scottish islands, where, for example, the adult single fare to and from a comparable island – Islay – is £6.30 on the ferry all year round. Compared with £47 by Scillonian in the summer or £70 to £80 by air. Scilly urgently needs recognition of the need for lifeline transport services.**

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