

Government safeguards vital ferry services

- the government announces £6.5 million to keep key ferry services running between Isle of Wight and mainland
- the vital transport link helps support jobs, ensures islanders can access key medical services and essential supplies like food and medicine
- £21.2 million has now been provided to keep lifeline ferry services running since the start of the pandemic

This funding will help ensure these communities continue to have access to vital services such as medical care on the mainland. They will also ensure key supplies of food and medicine are delivered, as well as continuing to support jobs on the island.

Ferry services play an important role for the island's 141,000 residents, providing essential supplies and access to critical services in mainland hospitals such as Southampton and Portsmouth, including cancer care, dialysis and Covid-19 emergency care, as well as providing crucial links for essential travel.

This funding builds on the £10.5 million announced in the Spring for these services and those in the Isles of Scilly.

This is in addition to the temporary suspension of competition law to allow ferry operators to work together to continue to run essential services despite reduced usage during the pandemic, maintaining a vital route for those who cannot work from home and those needing medical treatment.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Steve Barclay, said:

These ferry services are essential to everyday life on the Isle of Wight, and this further package of funding will help ensure residents can continue to access healthcare and essential goods and services.

It's vital no community or region is left behind as we fight the Coronavirus pandemic and build back better.

Sarah Williams, Associate Director of Research & Improvement at Solent NHS, said:

The commitment of Hovertravel and other carriers to continue their service across the Solent has been a lifeline to the NHS and other communities through the pandemic – myself and colleagues (including the ambulance service) have been able to support the pandemic

response across Hampshire & The IOW, the resource supply chain has been maintained, and patients have been able to access the critical services that they need.

Without their support and service, there is no doubt that the quality of services both on the Island and the mainland would have been severely compromised, and patients would not have received treatment and care that they needed. Within the NHS and care system, we consider Hovertravel, Wightlink and Red Funnel part of our critical infrastructure and have been struck by the extra efforts they've gone to in supporting us in a COVID safe manner. The adaptability, positivity and cheer that they do this with is something that we won't ever forget and for which we are extremely grateful.

Maritime Minister Robert Courts said:

We took immediate action at the start of the pandemic to protect these vital routes, keeping the services people depend on running between the Isle of Wight and the mainland, and protecting jobs.

This additional funding will continue this essential support for local transport operators, ensuring people can access medical care as well as other crucial services.

So far the government has invested over £12 billion to keep public transport services across England running during the pandemic in order to support the economic recovery and help frontline NHS staff and other key workers get to work. This investment to keep the Isle of Wight's ferry services running to the mainland is the latest in this support to keep the UK connected.

The government continues to work closely with industry leaders and operators across the transport sector to provide them with the support they need.

Further information

The government is providing up to £6.5 million to support lifeline operators servicing the Isle of Wight. The funding will be available to support operators costs on five lifeline routes between November 2020 and March 2021.