

Torpoint Ferry Questions and Responses

Torpoint Town Council meeting 17 September 2026

Tamar Crossings recognises the significant inconvenience caused by the recent reduced service and the continued closure of public toilets. The responses below explain the present position, the operational constraints and the actions being taken. Where no approved date or scheme exists, we have stated that plainly rather than make a commitment that cannot yet be delivered.

1 Public toilet reinstatement

It has been quite some time since the ferry toilets were closed for use. Where are you at regarding the reinstating of public facilities to the ferries and why is it taking so long?

We recognise that the continued closure of the toilets has caused frustration, particularly during periods of disruption and longer queues. The facilities were closed while environmental concerns and the arrangements for managing public access were reviewed. Reopening them is not simply a matter of unlocking the doors. We must be satisfied that the facilities can be operated lawfully and safely, with suitable plumbing, servicing, cleaning, security and management arrangements in place.

Portable toilets remain available on both banks as an interim measure a different company being used from October 1st. We are continuing to consider longer-term shore-based provision, but there is currently no confirmed date for reopening either the permanent facilities or the toilets on board the ferries. We will communicate a clear position once a safe and sustainable arrangement has been approved.

2 Adequacy and location of temporary toilets

Is one portable toilet on each bank adequate at peak times, and can the permanent toilet blocks be reinstated?

One portable toilet on each bank was introduced as an immediate minimum provision. We accept that this arrangement can come under pressure at busy times. Usage will continue to be monitored so that the number, type, servicing frequency and location of the units can be reviewed against actual demand. Due to the monitoring so far; 2 toilets will be on Devonport side from October 1st, where demand will still only need 1 on the Torpoint side.

The permanent facilities cannot be reopened until the environmental, servicing, security and public-access arrangements are resolved. We would rather be open about that than give a reopening date that we may not be able to meet. In the meantime, we will improve the information available to customers and review whether the temporary provision remains sufficient during known peak periods.

3 Three ferries at weekends and two on weekdays

Why have three ferries operated at weekends while only two have operated during the working week?

The number of ferries in service is determined by two separate requirements: a serviceable vessel must be available, and each vessel must have the required number and mix of appropriately qualified staff. Having three vessels physically available does not mean that three can be operated safely on every shift.

On some weekends we were able to secure the competent crew needed for a third ferry due to this being a confirmed schedule during summer peaks, while weekday gaps remained in specialist positions such as Controller, Vessel Master and Mechanical Operator. We deployed the available resources where a complete and competent crew could be formed. We recognise that this appeared inconsistent to customers and should have been explained more clearly at the time.

4 Forward planning and staffing resilience

What proactive measures are in place to prevent a repeat of the recent disruption?

Annual leave is planned, but the recent disruption was caused by a combination of planned leave, sickness, and other elements we will not disclose to the public for privacy and GDPR reasoning.

Measures are being taken including closer review of the forward roster, earlier escalation of uncovered safety-critical shifts, targeted recruitment and temporary operational support, additional training and cross-training, use of overtime where it is safe and sustainable, and clearer day-by-day service planning. We are also strengthening oversight of competence records so that the roster reflects both staff numbers and the exact qualifications needed on each vessel and shift.

These measures reduce the risk, but no responsible operator can guarantee that sickness, a technical defect or another unplanned event will never affect the service. Our commitment is to identify gaps earlier, use all safe options available and give customers timely, accurate information when disruption cannot be avoided.

5 Emergency staffing and an additional ferry

What is the protocol for bringing in emergency staff or a secondary ferry?

When an unexpected gap occurs, the duty team first assesses the service that can be operated safely with the staff and vessels immediately available. Supervisors and management then seek suitably qualified cover through available employees, including themselves, and agreed overtime arrangements. A person cannot be placed into a safety-critical role simply because they are available; they must hold the required current competence and be fit for duty, including compliance with working-time and rest requirements.

Bringing an additional ferry into service also requires the vessel to be technically available, prepared and checked, and supported by a complete competent crew. Depending on the vessel's condition and location, engineering attendance or other preparatory work may be needed. If those conditions cannot be met, the service is reduced and customer information is issued. Safety has to remain the deciding factor, even where that results in longer waiting times.

6 Prominence of portable toilets

Why are the portable toilets not in a more prominent location on both sides of the queuing areas?

The locations were selected to balance safe pedestrian access, servicing access, security, available space and the need to avoid interference with traffic operations. We accept, however, that the facilities are not sufficiently obvious to customers. We will review both the positioning and the signage, including information on our website. Any relocation must first be checked against vehicle and pedestrian safety requirements.

7 Grounds maintenance and the Park Avenue sign

Why is the grounds keeping poor, and can vegetation obscuring the Park Avenue information board be cut back?

Park Avenue in Devonport Plymouth and the information board I believe referred to are not part of the Tamar Crossings remit and are not owned or maintained by Tamar Crossings from my records. We are therefore unable to arrange grounds maintenance or vegetation work at this location.

We respectfully return this question to Torpoint Town Council for further information and for referral to the relevant landowner or highway authority believed to be Plymouth City Council. If further information identifies an issue within the Tamar Crossings estate, we will review it and direct it to the appropriate team.

8 Fares concessions and compensation

Are reductions in concessions or other compensation planned because of the reduced service, delays and additional travel costs?

There is no current proposal to reduce fares or introduce an additional concession as compensation for the recent disruption. Existing concessions remain in place. Ferry fares and concessions are set through the established Tamar Crossings governance and budget process; operational managers cannot vary them in response to individual periods of disruption.

We recognise that delays can result in additional fuel costs, longer journeys and significant inconvenience, but pricing is set by parent authorities and joint committee, if you have further questions please direct them to your local MPs.

9 Evidence of delay and loss of pay

Can Tamar Crossings provide proof of delays for employers or reimburse residents who lose pay because they arrive late?

Tamar Crossings cannot direct how an employer manages attendance, nor can we operate a general scheme to reimburse lost wages. Where possible, our published service updates provide a contemporaneous record of the level of service and reported disruption. A customer who needs evidence may contact us with the date, approximate time, direction of travel and relevant details. We can confirm the information held in our operational or public service records, but we cannot certify an individual's exact arrival time or confirm that a particular journey was delayed by a stated amount unless our records support that conclusion.

We encourage employers to take verified, exceptional transport disruption into account, but any decision about pay, working time or attendance remains a matter between the employee and employer.

10 Three ferries on Bank Holiday Monday

Why were three ferries operated on Bank Holiday Monday when customers had previously been told that three could not be maintained for operational reasons?

Three ferries operated on Bank Holiday Monday because sufficient appropriately qualified cover and serviceable vessels were available for that period. That did not mean the same combination of staff and vessels was available on every preceding or following shift. Operational availability can change from day to day as sickness, competence coverage, vessel maintenance and defects change.

We accept that the phrase 'operational reasons' did not give customers enough information and made the Bank Holiday service appear contradictory. We are glad this time however to over deliver on our expected service.

11 Emergency access during long queues

What contingency plans enable emergency services and nearby residents to gain access when queues extend towards the traffic lights?

Emergency vehicles are prioritised for ferry access when it is safe and operationally possible to do so. Ferry staff use the available traffic lanes and radio communication to make space and coordinate loading. Once an emergency vehicle is accepted for an urgent crossing, the vessel may depart without continuing normal loading so that the emergency response is not delayed.

Where queues extend beyond the normal holding area, staff monitor the approaches and use traffic-management measures within the limits of our site and authority. We also provide live service information so that emergency-service control rooms and other road users can consider the Tamar Bridge or another

route where appropriate. As with all emergency vehicles along any stretch of highway they navigate in safe processes to continue their journeys.

12 Permanent and onboard toilet facilities

Why have closed toilets not been reopened when significant queues are expected, and when will the facilities be updated and made operational on the ferries?

We understand why customers see the closed facilities and ask why they cannot be used during disruption. The reason is that predicted demand does not remove the environmental, safety, servicing and management issues that must be resolved before public access can resume. Opening a facility temporarily without those controls would not be responsible.

There is currently no approved date for reopening the toilets on the ferries. The interim provision remains the portable toilets on both banks while longer-term shore-based arrangements and the future of the onboard facilities are considered. We will publish an update when the review has produced a deliverable option and timetable.

13 Loading decisions and cyclists

Why are staff not more resourceful when loading, including allowing cyclists to board and using apparent spare space in a vehicle lane?

Crews are expected to use the available deck capacity efficiently, but loading decisions must account for more than visible floor space. Staff must consider safe clearances, vehicle size, weight distribution, traffic movement, pedestrian and cyclist segregation, access to safety equipment, the landing and departure sequence, and the time remaining before the vessel must sail. A space that appears usable from the queue may therefore be unsuitable for another vehicle.

The cycle lane provides a controlled route to the vessel; it does not guarantee priority boarding or that a cyclist can be accepted after final loading decisions have been made. In particular, once an emergency vehicle has been loaded for an urgent crossing, normal loading may stop so that the vessel can depart promptly. We will nevertheless confer with loading staff that cyclists should not be left behind where they can be accommodated safely and without delaying an emergency response or the scheduled departure. Specific incidents should be reported with the date and time so that the loading decision can be reviewed against CCTV and operational records.

14 External condition and paintwork

Why is there insufficient maintenance of the ferries' paintwork?

The external appearance of parts of the fleet is below the standard we want customers to see. Chain ferries operate continuously in a harsh saltwater environment, so coatings deteriorate quickly and substantial paintwork often requires the vessel to be removed from service, prepared correctly and worked on under controlled conditions.

Safety-critical engineering and statutory work must take priority when maintenance time and vessel availability are limited, and all maintenance costs money and time out of service to complete safely. Cosmetic and protective coating work is considered within each vessel's maintenance and refit programme. The scope of paintwork completed during those periods will depend on the approved work package, condition findings, time and available funding.

Tamar Crossings will continue to update the Town Council and customers as firm decisions are made on toilet provision, the maintenance programme and service resilience.