

## **Statement to KCC in support of my petition to reinstate the Gravesend-Tilbury Ferry**

The Gravesend-Tilbury ferry service was an accessible and convenient way for people to travel across the Thames locally, and was widely used. KCC's own Consultation Report has stated that ferry user footfall was more than 100,000 passenger journeys per year, that passengers travelled from Kent, Thurrock and further afield and the service was a convenient way to travel to work, school, or to access Gravesend and Tilbury towns and onward destinations.

A high proportion of frequent users indicated that it was used to access support and amenities in the form of doctors, hospital and other healthcare, essential food shopping, social activities or caring responsibilities. Cross-river journeys are now longer and less straightforward, putting additional pressure on the already over-used Dartford Crossing and surrounding roadways.

The ferry cancellation has also had a significant impact on businesses in the Gravesend town centre who are reporting a noticeable downturn in revenue, and in some cases, closures. One local business of a number of years' standing referred to the ferry closure as "...the final nail in the coffin. We just lost so much trade."

I am aware that the service operated with financial subsidies from KCC, however, there are previously unexplored possibilities for improving revenue if it were reinstated. There are many ways in which the existence and convenience of the ferry could be communicated to people locally, including the argument that it would be an appealing and economical alternative to using the Dartford Toll crossing. Connecting the infrastructure across Gravesham/Kent and Tilbury/Essex could make the ferry a central point for public transport north from Kent into Essex and beyond. Further, the opportunity to promote the ferry as a tourist attraction should not be ignored, and could be utilised as a unique selling point as part of Gravesend's maritime history.

It is an important part of our history, as well as a vital service for our community. The 2,400 responses to the petition demonstrate how much people want this service reinstated. Petition responders described the ferry as a "lifeline" and a "much needed service". Many people have spoken to me about their personal history with the ferry – how it has been used by successive generations of people as a convenient and fast way to cross the river while avoiding the frequent congestion at Dartford, or other road crossings. We know that there has been a ferry at that site for hundreds of years, and there is evidence for this going back to Roman times.

The ferry's discontinuation has disrupted so many people's lives and routines, not just people in Gravesend (and Tilbury), but across Kent, too.

This is an excellent opportunity for the new KCC administration to demonstrate a people-focused solution to the ongoing issues with cross-river transport in the local area, while also demonstrating goodwill and the ability to listen and engage with local issues.

I therefore urge the committee to secure the funding to reinstate the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry, and to safeguard a long-term future for this vital local service.

Rebecca Drake Hopkins