

High hopes for delayed Fullers vessels

As two long-awaited new ferries sail into town, questions are still to be asked about how passengers are being treated on Waiheke and in Devonport. Sophie Boladeras reports.

Fullers Group continues to navigate choppy waters with delays in the rollout of two new vessels, which it was hoped would bolster the fleet and mitigate ongoing cancellations.

In June, the company said that it had invested in two four-engine jet propulsion vessels, which “will provide further resilience to the Waiheke and Devonport routes from August 2019”.

Despite this ambition, delays have meant the vessels are not yet operational and, just last week, hundreds of passengers were left queuing at Devonport when the *Kea* experienced a mechanical issue.

“Admittedly, last week was operationally difficult due to a number of vessel issues, weather conditions and other unforeseen circumstances and we share this frustration with our customers,” says Fullers CEO Mike Horne.

“We recently invested \$15 million in two 400-seat, four-engine jet propulsion vessels which will provide further resilience to the scheduling and services across the routes.”

Mr Horne says the vessels are now in the final phase of refurbishment and are scheduled to go into service in September. They will arrive in Auckland from Whangarei and Brisbane, with one currently crossing the Tasman and set to arrive this afternoon (Thursday). Only time will tell if the two new vessels will provide resilience in the event of mechanical or weather-related issues in future.

This Sunday, a petition on Change.org calling for Transport Minister Phil Twy-

ford to bring Fullers ferry services under the Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM), closes. The petition, started by councillor Chris Darby has already garnered more than 5000 signatures demanding fare structure integration and consistent levels of service with Auckland Transport oversight.



“Last week was operationally difficult due to a number of vessel issues, weather conditions and other unforeseen circumstances and we share this frustration with our customers.”
- Fullers CEO Mike Horne

“After closing the petition off this Sunday night, I will collate the information and make contact with Minister Twyford’s office regarding his receipt of the petition,” Mr Darby told *Gulf News*.

“We’ll need to stick together going forward and not be distracted by the carrots Fullers are likely to throw our way. Already the promised new vessels for August operations are no-shows.”
- Councillor Chris Darby



“While the petition has my name as the organiser, it is by no means a one-person show. Richard Hills and board chairs Cath Handley and Pippa Coom have played critical roles, so I’m keen to canvass with them on a joint presentation.”

Mr Darby says the review of the operating model and therefore the exempt status could be a laboured process, due

to the need for robust evidence-based analysis. In the interim Mr Darby, along with Ms Handley and other stakeholders are urging Auckland Transport to do whatever possible to negotiate better levels of service, address fleet resilience and achieve integrated fares with bus and rail.

“To Waiheke ferry users, it’s a big shout-out from me and all the Devonport users for signing up in massive numbers. There’s always been a great synergy between the two communities and this issue has made everyone aware of each community’s reliance upon Fullers,” says Mr Darby.

“The two-pronged community campaign has been powerful. We’ll need to stick together going forward and not be distracted by the carrots Fullers are likely to throw our way. Already the promised new vessels for August operations are no-shows.”

Local board chairperson Cath Handley is currently seeking a meeting on behalf of the board with Transport

Minister Phil Twyford to continue the push for Fullers ferry services to come under the PTOM.

“I have also been having discussions with AT and they are adopting a pro-Waiheke residents and commuters approach,” says Ms Handley.

“They have done a pretty good job at working through a whole raft of options, as there may be a significant delay before the minister can work through issues to change the legislation centrally.

“AT is looking at other measures to see if residents can get support with ticketing pricing before then.” •

Aotearoa Insurance Limited
For protecting life on an island
t 372 6199 3/17 Belgium St Ostend
info@aotearoainsurance.co.nz

Mortgages & Insurances

- 25 years combined industry experience
- ACC levy reduction specialists
- Agencies with major banks/lenders and insurance companies
- The only locally owned & operated risk/mortgage specialist on Waiheke
- Our advice is complimentary and obligation-free

1 trust + 2 e-wills: \$1500 with a \$50 discount. Wills from \$100.