

'Disaster' summer killing businesses

Frustration is at an all-time high among ferry passengers and Waiheke businesses dealing with the fallout of repeat cancellations, delays and lengthy hours-long queues on the island's vital transport route.

Fullers360 CEO Mike Horne has been quick to defend the company, pointing to a critical skills shortage, unprecedented weather and cruise ship disruptions.

Patience has worn thin though and Waiheke shuttle bus operator Rob Griffin says poor service from Fullers is not only "killing business on the island" but now puts living and commuting here in the "too hard basket" for many.

In a direct appeal to Mr Horne, Rob said he had used the ferry service for years and had never seen it so bad.

He also questioned Fullers' recent preference for smaller vessels, when larger ferries like the *Quickcat* provided a more robust and reliable service to the island.

"I commuted for 23 years from 1987, when the *Quickcat* started on the run and during that whole period we probably had about two or three cancellations and maybe six delays in the whole year," said Rob. "Sure numbers were lower but the larger ferries ensured all passengers were able to get on board, very rarely were people left behind.

"Last week the commuters for the 7am ferry were waiting in line only to be told with 15 minutes notice that the 7am ferry was cancelled and the next ferry was 7.30am, well the 7.30am ferry didn't depart until 7.45am leaving 100 commuters at the terminal.

"Then the 8am ferry was also cancelled with no other ferry until 9am, obviously with every cancellation the numbers at the ferry terminal increase."

Rob says ferry delays and cancellations on Fullers Waiheke route have become the "norm" with Fullers messaging about "operational issues" and "vessel breakdown" now meaningless.

"Our business together with so many other Waiheke businesses are hurting big time, our summer trade has been affected by the bad weather and Fullers have simply compounded the problems," he said.

"Getting through next winter is going to be the real test for many local businesses and from what we hear around the island many current commuters are thinking very seriously about the viability of continuing to live and commute from the island. It's simply in the too hard basket."

In a direct appeal to Mr Horne as CEO of



"With every cancellation, the numbers at the ferry terminal increase," says Waiheke shuttle bus operator Rob Griffin.

Fullers, Rob asked for support and assistance on behalf of every Waiheke business, not just transport and hospitality.

"The season just past was a total disaster, what with groups arriving downtown and not being able to get on a ferry due to maximum capacity or a group being split in half for the same reason, transport operators and venues on Waiheke had no idea when or if their groups were arriving," said Rob.

"Any form of timetable was thrown out the window from the first ferry arrival in the morning. Many of these groups after finally getting to Waiheke after a 1.5 hour wait at the downtown terminal have told us they will never return here for these functions.

"Fullers inability to provide a reliable and regular service, according to its published timetables, is killing business on Waiheke."

In response to Rob, Mike Horne said he understood and empathised, but Fullers continues to face a critical skills shortage as demand for ferry services grows. Since July 2022, he said Fullers has transported more than one million people to the island, all while short 60 skilled marine crew.

"These circumstances were not unexpected, and our team has tried in earnest for over two years to mitigate these compounding issues," he said.

"As we continue to seek ways to resolve the issues our business and the Waiheke community is facing, I want to assure you that the steps we're taking to ensure both tourists, commuters and local businesses have a viable transport service is not inconsiderable." These steps include a targeted recruitment campaign both domestically and internationally from other markets including

the Philippines, South Africa and Australia. Ongoing liaison with government ministers and departments to seek acknowledgement and support for Fullers' position, particularly regarding immigration and visa rules for skilled maritime crew. Pay increases have also been made, he says, with active training and over 25 percent of crew promoted in the past year.

"While the solution to this problem is complex, the issue itself is simple: based on the current New Zealand workforce conditions, we cannot get enough skilled crew into the country fast enough to deliver our usual peak summer timetable that was in place before the pandemic began," he said.

Reducing or cancelling services was not a decision Fullers makes lightly, added Mr Horne, and was always a last resort.

"It goes without saying that in recent weeks unexpected events such as the unprecedented weather in Auckland and harbour disruptions with the return of cruise ships in the ferry basin also impacted our services," he said.

"This is compounded with the incomplete infrastructure at Mātīatia and a lack of appropriate space for visitors in the recently completed downtown ferry terminal."

Mr Horne said Fullers had foregone its usual ferry charter business, paused the Coromandel service and drastically reduced its Rangitoto services to ensure all possible crews are available for the Auckland ferry network.

Further, he disagreed with Rob that Fullers was killing local businesses, instead he said he believed that in his past five years as CEO, Fullers had instead been a huge enabler for Waiheke businesses and communities.

Meanwhile, he said Fullers360 had endured \$20 million of financial losses while continuing to provide an essential service to Waiheke, without receiving any Covid-19 related financial support from the government in 2021. No dividends have been paid to shareholders in the past 10 years, he added, with all profits reinvested into Fullers360, a significant portion of which has benefited the Waiheke community.

"Ultimately, a critical step for the maritime ferry industry to help resolve this issue lies offshore in the form of experienced and skilled maritime crew that will help unlock many more ferry services to Waiheke, additional back up vessels and greater support at a time when we all need it most." • *Liza Hamilton*

Letters to the editor

Open letter to Auckland Transport

I went to do your survey and the first question was regarding the mode of travel to get from my home to my destination; that is, from Onetangi on Waiheke to Meadowbank. I travelled on two buses, the ferry and the train, but your useless survey would only allow me to choose one form of travel.

You asked me via email to have my say but the first question did not allow that, so I must assume that the following questions were of a similar nature and would only allow me to choose predetermined answers. Surveys need to be

flexible, not guided.

So I will explain my journey on Friday 27 January.

I left home and caught the 8.55am bus from Seventh Ave on Waiheke. I wanted to be early at Mātiatia just in case there was a queue at the ticket counter. I arrived at Mātiatia around 9.25 am to catch the 10.00am ferry to Auckland via Devonport.

While waiting it was announced that the 10am ferry would be delayed, as it had not left Auckland until 9.30am. At approximately 10.15am we were asked

to start queuing for the ferry. There were three people in front of me in the queue and they decided to go onto the new boarding ramp. I followed - that was a mistake.

I had not travelled off the island since the new ramp had been opened. The shelter provided on that ramp is non-existent to point of being useless for wind and rain. The three people in front of me shared an umbrella, I had my own. The old ramp provided better shelter than its replacement.

When the ferry did dock, finished unloading and we were able to board it, the Fullers employee scanning the tickets was standing in a puddle of water. The design of the whole system is an absolute disgrace and would be more suited to loading sheep.

After the waiting passengers were loaded aboard, the ferry finally departed at 10.40am, the first stop being Devonport, then on to Auckland's downtown, but the ferry could not enter the ferry basin because a cruise ship had a problem with



Those queuing for the Waiheke ferry have very little protection from sun or rain.



EV Gala Day - Sunday 26th February 2023

Calling all EV owners - we need your help

All EV owners are asked to assemble their vehicles at Placemakers/Waiheke Living carpark, Ostend, Waiheke Island from 2.15pm, Sunday 26th February 2023. The aim of the assembly is to attempt to set a record for the most EVs in one place at one time on a residential island and register it with Guinness World Records. The aim cannot be achieved without your attendance. Drone photo at 3pm. Visitors to the Island are welcome to attend with their EVs. Plug in hybrids welcome. Registration on arrival to establish an email database to enable EIW to communicate with EV owners. Registration will enter you into a prize draw of a battery powered garden blower donated

by Stihl Shop, Waiheke. Please support this business in thanks for supporting the EV Gala Day. There is no cost to attend. Register your intention to participate and to order a free drone photo email, john.mead@electricisland.co.nz

All EV, e-bike, e-scooter and e-motor cycle owners are also urged to attend the event with their vehicles. Please invite your family, friends, neighbours and anyone who may be interested.

The 05/02/23 EIW database update lists a total of 661 EVs including 448 Nissan Leafs based on Waiheke. Flyer #4, 10/02/23.



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a mooring line and was using its side thrusters to stay against the wharf. So, along with other ferries we waited and waited to enter the ferry basin. In the end the ferry went back to Devonport because one of the passengers was unwell and needed to get off. (More than half those on board got off at Devonport and then we headed back towards the ferry basin).

We finally got a berth, and I disembarked around 12.30pm. Fortunately, there was minimal rain at that time and I was able to get into the Britomart train station reasonably dry and catch the train to Newmarket. Arriving at Newmarket, I awaited the route 70 bus on Remuera Road to get me to the Meadowbank Shopping Centre. While waiting for the bus, light rain was being blown onto the waiting passengers. The protection from the elements at that stop is minimal... it is very open to the prevailing wind.

Once on board the 70 bus and heading towards Meadowbank, the rain intensified to the degree that I decided not to get off at my usual stop just past the Meadowbank Shopping Centre, but to exit at the previous stop where there is a shelter - great in theory - but it provided no protection whatsoever and I had to make a dash for the block of shops on the corner of Meadowbank and St Johns roads.

There, I decided to text my daughter who was waiting in a car to pick me up from the Meadowbank Shopping Centre.

After a late lunch at the shopping centre, we visited my elderly sister in



Long queues have become commonplace on the Waiheke route.

the Gerard Way Bupa Rest Home, after which I had to make the return journey to Onetangi. Fortunately, my daughter drove me from the rest home to the bus shelter outside the Meadowbank Shopping Centre before making her return trip home to Maramarua.

What did I learn from that day?

1) The new boarding ramp at Waiheke is poorly designed, provides little shelter and the ticket-scanning area pools with water. It is a danger to people because it is only wide enough for loading sheep. If a person is slow or disabled, people are piling up and an accident could occur. The designer should be sacked.

2) The ferry basin should not also

be the berthing place for cruise ships, because when berthing, leaving or have problems, as on 27 January, they create further problems and disrupt the ferries.

3) That there is very poor shelter for waiting passengers at the bus stop at the bottom of Remuera Road outside the railway station.

4) The bus shelter I used just before the corner of Remuera and Meadowbank Roads was as wet inside as it was outside. Most modern bus shelters should be called 'sun shelters' because that is about the only thing they provide shelter from, certainly not wind or rain.

Allen Davies, President Waiheke Grey Power Association.

Gratitude for Stony Batter restoration

In January 1998, my boyfriend and two friends took a picnic to Man o' War Bay. En route, we stopped at the Stony Batter tunnels. They had been abandoned but with the help of torches, we set out to explore them. At one point, the guys piggy-backed us through an area that was ankle deep in

water. After the picnic at Man o' War, we wandered through a derelict cottage at the southern end of the beach. This had been stripped of anything useful, such as taps, and someone had spraypainted the words "Fred Dagg Hotel" beside the front door.

It is heartening that this property has

been privately restored and that dedicated volunteers have been instrumental in the restoration of Stony Batter, which is now a popular attraction for tourists and locals alike. Their hard work deserves our thanks and support.

Jan Scott, Ostend

Thanks for sweet gift

Thank you Waiheke Honey Bee for a lovely surprise! I found a large tub of Mānuka honey on my stall at the market last Saturday. As I don't use a computer and knew nothing about it, I phoned the number

printed on the honey label. Yes it was for me! Thank you again it is lovely honey.

Betty Willis, Surfdale

Correction

In last week's story *From Waiheke Island to Treasure Island* we incorrectly named Micah Marsh as Micah Marshall. We apologise to Micah and his family for any inconvenience caused. •

Letters to the editor should be received no later than midday the Tuesday before publication and be no more than 300 words. A name and address must be supplied. All letters are published at the editor's discretion and may be reduced in length to fit space available. Email to editor@waihekegulfnews.co.nz - Editor