



SEVERN LINK MEDIA PACK QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Under Embargo Until 06.00am, Thursday 29th October 2009

Where did the idea for this come from? When was the Severn Link route first thought of?

Chris Marrow has had a lifelong connection with the Bristol Channel and the Celtic Sea, and as he has started new ferry routes elsewhere in the world he has always viewed the area and thought that someone should start up a ferry. When he returned from Africa where he was running the fleet of ships on Lake Malawi, he decided to rectify the deficiency and set about planning what has now become Severn Link.

What kind of ferries will you be using, and how safe will the service be?

Initially, the Severn Link fleet will comprise of 40 metre 'Flying Cat' passenger ferries, capable of running at up to 34 knots and carrying up to 360 passengers (all seated). These ferries comply with all necessary maritime regulations under High Speed Craft licensing laws and are safe and comfortable to travel in. All passengers can enjoy travel fully seated within a warm and dry environment, with on-board facilities. It is planned to augment the cafeteria window with a trolley service, and various types of on board entertainment are also planned.

How many jobs has this project created?

The Severn Link service will employ around 50 full-time staff when in full operation. In addition, we anticipate that the upturn in tourism which the service will bring in once fully established will create many more jobs in the local communities amongst service industries, ensuring that Severn Link contributes positively to local economies for the long term.

What kind of catchment area do you expect to serve?

We anticipate serving both residents and tourists in the North Devon, West Somerset and North Cornwall regions, residents in the major conurbations of South Wales and tourists holidaying in the Vale of Glamorgan, Swansea, The Gower and West Wales for day trips.

How often will the ferries run?

Severn Link will be much more than a travelling option for tourists in the summer months. The service will run all year round with additional sailings at peak periods and is fully expected quickly to become important to local economies and residents as a key transport link.

Trip numbers will depend on local demand and the building requirements of the service, but we estimate that there will be a minimum of two return trips a day rising to as many as five in peak times.

The service will begin operation around Easter 2010 between Swansea and Ilfracombe, with plans already in place to add extra destinations in North Devon, West Somerset and South Wales. Launch information on these additional services is not yet finalised but will be made available to the public and media as soon as possible.

What kind of research has gone into the project – what makes you think we need a link between the two areas? If there has never been a need for a ferry link previously between these destinations, aren't you wasting your time?

Not at all – it has been proven time and again that travelling around the Bristol Channel on increasingly congested road links is time-heavy and difficult, and our market research backs this up. There have been periodic attempts over the years by local authorities to encourage the creation of a ferry service. According to the best available information, there is no other similar stretch of water which links similarly populated areas which doesn't have a heavily utilised ferry service.

Additionally, increasing consumer and Government focus on carbon emissions means that it is more important than ever to provide a more carbon-friendly way to travel than individually or in small groups by car. The provision of Severn Link entirely satisfies the objectives of the 'Atlantic Arc' programme of the EU, which has the stated aims of:-

- *promotion of alternatives to road transport, particularly maritime transport and short sea shipping services*
- *search for transport solutions that respect the environment*

Market research has been carried out to assess potential takeup in local communities – those who would be likely to use the service on a regular basis – and also for tourism purposes. These figures which have been analysed by the University of Wales show that around 20% of tourists in the area between the Gower, North Devon and West Somerset (total figure estimated at 3 million per year) would use the service.

Additionally, the Severn Link service will open up enhanced opportunities for shopping in Swansea and Cardiff, act as a feeder service for the Irish ferries, provide a link between the Celtic nations of Brittany and Wales create sporting links to major events, create easy access from the South West to Cardiff Airport and facilitate travel between the many thousands of families who have historically been based on either side of the Bristol Channel. Research shows that these are all areas of strong demand and opportunity amongst the thousands of residents local to port areas.

Finally, there is also a high number of students in Welsh and South West Universities and colleges for which the Severn Link service will provide a cost effective and simple way to travel to and from their study locations.

Will there be any benefit for the local communities?

Our extensive research has demonstrated that the Severn Link project has received the strongest possible support from business and residential communities on both sides of the Bristol Channel and is perceived as a key to much needed regeneration. Local authorities have been involved in the project from the early stages and we have also consulted industry experts and local tourism boards to ensure that every angle has been covered.

Severn Link will be marketing the service heavily to national and international markets to raise the profile of the service, the local areas and the attractions and facilities inherent to create heightened awareness of the benefits of visiting the coastal areas on both sides of the Bristol Channel. This in turn is fully expected by all parties to contribute positively to local economies by driving visitor numbers to the region.

Official support to the Severn Link service has already been secured from a wide variety of local authorities, tourist boards and influential local organisations, including (but not restricted to): City & County of Swansea, North Cornwall DC, Devon CC, South West Tourism, SW Wales Tourism, Ilfracombe Town Council and The Eden Project.

What about weather disruption? Is this likely to be a factor and are there contingencies in place for instances when the ferries cannot run?

All ferry operators are used to dealing with adverse weather conditions and the effect they can have on the smooth running of the service, so we have been at pains to ensure that a policy will be in place to minimise any disruption to passengers in the event that weather conditions mean that ferry travel is delayed or cancelled. Where poor weather conditions have been forecast which we believe will have a significant impact upon the service, we will endeavour to provide alternative means of transport to ensure passengers reach their destination. Further details of this policy will be available nearer the time of the service launch.

What about tides in the Bristol Channel? Won't this mean that the service won't be able to run at certain times?

The main time that we will have to avoid is low water spring tide. This always occurs at roughly the same time of day and can thus be avoided in the daily schedule. Given the number of daily crossings planned, we are easily able to avoid low tide issues at each of the harbours Severn Link will dock at and still offer a regular service at convenient times of day.

How will the smaller ports cope with the influx of passengers? And what about the demands on the local infrastructure, such as car hire, hotels, restaurants and so on?

An integral part of the success of Severn Link is dependent upon our seamless integration into local communities and providing benefits to these areas in terms of increased tourism opportunities and easier transport links for residents. As such, we have been working continually with the local councils and business communities, who are highly supportive of the introduction of the service. We are in discussions with local authorities regarding the provision of integrated transport links and park 'n' ride services where not already in place plus harbour improvements where required, to ensure that passengers' journeys are as quick and easy as possible, and that existing infrastructures aren't overloaded by the introduction of the Severn Link service.

What will the environmental impact be?

Travelling by public transport in larger numbers will always be more environmentally friendly than travelling by car alone or in small groups.

On a trip between Ilfracombe and Swansea, the ferry emits around 1715 kilos of CO². A car undertaking the same journey creates around 47 kilos of CO². Therefore, the ferry only has to carry the equivalent of 31 cars' worth of passengers to be contributing positively to the carbon balance of the planet. If we assume that a car will carry an average of 2.5 passengers, that's only around 77 passengers per trip – and as each ferry is capable of carrying up to 360 passengers, there's a very real potential for huge carbon savings.

How much will a journey cost, and is it more cost-effective than driving?

Final journey costs are yet to be determined, but at present we estimate that the average fare will be around £22 per trip.

In comparison, taking an example of a round trip from Ilfracombe to Swansea by road, this would take an estimated average of around six and three quarter hours, travelling over 350 miles, and based on an assumed cost of 12 pence per mile, cost over £42 in fuel alone – not to mention £5.40 bridge toll and the additional cost of vehicle wear and tear, insurance, etc.

The same return journey between Ilfracombe and Swansea by Severn Link would take a total of just **one hour 40 minutes** in actual travel time.

What are your turnover projections for the business?

Our current business projections show a turnover of around £2.8m in the first year of operation, rising to around £8.6m in year five.

Who is behind Severn Link?

The Severn Link project has been masterminded and driven by Chris Marrow, a UK expert in maritime travel with a huge wealth of experience in identifying requirements for ferry travel and establishing routes with proven longevity and positive economic impact – both in the UK and abroad. Chris heads up a team of internationally renowned experts in maritime travel, operations and finance, further details of whom can be found within the directors' profiles contained within the media pack.

Why is Severn Link running passenger only ferries? Wouldn't car ferries be more useful?

Our primary intention at this stage is to provide tourists and local residents with the ability to cross quickly and easily, cutting a significant amount of time off their car, train or bus journeys. The Fast Cat passenger ferries we will be using are much faster than car ferries, travelling at a speed of up to 34 knots.

At present, the routes Severn Link will be running don't have the necessary infrastructure in place to support the demands of car ferries. It is our eventual intention to add a car ferry to the fleet as and when the ability to support this function arises, meaning that passengers who do wish to travel with their cars as well as commercial traffic can be accommodated.

Research has proven that most potential travellers would still use the Severn Link service on a passenger-only basis.

What about the proposed Severn Barrage plans we've heard about? Won't the building of this mean that a ferry service is redundant?

The Severn Barrage, should plans proceed, will take a great number of years to construct. In the interim period, the construction process will greatly increase the movement of traffic between South Wales and the South West, which inevitably will create extra business. By the time the Barrage is completed, we will have had ample opportunity to reconsider the routes and change them should this prove necessary.

The Bristol Channel is increasingly being seen as a future centre for renewable energy, be it tidal or wind power, all of which will increase the demand for the movement of goods and personnel, opening up additional opportunities for a variety of transport solutions, including ferry travel.