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Solent Local Growth Deal Consultation: Floating Bridge 6

Summary of Responses

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Floating Bridge 6 Consultation: Summary of Responses

Background

In October 2014, the Solent LEP signed the Solent Local Growth Deal with central Government. As part of this deal, the Solent LEP secured £124.8m from the Government's Local Growth Fund to invest in projects focused on:

- Enabling flagship sites for housing and employment
- Enhancing transport connectivity across the area
- Growing the skills base and supporting business growth.

A copy of the Solent Local Growth Deal is available at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398873/29_Solent_growth_deal.pdf

The Solent LEP administered a consultation on the first tranche of projects included in the Growth Deal for 10 weeks (extended from 8 weeks to reflect the Christmas and New Year holiday period), from 22 December 2014 until 2 March 2015. This included consultation on the "Cross-Solent Connectivity" project. No responses were received during this consultation period.

Following submission of a new business case for the Solent Gateways project (previously titled "Cross-Solent Connectivity" project) the Solent LEP published the new business case for consultation. This second consultation ran for eight weeks from 15 July 2015 to 9 September 2015. A copy of the published responses to the consultation was made available in November 2015 and can be viewed at the following link:

https://solentlep.org.uk/media/1428/solent_gateway_consultation_summary.pdf

Following the introduction of Floating Bridge 6, it is well documented that the service has experienced a number of operational challenges. Solent LEP therefore requested a review of the business case to provide the nationally agreed mechanism for testing value for money for public investment in projects of this type. A revised Full Business Case was submitted by the Isle of Wight Council to the LEP. Solent LEP has undertaken a third consultation on the updated Full Business Case for this project and this ran for 16 weeks from 5 October 2018 to 25 January 2019. The updated Full Business Case was also assessed by independent expert consultants to consider consistency with national guidance on Full Business Cases and value for money, and provide impartial advice to the Board of the Solent LEP. The Board of the LEP consider this advice as well as responses to the public consultation, as summarised in this report.

Introduction

The Isle of Wight Council are the scheme promoter for the Floating Bridge project and are responsible for the delivery and operation of the service. The Floating Bridge project covers the replacement of the floating bridge vessel (FB 5) running between East Cowes and Cowes, which came to the end of its economic life in 2017. The project included re-modelling of both slipways to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic and an advance payments system to be incorporated for vehicles and pedestrians, prior to embarking on the bridge. The main

objectives of the project and the introduction of the new Floating Bridge (FB 6) as stated by the Isle of Wight Council are to:

- Provide direct pedestrian access between the two town centres of East Cowes and Cowes, to ensure their future vitality and competitiveness in a global tourism market;
- Allow for continued river access upstream for commercial and private vessels;
- Provide continuity of river crossings during the delivery period;
- Improve reliability in operation, which has become more critical since the reserve ferry was decommissioned in 1982;
- Minimise congestion on the local road network, particularly where this negatively impacts the economic potential of town centres;
- Ensure affordable fares for a population that experiences high levels of deprivation;
- Safeguard and enhance the value for money of the substantial delivery of the East Cowes Masterplan and subsequent planning permissions and developments; and
- Enhance environmental sustainability, through reduced vehicle use, operational energy requirements and carbon emissions.

The service has operated on a reduced basis and the project has experienced a number of operational challenges. The Solent LEP Board remain committed to seeing the economic benefits of the investment fully realised over the lifetime of the asset in order to improve connectivity on the Island for the benefit of local businesses, residents and visitors. As a result, and in order to enable an evidence based appraisal of the LEP's investment in line with the requirements of the National Local Growth Assurance Framework, the Solent LEP Board requested an updated Full Business Case for the project to include:

- A status update on the operation of the service in order that a new investment appraisal could be undertaken; and
- information setting out how the operational challenges would be addressed.

The Isle of Wight Council submitted the final version of their updated business case by 21 September 2018 and the Solent LEP ran a consultation for sixteen weeks from Friday 5 October 2018 to Friday 25 January 2019.

Analysis of the consultation

The consultation asked the following three questions:

1. Do the projects respond to the following key priority areas outlined in the Solent Strategic Economic Plan:
 - Enabling flagship sites for housing and employment;
 - Enhancing transport connectivity across the area; and
 - Growing the skills base and supporting business growth.
2. Do you think the projects provide sufficient geographic / sector coverage?
3. Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

A total of 14 responses were received during the consultation period. Respondents are summarised as follows:

- One response from a stakeholder group
- Two responses from public authorities
- 11 responses from individuals

A number of responses were duplicates (i.e. from individuals but have been included in an organisation's response).

13 of the responses raised issues with the project and one response was supportive of the project.

Question 1 Response summary:

Does the project respond to the following key priority areas outlined in the Solent Strategic Economic Plan:

- *Enabling flagship sites for housing and employment;*
- *Enhancing transport connectivity across the area; and*
- *Growing the skills base and supporting business growth.*

10 of the 14 respondents completed this question .They focused on the transport connectivity and for the purpose of this summary they can be categorised as follows:

- Three of the responses highlighted that connectivity has been impacted due to the poor reliability of the service.
- Three of the responses commented that FB 6 was not meeting transport connectivity objectives due to poor reliability.
- Three of the responses stated that it was difficult to determine whether connectivity would be enhanced as they felt the business case structure was difficult to follow.
- One response stated that FB 6 had enhanced connectivity between East Cowes and West Cowes.

The following table provides a summary of the above points raised on the consultation against the respondent groups that these were raised by:

Points raised	Respondent group
Connectivity impacted due to poor reliability	Individual
FB 6 not meeting transport connectivity objectives	Individual
Difficult to determine whether project is enhancing connectivity	Stakeholder group, Individual
FB 6 has enhanced connectivity	Individual

Question 2 Response summary

Do you think the project provides sufficient geographic / sector coverage?

Nine of the 14 respondents completed this question. They focused on the transport connectivity and for the purpose of this summary they can be categorised as follows:

- Four of the respondents commented that the FB 6 project does provide sufficient geographic coverage.
- Five of the respondents commented that it did not provide sufficient geographic coverage, with two outlining a need to look at the impact of the project on the overall economy of the Isle of Wight, one setting out a need to consider the relationship with the cross-Solent ferry links to Southampton and two responses stating that the business case does not show evidence of the financial impact of the project on the Isle of Wight.

The following table provides a summary of the above points raised on the consultation against the respondent groups that these were raised by:

Points raised	Respondent group
FB project does provide sufficient geographical coverage	Individual
FB project does not provide sufficient geographical coverage	Stakeholder group, Individual

Question 3 Response Summary

Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

All respondents either completed this question or submitted an individual response setting out comments on the project. The responses tended to focus on the following areas:

- The FB 6 project does not meet economic or connectivity objectives due to poor reliability which is linked to a range of other issues in the design, procurement, governance, technical competence and management of the project.
- FB 6 is having an adverse impact on the reputation, economic growth and regeneration objectives of the Isle of Wight.
- There were general comments about a lack of communication from the service operator, Isle of Wight Council.
- There were comments about the noise impact of the service.
- There were comments that FB 6 will not be able to deliver a reliable service and hence should be replaced with an alternative vessel or alternative method of connecting East and West Cowes (a swing bridge is referenced).
- Respondents commented on the cost escalation and viability of the project.
- One respondent highlighted the usefulness of the link and that they have not experienced problems when using it.

The table overleaf provides a summary of the above points raised on the consultation against the respondent groups that these were raised by:

Points raised	Respondent group
Project does not meet economic or connectivity objectives	Individual, Stakeholder group, Public Authority
Project impacting on the regeneration of the Isle of Wight	Individual, Stakeholder group, Public Authority
Issues relating to noise	Individual, Stakeholder group, Public Authority
An alternative to FB 6 should be sought	Individual, Stakeholder group, Public Authority
Financial considerations around cost and viability	Individual, Stakeholder group, Public Authority
Usefulness of link	Individual

All of the consultation responses received in relation to the updated Floating Bridge 6 business case were considered by the Solent LEP Board at its meeting on 15 February 2019, and subsequently by the Funding, Finance and Performance Management Group at its meeting on 3 April 2019.

The responses to the consultation will be used by the Solent LEP to inform the ongoing monitoring of the Floating Bridge 6 project.
