

Tamar Crossings Newsletter

July 2019



Introduction by David List General Manager

Welcome to the first edition of our new bi-monthly newsletter Tamar Crossings which is designed to keep you in touch with what is happening at the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry. As well as providing the latest news and information about the two crossings, we will also be including features on members of staff so you can find out more about the people who are providing the service.

Unlike many major estuarial crossings in other parts of the country, our service does not receive any financial subsidy from either local councils or the Government. This means it is entirely self-financed through the tolls charged which pay for the operation, maintenance and improvement of both crossings.

We have just completed a successful refit of one of the three Torpoint ferries and are in the middle of a major project to renew part of the bridge deck waterproofing system on the Bridge.

We have also opened a new Visitor and Learning Centre which is already attracting hundreds of visitors and school groups, and we are upgrading our toll system to make it quicker and easier for people to use. You can read more about all of these projects in this edition of the newsletter.

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Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee

The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry are jointly owned by Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council, with the operation of the service overseen by the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee. There are 10 councillors on the Joint Committee (five from each of the two parent authorities) and its meetings are held quarterly in Saltash, Torpoint or Plymouth, and are open to the public. Details of the agenda for each meeting are available on the Tamar Crossings website and on the websites of the two Councils.

The current Joint Chairs are Sam Tamlin (Cornwall Council) and George Wheeler (Plymouth City Council).

Sam became Joint Chair of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee in June having served on the committee since he was elected to represent Saltash at Cornwall Council two years ago. "There will be a lot going on in the next twelve months, from major maintenance projects like kerb replacement on the bridge to smaller projects such as extra payment options for our customers" said Sam. "We need to make sure these all go smoothly with as little disruption to the public as possible."

George was elected to Plymouth City Council in 1995 and was appointed to the Joint Committee as Joint Chair (Plymouth) at that time. He's been a member of the Joint Committee for all but 3 years since then and chair on and off for 11 years. "I've seen a lot of changes in that time but the three aims of the committee and management haven't changed in that time – to provide safe crossings at the bridge and ferries while minimising hold-ups but keeping the costs as low as we can."



As this is a new publication we are keen to hear what you would like to see in future editions so please let us know at trisha.hewitt@tamarcrossings.org.uk



Bridging the Tamar



Our new “Bridging the Tamar” Visitor and Learning Centre is now officially open. The Tamar Bridge and Royal Albert Bridge have played historic roles in linking Devon and Cornwall and our new Visitor and Learning Centre tells the story of the two bridges and celebrates their incredible engineering legacy through interactive exhibitions and hands-on activities.

We were joined by The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Plymouth, Councillor Richard and Diana Ball; the Chairman of Cornwall Council; Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee members Councillors George Wheeler, Sam Tamlin, Mark Coker, Jonathan Drean, Derek Holly and John Crago; children from local schools, Tamar Crossings staff and volunteers for our special opening ceremony in June.

Our new Centre has been funded largely by a £272,700 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee funding the remaining 25 per cent of the cost.

We want to encourage more young people to consider future careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics and have designed the Learning Space at the Centre around this theme, with hands-on activities, workshops and events. A new Plymouth STEM schools' competition, developed by Plymouth STEM, Plymouth University, and the Institution of Civil Engineers, which was launched at our Open day, will see students re-design a different iconic Plymouth Structure each year, starting with the Tamar Bridge.

One of the highlights of the day was watching 23 members of the public climb the 35 metres to the top of the Tamar Bridge towers, and experience the stunning panoramic views over the river, and also get a better feel for the scale of the structure. The lucky



people given this rare opportunity were the winners of the ballot held to mark the opening of the Centre, together with Matthew Addlesee who won the photo competition to capture the best image of the Tamar Bridge or Royal Albert Bridge.

Entry to the Centre is free of charge and it is open from 10 to 4pm every day. Bridge Ambassador volunteers are on hand to welcome visitors, deliver tours of the Centre and local area and support schools visits so please come and see us.



Spotlight on Mary Olszewska

Arriving at the Tamar Crossings office on her first day as the Community Learning Volunteering Officer for the "Bridging the Tamar" project, Mary Olszewska found a refurbished space and colleagues with a huge enthusiasm for creating an exciting new learning space which would tell the story of the iconic Tamar Bridge and Royal Albert Bridge and celebrate their incredible engineering legacy.

With a passion for history, and a background in leading successful heritage projects in the south-west, Mary was undaunted by the task and immediately set about bringing together the people and ideas to turn the vision into reality, thanks mainly to National Lottery Heritage Funding.

Just 12 months later the 'Bridging the Tamar' Visitor and Learning Centre contains a wealth of interactive exhibits and displays supported by a programme of schools workshops and public events which have already attracted more than 2,500 visitors since it opened at the end of May.

While working at the Tamar Bridge may seem a long way from her previous roles at museums, art galleries and National Trust properties, Mary says her aim remains the same – to help members of the public understand the history and heritage of the places they are visiting.

"The sense of achievement you feel when you watch people getting a better appreciation about the past and how it shapes the future is really satisfying. The bridges have played historic roles in linking Devon and Cornwall and we wanted our new Visitor and Learning Centre to reflect this heritage as well as celebrating the incredible feats of engineering which lie behind their construction."

One of Mary's passions is inspiring young people. The Learning Space is part of a wider programme to encourage young people to consider future careers in this sector. She and her colleague, Project Assistant Mark Tebbs, have worked closely with local partners to develop a learning and events programme with exhibitions, a range of workshops and bridge building activities for young people.



"Visiting the Centre gives children the opportunity to learn outside the classroom, and discover new things by touring the bridges, taking part in hands-on activities and talking to real engineers about what they do" said Mary. "We want to inspire the next generation of engineers to follow in the footsteps of Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the people who designed and built the road bridge in the 1960s."

With the Centre now officially open Mary and Mark are supported by their team of Bridge Ambassadors. They are always on the lookout for more volunteers so anyone interested should contact volunteer@tamarcrossings.org.uk

The new Centre is open to the public, between 10am - 4pm every day and entrance is free. You can also visit the website at www.bridgingthetamar.org.uk

Did you know...

The 650 metre (1,099 ft) long Tamar Bridge runs adjacent to the Royal Albert Bridge and connects the A38 trunk road network. It was opened in 1961 and now carries over 16 million vehicles a year across the River Tamar - over ten times that carried in the early years, and on a busy weekday over 50,000 vehicles use the crossing.

The Torpoint Ferry is the world's biggest and busiest chain ferry service and the UK's busiest inland waterway ferry crossing – providing crossings for two and a half million vehicles and around a million cyclists and foot passengers each year. Toll charges remain amongst the lowest for a major estuarial crossing in the UK.

Ferry refit

It was great to welcome Tamar II back to Torpoint a week ahead of schedule following her five-yearly refit. This meant we had three ferries in service in time for the busy Bank Holiday weekend.



Our ferries operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in all weathers. Achieving this requires a significant planned maintenance programme. Staff carry out the majority of maintenance work while the vessels are either in service or during off-peak periods when an individual vessel is not on scheduled service. However some maintenance activities have to be carried out during refits in dry dock conditions. These refits are essential to maximise the life of the ferries and ensure that we provide a safe and reliable service.

Planning and managing the refit was a highly complex process which began nearly two years ahead of the ferry being towed the 44 nautical miles to A & P's dry dock facility in Falmouth. Our staff liaised closely with A & P's refit team to ensure that the extensive programme of work was carried out on schedule.

Tamar II's refit included:

- replacing obsolete equipment
- installing new power management and CCTV/IT systems
- removing the prows to completely overhaul them including repairs to the steel structure and extensive work on the hydraulic systems
- cleaning the hull and repainting the vessels both above and below the waterline.

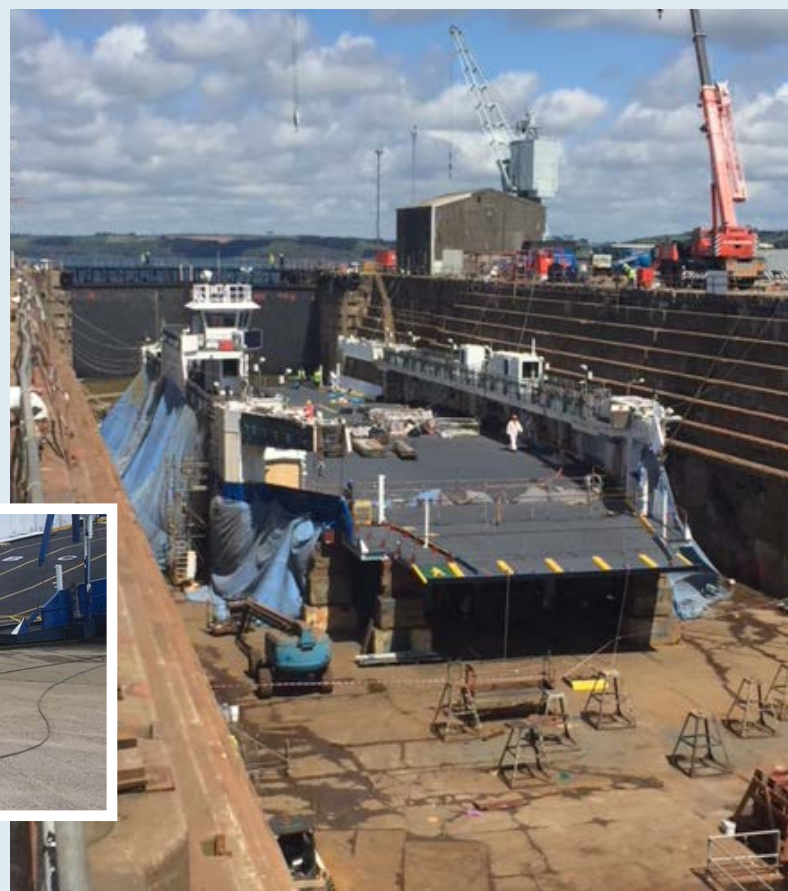
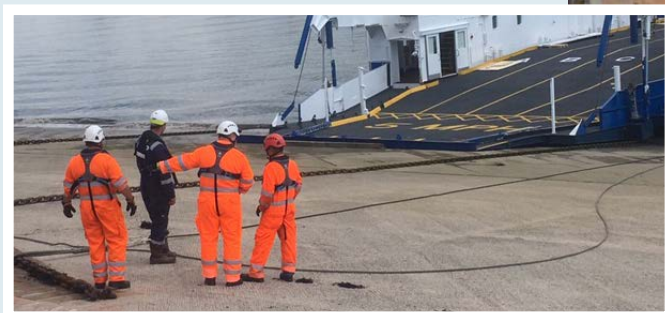
— a huge amount of work. The ferry was towed back to Torpoint — a journey which can only be done in fairly calm weather so all eyes were on the forecast.

As only two ferries were in operation during this period, our ferry staff worked very hard to minimise disruptions to the service and carry out any repairs to the vessels as quickly as possible while Tamar II was away.

We would like to thank everyone for their patience during the refit. We were also pleased to receive a letter of thanks from the Mayor of Torpoint.:

"On behalf of the town and the Rame Peninsula I wish to thank the Tamar Crossings staff and the refit team at A & P Falmouth for successfully completing the five year refit work to Tamar II to ensure that the vessel was returned to service. It is particularly pleasing to see that it returned one week ahead of schedule and in time for the busy bank holiday weekend."

Councillor Mrs C E Goodman, Town Mayor



Bridge Maintenance

Works are progressing well on the scheme to renew part of the bridge deck waterproofing system.

The last inspection identified that the deck waterproofing and steel fixings holding the kerbs units in place were nearing the end of their serviceable life and needed replacing. These works are essential to prevent the steel bridge deck from corroding and to ensure the continued safety of those crossing the bridge.

The £3.8 million scheme is being carried out in four phases, beginning with the south cantilever, and is expected to take up to 12 months to complete. We aim to keep four running lanes of traffic throughout the scheme, although it will be necessary to introduce some closures at certain times.

Once the current phase has been completed the south cantilever will be opened to west bound traffic but will be closed to pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooters. We will be providing a free shuttle bus service between the Tamar Bridge car park and Fore Street in Saltash throughout the day and night for those affected by the closure of the pedestrian and cycle path.

Work on the scheme began on 1 April as scheduled. Following the completion of safety checks and the off-site welding and installation trials, contractors have begun the formal site trials on the south cantilever. These trials are a very important part of the scheme – there are over 7,000 kerb units to remove and re-install and 28,800 bolts to replace – so we need to make sure that the work is done correctly right from the start. Investing time at this stage will hone the installation processes and save time and ensure quality in the long run. Once these trials have been approved work can begin on the remainder of the south cantilever.

If you have any queries about this work please contact the Tamar Bridge office on 01752 361577 or visit www.tamarcrossings.org.uk for the latest information.



Parapet review

The Tamar Bridge parapets have been reviewed by Tamar Crossings staff and consultants in partnership with the emergency services and health service professionals, as part of an overall public safety review. After considering the findings of the review members of the Joint Committee have decided to set up a working group to hear evidence from professional bodies, emergency services and affected members of the public in person before making a decision on whether to increase the heights of the parapets.

Meetings of this group will be held in public with its recommendation on the way forward then being reported back to a future meeting of the Joint Committee for a final decision. Details of the working group, and dates for meetings, will be published as soon as they are confirmed.

Toll system upgrade

We are upgrading the toll system at both crossings to make the system easier and quicker for service users.

Specific improvements include the introduction of contactless card payments on the Bridge (we are working to develop a contactless solution on the ferry) and a new system which automatically tops up tag holders' accounts when their balances drop below the low balance level rather than depending on fixed monthly direct debits which may not match actual usage. There will also be an automatic replacement system for older tags, improved web services, the introduction of online applications and improved technology which will ensure that ferry collectors have the latest account balances available, rather than taking up to 24 hours for them to show. We are also changing the system for people who are not able or willing to pay the toll charge at the time of crossing via the bridge or ferry. Under the current system these people are given a "violation" slip and are then required to pay for the cost of the crossing and an administration fee in person or by post. Under the new system individuals or companies will be able to pay the charge online or by phone as well as in person. However the initial cost will increase significantly if payment is not received within five days.

The new systems are still being finalised and are not due to be introduced until September 2019. However Toll Booth Lane 1 will be used for testing and trialling the new system, and for staff training is due to begin in the next few weeks. The process of installing new equipment across the plaza could lead to some minor delays.



Did you know...

In 1791 a privately owned operation with vessels powered by oars and sail was established to cross the Tamar at Torpoint. The first chain ferry service linking Torpoint and Devonport started operating in 1834, and several generations of ferry later the current vehicle and pedestrian chain ferry continue to service the route. The three ferries - Tamar II, Lynher II and Plym II – provide a service 24 hrs a day, 365 days a year, with a 10 minute frequency at peak times.

Toll revision

Our application to increase tolls on the Bridge and Ferry was formally submitted to the Department of Transport in March. We publicised the application with a formal public notice on 17 April 2019 and around 140 objections were received. This means that there has to be a public inquiry before the Department of Transport can make a decision on whether we can increase tolls. This inquiry will be led by a planning inspector appointed by the Government and will take place at Plymouth Guildhall on 6 and 7 August. You can follow the process on our website: www.tamarcrossings.org.uk

Recycling seaweed into fertiliser

Did you know you can turn seaweed into compost?

As part of our 'zero waste to landfill' contract we have supported a new project to recycle the seaweed washed up on the ferry slipways.

Seaweed, algae and other materials are washed up onto the slipways at either side of the Ferry crossing with every tide. This debris must be regularly cleaned off to avoid creating a potentially slippery surface for people using the crossing.

Over the past year Viridor have taken 65 tonnes of seaweed – enough to fill five double decker buses –to be cleaned and processed by Tavistock farmer Dave Bragg and turned into high-quality agricultural fertiliser.

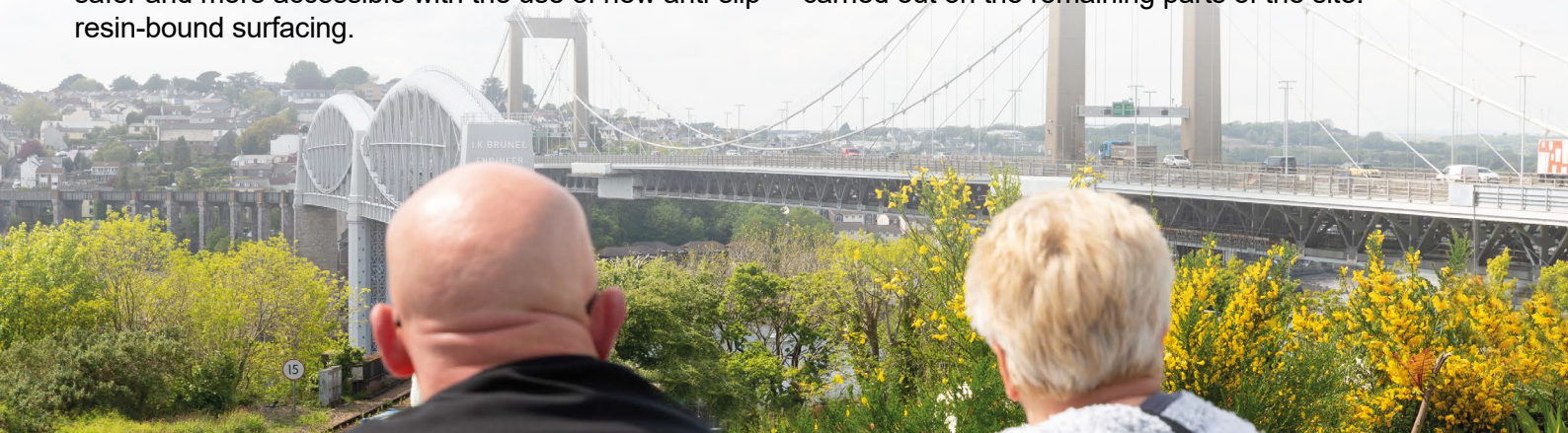
The collected seaweed cannot be returned to the sea because it may have picked up contamination, including additional waste materials, such as plastics. Dave Bragg's process removes these contaminants and this project allows the processed seaweed to be ploughed back into the earth.



Improving our picnic areas

We have been working with our contractors to improve the picnic and viewing areas next to the Bridge to make them more accessible and enjoyable for local residents and visitors to use. We have also made the pathways around the picnic areas and the memorial safer and more accessible with the use of new anti-slip resin-bound surfacing.

The improvements have been part of our wider scheme to upgrade the Bridge offices, which included the opening of the new 'Bridging the Tamar' Visitor and Learning Centre. Once work has been completed on the picnic areas, further landscaping works will be carried out on the remaining parts of the site.



Partnership working

Three members of our operational staff visited the Met Office in Exeter to see how the customised daily weather forecasts we receive are put together. Several operational staff have also been on police insight patrol days where members of staff shadowed police officers for a day, starting with their briefing at the start of the shift, through to accompanying officers responding to incidents and the debrief at the end of the shift. These visits provide a greater awareness of the work being done by our partners, and also gives us the opportunity to explain how we operate.



Meet our team

Ferry supervisors Claudine Jones and Mike Bright

Claudine Jones and Mike Bright are part of a team of nine supervisors responsible for managing the day-to-day operation of the Torpoint Ferry service.

Based in the control towers at Devonport and Torpoint, the supervisors oversee the health and safety of all people on site, shoreside and on the ferries, as well as directing the loading of vehicles onto the ferries and managing the crews operating the vessels. They also liaise between the emergency

services and the Ferry crews.



Mike Bright joined the ferry service 15 years ago as a yard operative and has now worked his way up to his 'dream job' as a supervisor. Now aged 51, Mike, who has lived all

his life in Torpoint, is very proud of his role and knows how important this service is to the local people, businesses and economy of the Rame peninsula and surrounding area.

"I had always wanted to work on the ferries and spent 20 years trying to get a job here" he said. "My first job was a yard operative which involved cleaning and mopping out water from the bilges of the ferries. After spending some time doing this role, the introduction of four man crews provided an opportunity to become a collector and then a supervisor."

Claudine Jones took a very different route. Having worked for a number of years as a VAT Inspector, she lost her job when HMRC closed the Plymouth Tax Office three years ago. While her colleagues were applying for jobs in accountancy firms or other administrative roles, she decided that she was "not an office kind of girl" and wanted to do something different with her life.

"The ferry service were advertising for an assistant supervisor and I decided to apply for the job" she said. "Luckily I got an interview and was offered the job"

Claudine became a supervisor earlier this year and, like Mike, says that this is her dream job. "I love working here " she said. "The team are fantastic

and I love working next to the river. There is always something different to see – from boats, ducks, herons and dolphins, to the most incredible rainbows over the river."



Both Mike and Claudine work a nine-week shift pattern, working either between 6am and 2pm, or between 2pm and 10pm, and based either at the Devonport or Torpoint control towers. All supervisors manage

a team of six members of staff, including a controller, two collectors, an engineering assistant and two crew reliefs.

Key tasks include ensuring that the maximum number of vehicles are loaded in a managed way to ensure that the operation is safe, monitoring the lanes of traffic using CCTV and managing the traffic flows to keep the queues moving as quickly as possible. They are also responsible for safety around the slipways, liaising with Flag Port Control to help manage the safe passage of all river traffic around the ferries, and working with the blue light services to ensure that they can cross the river as quickly as possible when dealing with an emergency situation. This can mean holding a departing ferry until they arrive or letting the ferry leave earlier than scheduled – day and night. Travelling by ferry rather than driving around via the Tamar Bridge can save around 40 minutes of travel time which could be vital in a life threatening situation.

While the supervisors' role includes a number of routine tasks, one of the things both Claudine and Mike love is that no two days are the same. "There are so many different parts of the job that you are always keeping lots of balls in the air" said Claudine.

"Whether you are sending traffic to the ferry, answering a query from a controller, or responding to a call from one of the blue light services – there is always something happening. Add the amazing camaraderie from the team and the beautiful river setting and I cannot imagine anyone wanting to work anywhere else."



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