

Tamar Crossings Newsletter

No. 7 March 2022



Welcome to the latest edition of Tamar Crossings

The last few months have been very much focussing on our finances, and the very reluctant step we have had to take to propose toll increases, so that we can ensure the continued safe, efficient and effective delivery of the two crossings in the long term. The income needed to deliver the service relies on traffic numbers, and even now, two years after the first lockdown, our traffic levels are only about 90% of pre-pandemic levels. This edition has an update on the toll revision and the associated public consultation.

We are also giving an insight into one of the 'heavier' maintenance jobs at the Ferry - a main chain change - to give readers a better idea of what is involved in operating the world's biggest chain ferries.

The newsletter reflects on the very successful 60th anniversary event at the Bridge, which could not have been achieved without our wonderful Visitor and Learning Centre volunteers, and gives information on becoming a volunteer.

David List,
General Manager

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Spotlight on Cornwall Councillor Philip Desmonde



With a background in structural engineering, Cornwall Councillor Philip is delighted to have a role as a member of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee and to be working with them to respond to and plan for the longer term challenges of maintaining the utility and functionality of the Tamar Crossings operations.

The local councillor for the Pool and Tehidy electoral division, in May 2021 Philip was appointed as the Council's Cabinet Member for Transport where he is responsible for a capital programme of some £350m and substantial budgets for public transport and roads.

A former Chairman of the Devon and Cornwall Branch of the Institution of Structural Engineers with over thirty-five years' experience of engineering design and project management throughout the UK, Europe and the Middle East, he has worked on a wide range of commercial, residential, industrial, defence, and maritime projects.

In his role as Cornwall's Cabinet Member for Transport Philip works closely with the Joint Chairs and is playing a key role in helping to shape the future direction of Tamar Crossings.

"While the crossings are undoubtedly an amazing feat of engineering, we need to ensure that we have a robust business plan in place for their upgrade and maintenance in the longer term" he said.

"As well as developing a capital programme which plans for some £100m of investment over the next 20 years, we also need the Government to provide financial support for the crossings. It is simply not fair that the majority of the costs of operating the crossings falls on the residents and businesses in southeast Cornwall and Plymouth. Under the current situation the Government has free issue of a short length of the A38 whilst increasing demand for access across it with huge investment on the A38 to the east and west. This has to change.

Although both Councils have been sending this strong message to the Government, so far we have not had a positive response. This has resulted in the Joint Committee being faced with the prospect of increasing tolls.

We are currently looking at the future governance of the organisation and have been working with Tamar Crossings staff to see where further efficiencies can be made. However, we are also determined to continue to press the Government to contribute to the costs of funding the crossings."

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



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www.tamarcrossings.org.uk

Update on tolls revision

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the recent consultation on funding the Tamar Crossings.

The consultation ended on 14 February, with 3,849 people filling in their questionnaires or emailing us with their comments.

This feedback is now being analysed and will be presented to members of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee at their meeting on 18 March when a decision will be made on the proposals.

Here are some of the questions we received during the consultation, together with our responses.

Why is there a charge to use the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry?

In the 1950's the two local authorities on either side of the river Tamar, Plymouth City Council and Cornwall County Council, recognised a need to build a river crossing to replace the ferry which ran between Plymouth and Saltash. As the Government was not prepared to provide funding for the crossing, the two authorities had to sponsor the crossing themselves. This led to the Tamar Bridge Act being passed in 1957.

This allowed the crossing to be built and led to the formation of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee to be responsible for its operation, maintenance and improvement, funded through tolls on a 'user pays' principle. Under the Act the Torpoint Ferry, owned by Cornwall County Council at the time, was also incorporated with the Bridge into a single business unit.

The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry continue to be jointly owned and operated by Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council. Between them the crossings carry around 18 million vehicles a year (16 million on the bridge and up to 2 and a half million on the ferries). Tamar Crossings do not currently receive any funding from either the Government or the two Councils. This means that, in accordance with the Tamar Bridge Act, both crossings are funded by toll income which is used to operate, maintain and improve the bridge and ferries.

I was told the bridge would be free after the original construction costs were paid for. Why do I still have to pay?

Although the original costs of building the Tamar Bridge were repaid many years ago, as Tamar Crossings do not receive any funding from either the Government or the two Councils who own and operate the Tamar Bridge or Torpoint Ferry, the income from tolls is still needed to meet the costs of the ongoing operation, maintenance and improvement of the two crossings.

This is different from crossings like the Severn bridges which are run by National Highways (formerly Highways England) on behalf of the Government and funded by general taxation, but is similar to a number of other crossings including Humber Bridge and the recently constructed Mersey Gateway Bridge.

While a number of people report that they were told the bridge would be free of tolls after the original construction costs were met, there is nothing in our archives, or those of the two Councils, or in any legislation, minutes or even press cuttings from that time which support this claim. We have asked anyone who has documents supporting this claim to share them with us.

Why isn't the Tamar Bridge 'free' like the Severn bridges?

The Severn River Crossings are run by National Highways (formerly Highways England) on behalf of the Government and are funded by general taxation. While drivers do not pay tolls to use the Severn River Crossings, they are not 'free' – the costs of operating and maintaining the Severn River Crossings are effectively paid for by all tax payers, regardless of whether they use the bridges.

Why haven't you asked the Government for financial help?

We have lobbied for financial support from the Government and continue to do so.

Members of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee have been working with MPs in Cornwall and Plymouth over a number of years to seek ongoing financial support from the Government for the two crossings. The two Joint Chairs of the Committee and the portfolio holders with responsibility for transport from Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council have written to the Government on a number of occasions expressing their concerns over the situation facing Tamar Crossings. Last July the Joint Chairs wrote again to the Government requesting that National Highways (formerly Highways England) contribute towards the costs of maintaining the Bridge. Unfortunately the Government did not support this request. Whilst there is currently no prospect of further support from the Government, the Joint Committee and the two Councils are continuing to lobby Ministers for a change in its position.

Why can't you just charge visitors more?

The tolls charged are regulated by Central Government and the two councils have to submit a robust business case for any increase in tolls. 60% of drivers currently enjoy a 50% discount and more convenience by pre-payment using the organisation's TamarTag system. The current proposals also involve increasing the price for cash toll payments and tolls settled through the TamarTag scheme will revert to a 50% discount once we have authorisation to change cash rates.

Why haven't you looked at other options before deciding to increase prices?

During the past 12 months the Joint Committee has looked in detail at all areas of spending, including staffing, and a range of service reduction and other options to address the financial shortfall. The two authorities are appointing an independent consultancy to carry out a review of the effectiveness, efficiency and governance of Tamar Crossings to inform, amongst other things, a long-term pricing strategy that will reflect the need to manage future demand and support the wider climate change agenda. Specialists are also being appointed to review land use and potential commercial opportunities on Tamar Crossings sites.

What is the toll income spent on?

The money from the tolls is used to operate, maintain and improve the two crossings. Over 100 staff are employed to deliver the service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at the two crossings. Despite the pandemic Tamar Crossings have continued to fully operate and maintain the crossings to deliver this critical service.

During the past few years significant works have been carried out at the bridge and the ferries. These include painting of the bridge structure, kerbs and waterproofing remedials and deck resurfacing works totalling £17m at the Bridge, together with a major update of tolling systems which includes the introduction of contactless payment at the toll booths. It is anticipated that contactless payment will be provided at the Ferry during 2022.

A cycle of refits for the three vessels has been completed at the Ferry, with plans being finalised for the next three-year cycle starting in 2023. During that next refit cycle work will also take place to replace the chain gantries that support the tensioning weights for the chains. The refit cycle and the gantry work represent around £6m of investment.

Information on how the money received by Tamar Crossings is spent is published on the Tamar Crossings website

<https://www.tamarcrossings.org.uk/about-us/statement-of-accounts/>

Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Funding the Crossings
Consultation January 2022

Covid-19 has had a major effect on our toll income and the accompanying leaflet explains our current and forecast position. Please read the leaflet before completing this questionnaire. Your responses to this consultation will ensure that all relevant factors are taken into account in finalising any changes to toll levels.

Section 1 Your use of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry
Please provide an answer for both bridge and ferry

TAMAR BRIDGE Please tick one box only

TORPOINT FERRY Please tick one box only

1a How often do you usually travel across the bridge and/or ferry?

1 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 5 times a week	1 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 5 times a week
2 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 times a week	2 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 times a week
3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 4 times a week	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 4 times a week
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a week	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a week
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Never	6 <input type="checkbox"/> Never

1b How do you usually travel across the bridge and/or ferry?

1 <input type="checkbox"/> Private car/van	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Private car/van
2 <input type="checkbox"/> Light goods vehicle (eg Transit van)	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Light goods vehicle (eg Transit van)
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Medium goods vehicle (ie 2-axle lorry)	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Medium goods vehicle (ie 2-axle lorry)
4 <input type="checkbox"/> HGV (ie lorry with more than 2 axles)	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle/scooter
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle/scooter	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle	6 <input type="checkbox"/> Local bus
7 <input type="checkbox"/> Local bus	7 <input type="checkbox"/> Walk
8 <input type="checkbox"/> Walk	8 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the ferry
9 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the bridge	9 <input type="checkbox"/> Other
10 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	

1c How do you currently pay to use the bridge and ferry?

1 <input type="checkbox"/> TamarTag	1 <input type="checkbox"/> TamarTag
2 <input type="checkbox"/> Cash	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Cash
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Contactless card	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes cash, sometimes Tag
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes cash/contactless, sometimes Tag	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt/free
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt/free	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the ferry
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the bridge	

1d Thinking about your most frequent journey using the bridge and ferry, what is the main reason for the crossing?

1 <input type="checkbox"/> Commuting journeys (to and from work)	1 <input type="checkbox"/> Commuting journeys (to and from work)
2 <input type="checkbox"/> Business	2 <input type="checkbox"/> Business
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Education	3 <input type="checkbox"/> Education
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare	4 <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation/leisure	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation/leisure
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Shopping	6 <input type="checkbox"/> Shopping
7 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the bridge	7 <input type="checkbox"/> Do not use the ferry
8 <input type="checkbox"/> Other	8 <input type="checkbox"/> Other

Why do you need to revise your prices at this difficult time?
Unfortunately the loss of traffic and therefore income caused by the pandemic means that without further funding support from the Government or a significant increase in traffic levels, we have to consider how to revise prices for the crossings as soon as possible. Our current financial position and are unable to provide financial support.

What is the proposal?
As things stand our only short-term option to increase income is to reduce pre-paid TamarTag discount. Introducing cash tolls involves applying to the Department for Transport under a formal statutory process, and typically takes several months to get approved. Unless prices are revised soon, we will face a significant and growing financial shortfall which without intervention would lead to a reduction in services.

How can you have your say?
We understand that this necessary proposal will be unpopular but we want to hear the views of all customers and other stakeholders to ensure that all relevant factors are taken into account in finalising any changes to toll levels. To make sure your views are taken into account please complete the questionnaire and return it to us by 14 February 2022. You can also download an electronic version of the questionnaire from our website: www.tamarcrossings.org.uk where you can also find more information about the proposal. Additional information can also be obtained by emailing us at: consultation@tamarcrossings.org.uk or calling us on 01752 361577.

This document is available in other languages and accessible formats. Please call or email using the contacts above.

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FUNDING THE CROSSINGS
Consultation 2022

TAMARTAG
PLYMOUTH COUNCIL

Tamar
Crossings

Changing the chains on the Torpoint Ferry

The world's biggest and busiest estuarial vehicular crossing chain ferry service, the Torpoint Ferry provides crossings for two and a half million vehicles and approximately 750,000 foot passengers and cyclists each year.

Keeping the ferries operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, requires a significant planned maintenance programme. While some maintenance activities are carried out during refits in dry dock conditions, most maintenance takes place while the vessels are afloat during off peak periods while an individual vessel is not on scheduled service.

One of the most challenging maintenance tasks is replacing the steel chains – the ferries pull on these chains to propel themselves across the river, and the chains also serve to guide the ferry across the river. Each individual chain is over 650 metres long and weighs 23 tonnes - with the total length and weight of chains in the river around 4 kilometres (approximately 2.4 miles) weighing some 140 tonnes.

The ends of each chain are connected to steel cables that run under the road to the chain tensioning gantries. In the gantries the cables run around a series of pulleys on one of which hangs a large steel weight bucket. The weight buckets are made of steel and contain cast iron weights. Each weight bucket has a total weight of approximately 12 tonnes, and keeps the chain tensioned so that as the vessels come and go from the slipways they remain on track in all weathers and tidal conditions.

The interaction between the chains and the chain drive wheel and the various pulleys in the system, combined with the abrasion caused by rubbing on the slipways means the

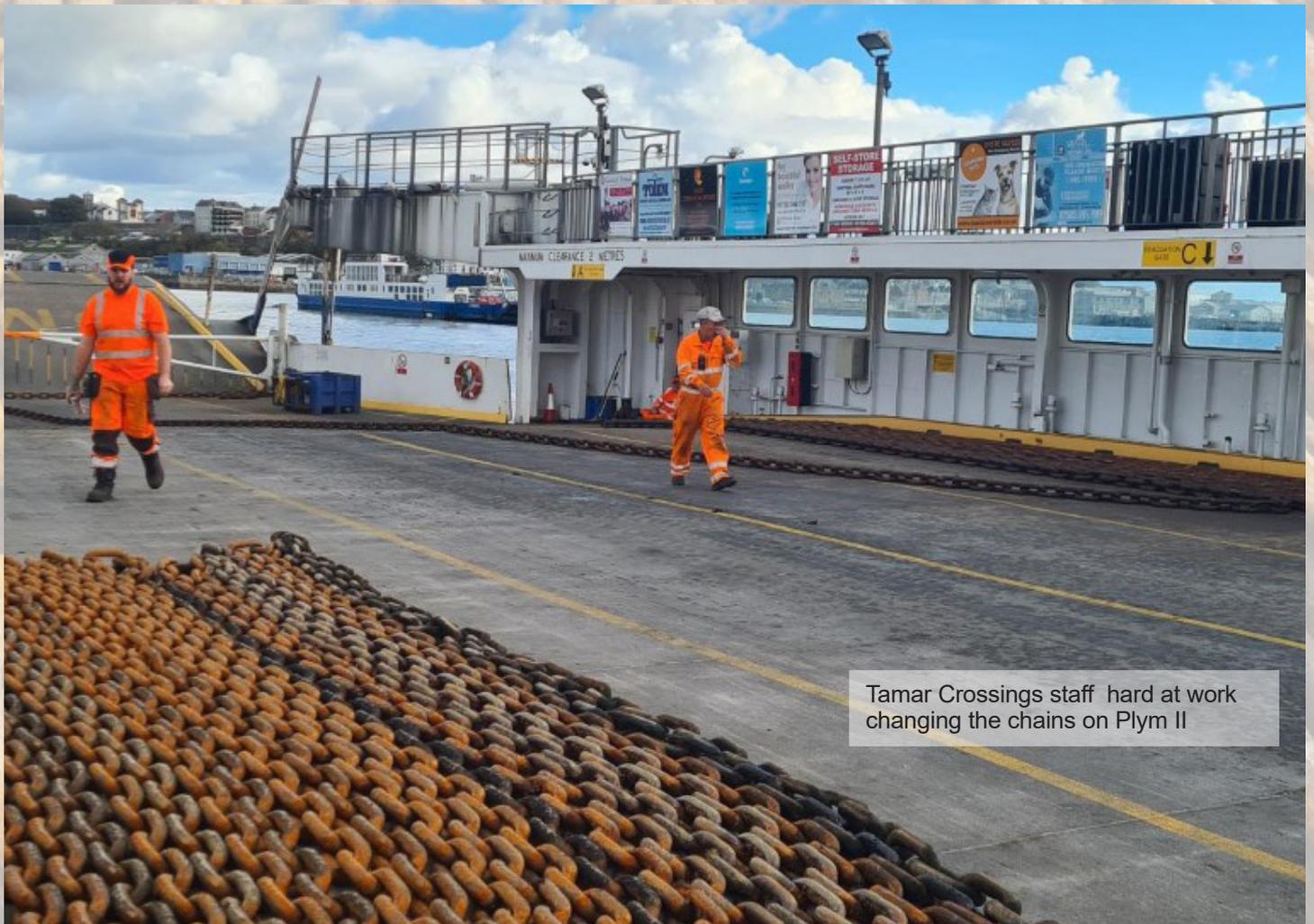
chains slowly wear and they are normally replaced once every three years.

A main chain change is a major time-consuming job that cannot be done with the ferry in service, and is only achievable when the wind and tides are within set limits.

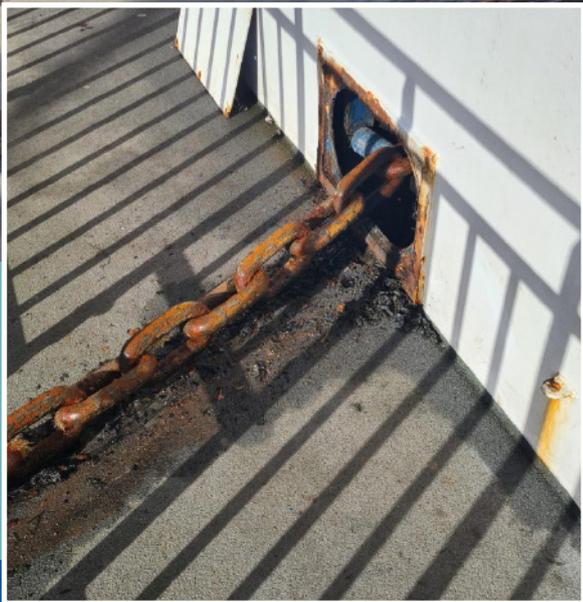
The chains are specially made to our own specification. While chains have been sourced from within the UK in the past, there are no longer any manufacturers in this country who produce the size and quality of chain required. As a result, replacement chains are now imported from a specialist manufacturer in China.

The process of changing the chains involves a series of processes. First the new chain is loaded onto the ferry and carefully and neatly 'flaked' out on the vessel so that it does not tangle when fed into the chain chutes inside the ferry.

Then the old chain is disconnected and pulled onto the ferry deck by a tractor as the ferry crosses the river. Once the old chain is completely removed, the new chain is connected and the ferry crosses the river again as the new chain is fed through the vessel and connected at the other side of the river. Finally the old chain is removed from the vessel. The whole chain change exercise typically takes around 10 hours so is generally carried out on a Sunday to minimise impact on users. The old chain is stored until we sell it, as although it is too worn for us, it is very popular for use as mooring chain.



Tamar Crossings staff hard at work changing the chains on Plym II



60th anniversary celebrations at the Tamar Bridge

Following the special 60th anniversary celebrations at the Tamar Bridge we have produced a short film about the weekend which you can watch on our website.

The first major suspension bridge to be constructed in the UK after the Second World War, it was the longest suspension bridge in the country when it was opened in 1961, with a total length of 642 metres and a main span of 335 metres. In 2001 it became the world's first suspension bridge to be widened from three to five lanes using cantilevers, and the world's first suspension bridge to be widened and strengthened while remaining open to traffic. The improved structure was officially re-opened by Princess Anne on 26 April 2002 - forty years to the day after it was first officially opened by her grandmother.

In 1961 the bridge was used by approximately 4,000 vehicles a day. Today over 50,000 vehicles use the crossing on a busy day - over 16 million vehicles a year – ten times the number carried in the early years.

It was fantastic to be able to share this very special milestone in the history of the iconic structure with a wide range of stakeholders – these included South East Cornwall MP Sheryll Murray, the Lord Mayor of Plymouth and the Mayor of Saltash and their Consorts, representatives of Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council, Tamar Crossings staff and volunteers, and the groups and organisations involved with the anniversary project.

This really was a weekend to remember and it included many different activities:

- the opportunity to walk underneath and within the structure of the bridge
- climbing to the top of the Plymouth tower for four 'lucky' ballot-winners
- the unveiling of a new exhibition of photos and images in the Visitor Centre as well as a collection of oral histories which can be found here: <https://www.bridgingthetamar.org.uk/the-bridges/stories/>
- mounting a series of panels on the pedestrian/cycle path telling the stories of the people who helped to build or lived close to the bridge 60 years ago
- a special drive across the bridge by a number of vintage and classic cars that would have been on the road in 1961
- the laying of a wreath to commemorate the seven people who tragically lost their lives during construction.



“The bridge connects the two communities of Saltash and Plymouth and it has got a lot of fond memories for a lot of people“ said Visitor Experience Manager Mary Olszewska. “We worked closely with Fotonow to bring out some of those fascinating stories from people who worked on the bridge, or have memories of it being built. We also worked with young people to create new artwork which has been installed as panels on the South Cantilever of the bridge. This artwork looks back at the history of the bridge as well as looking forward to the future.”

Some of the images and the stories shared with the team had never been seen or heard in public before. These include the story of a stilt walker – Leo Wellington - who walked across the bridge just after it opened. While, sadly, there are no photos of Leo walking across the bridge, the team were sent newspaper cuttings about Leo who was a well known children’s entertainer in the local area. Leo’s story now been added to the Bridging the Tamar archive.

One of those attending the 60th anniversary event was 91-year-old Gerald Ashton who helped to build the Tamar Bridge. Accompanied by his son Gary, Gerald presented the Bridging the Tamar team with the hard hat he wore more than 60 years ago.

Other highlights from the anniversary weekend included a drive across the bridge by a number of classic and vintage cars that would have been on the road in 1961. Organised by David Fry from Tamar Historic Transport Club, the event saw around 15 cars, ranging from a Rolls Royce to a Morris Minor, travelling in convoy from Saltash to the bridge office and back.

The weekend also saw the premiere of the five music videos produced by talented local musicians as part of the collaboration between Fotonow and the Bridging the Tamar team.



Visitor and Learning Centre update

A huge thank you to everyone who responded to our appeal for new volunteers to help with the running of the Visitor and Learning Centre. Some of the new recruits are already hard at work which is great news, but we are still looking for more people to join us.



Since our opening in 2019, many schools, families, local residents and holiday makers have visited the Centre and taken part in a range of activities, including guided bridge tours, walks and talks, and the chance to find out more about Brunel's iconic Royal Albert Bridge as well as its companion the Tamar Bridge.

One of our key aims is to encourage and inspire children and young people in STEAM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths), with visits to the Centre including bridge building activities and curriculum linked workshops from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4. School groups have arrived by train, coach, foot (and one year group even arrived by boat at Saltash before coming to see us!).

We also welcome adult groups with an interest in the Tamar Crossings story which includes the Torpoint ferry and, before that, the Saltash chain ferry. We have strong links with scouting and guiding groups, providing opportunities to develop pioneering skills in the bridge grounds.

Our team of around 30 volunteers are central to the day to day running of the Centre. Following the lifting of the COVID restrictions, we are now fully open and are looking for more volunteers to enable us to increase the range of activities we can offer.

Volunteer Bridge Ambassadors are on hand to welcome visitors, deliver tours of the Centre and local area, and to support school visits. They also support our events programme which includes the Plymouth History Festival, Heritage Open Days, special anchorage tours, and local regattas, as well as assisting with online events. During the COVID19 pandemic volunteers have also supported the Centre by conducting research from home. Volunteers also lead our popular guided tours on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturday mornings during the winter months as well as supporting the pre-booked tours held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons during the summer.

Both these tours include a walk onto the bridge and attract a steady flow of visitors. Comments from some of those taking part include: "thank you for the waterside tour last weekend, it was very interesting and we thoroughly enjoyed it...will be there on Saturday for the Anchorage tour."

"I Just wanted to say a big thank you to our guide this morning, when we brought out learners along. He was fantastic and provided information in an appropriate way for them to understand."

The Bridge Ambassador position comprises a number of different roles which volunteers can choose from, all of which are interchangeable.

These include:

- Bridge Guides who are responsible for leading the guided tours,
- Welcome Assistants who welcome visitors as they stop off at the Learning Centre on their way to Cornwall,
- Learning Assistants who support the Centre staff during school visits

There are also opportunities for people to become Research Volunteers to find out more about the histories of the bridges and the surrounding areas.

You do not need any prior knowledge of history or engineering to become a Bridge Ambassador – we are looking for individuals who are interested in meeting people from all walks of life and can spare an hour or two a week helping at the Centre. Volunteers will be supported to learn about the history of these iconic structures and gain an insight into the work of the STEAM sectors, and then share their knowledge and enthusiasm with others.

In return we can offer the opportunity for people to develop their skills and increase their self confidence by giving guided tours or speaking to a variety of visitors, as well as having the satisfaction of giving people an enjoyable experience or day out.

For further information about the role, support in filling in the form, or any other queries, please contact Mark Tebbs on 01752 361577 or email volunteer@tamarcrossings.org.uk

To get in touch contact visit@tamarcrossings.org.uk <https://www.bridgingthetamar.org.uk>

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