

Tendering a ferry service: commitment to quality



**Transnational engagement ensures
a successful procurement process.**

Gravesend-Tilbury ferry

As part of the iTransfer project, Kent County Council and Thurrock Council in southern England developed a tender for the provision of the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry service. With no previous experience in ferry operations, the project enabled Kent County Council to access best practice and experiences acquired by ferry operators and other local authorities in conducting a full procurement for a passenger ferry service.

Background and challenges

Tendering of a passenger ferry service can help secure vessel and service enhancements at an affordable rate, reduce the need for subsidies, and ensure that the service is commercially viable.

Carrying out a thorough procurement process demonstrates a commitment to quality of service and achieving value for money, which can, in turn, help local authorities to fund ferry operations for as long as possible and garner continued political support.

For a number of years, Kent County Council jointly subsidised the operation of the Gravesend-Tilbury ferry service with Thurrock Council as it meets important economic and social needs, providing access to employment, education and leisure. It also acts as a viable alternative to road transport across the Thames via the heavily congested Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing.

The investment in a pontoon on the New Town Pier (see iTransfer case study: 01) enabled Kent and Thurrock Councils to carry out an open tender and address the sustainability of new vessels and services to provide improved accessibility for passengers. The councils included improvements in the service within the procurement criteria whilst maintaining value for money and cost-effectiveness.

The councils set out to create a comprehensive and fit for purpose set of documents to enable the running of a procurement process, ultimately leading to the award of a new contract. The first tender received no compliant bids, and will be reissued. It will take into account advice from iTransfer partners and involve more detailed engagement with its potential market.

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Ferry from the pontoon

Transnational engagement

Kent County Council hosted a transnational ferry tendering workshop at Gravesend in October 2012 to forge new connections with iTransfer partners, particularly those in the ferry industry and other public sector authorities. The wide range of transnational partners brought varied experience and expertise to the workshop and partners suggested options for the tendering of a passenger service at Gravesend.

Like many local authorities, Kent had no experience in ferry operations and relied on partners to share information on the nuances of ferry tendering. The council received important advice on integrating ferry services into the wider transport system in Kent and the surrounding region, which has contributed to the council's wider aims of promoting efficient, low-emission, sustainable transport.

Funding through iTransfer allowed the council to appoint a specialist consultant to provide advice on constructing the tender documents. The project also enabled Kent to work with Gravesend Borough Council to develop a new pontoon at Gravesend to accommodate larger vessels and create a business case for potential new services from the landing, which was also part-funded by the iTransfer.

A report produced by the council on the tendering of the ferry service has provided useful advice to iTransfer partners as well as other organisations and local authorities embarking on the same process. The set of tender and contract documents can be used as the basis for the procurement and management of similar services.

Lessons learned

The passenger ferry market is very different to other local transport modes, such as buses. Bus operators will readily take short-term contracts, whereas ferry operators, who may need to invest in bespoke vessels with long payback periods, will require longer contracts to provide a high standard of service.

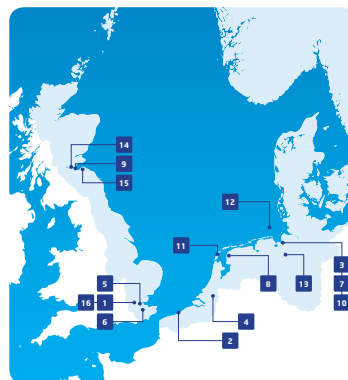
Procurement of high quality vessels can help to address sustainability and accessibility of services. In turn, this gives local authorities the confidence to invest in these measures.

Longer-term contracts provide opportunities to integrate services more effectively with the wider public transport system. Confidence in service provision can lead to investment in environmentally-friendly vessels, alternative fuels, ICT and through-ticketing.

Organisations tailor passenger ferry services to their local market. Before carrying out a tendering process, it is necessary to be clear on what is expected and is affordable, giving careful consideration to how the tender process will be run. Incorporating requirements such as sustainability and accessibility into the tender process, whilst still maintaining cost-effectiveness, should also be considered.

iTransfer

iTransfer (Innovative Transport Solutions for Fjords, Estuaries and Rivers) aims to make ferry transport more freely accessible and sustainable, and encourage more people to travel by water. In areas in the North Sea Region (NSR) there are opportunities to replace existing vehicle routes with passenger ferries as a viable alternative. Travelling by ferry is more sustainable, easier and quicker. It can also provide lifeline services to remote communities.



Lead partner

1. Institute for Sustainability (UK)

Partners

2. AG Port of Oostende (Belgium)
3. Erlebnis Bremerhaven GmbH, Bremerhaven Touristik (Germany)
4. Damen Shipyards (Netherlands)
5. Gravesend Borough Council (UK)
6. Kent County Council (UK)
7. Magistrat Bremerhaven (Germany)
8. Rederij Doeksen (Netherlands)
9. SEStran (UK)
10. Weserfähre GmbH (Germany)
11. TESO (Netherlands)

Sub partners to Erlebnis Bremerhaven GmbH, Bremerhaven Touristik

12. Helgoland (Germany)
13. Hal över (Germany)

Sub partners to SEStran

14. Maid of the Forth (UK)
15. East Lothian Council (UK)

Sub partner to the Institute for Sustainability

16. UCL Energy Institute (UK)



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