

Fullers seeks independent advice on cost of Waiheke ferry subsidy

At a private meeting on Monday, CEO Mike Horne said Fullers is seeking independent financial advice on the cost of subsidising Waiheke services, and Mayor Phil Goff said an official database will track the reliability of the ferry service.

The meeting was also attended by Waiheke local board chairperson Cath Handley and Auckland councillors including Mike Lee and Chris Darby.

"It was very much a meeting in which Fullers were fiercely defending their corner. Suggesting that things are rosy and perfect with 99 percent efficiency."
- Councillor Chris Darby

The Mayor said if the Waiheke ferry service's exemption from Auckland Transport's network ended, the cost of subsidising the service would be high.

Cr Darby who set up a change.org page, which has garnered over 3000 signatures calling for Fullers to come under the Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM), said "it was very much a meeting in which Fullers were fiercely defending their corner. Suggesting that things are rosy and perfect with 99 percent efficiency."

However, commuter feedback at a packed public meeting on Waiheke on 9 June and data supplied by ferry users to



Councillor Chris Darby speaks to the crowd at the AT and Fullers public meeting on 9 June. Photo Sophie Boladeras

Ms Handley says otherwise, which is why the official database is being implemented.

Mr Horne says many of the company's service issues have now been addressed, "while some specific areas require ongoing focus and improvement - specifically customer communication and the locals' lane for Waiheke residents.

"We're already seeing positive results from these changes coming through in our June performance indicators."

Mr Horne said he reiterated Fullers' support for integrated ticketing and the transport minister's review of PTOM.

"Fullers360 remains fully committed to working collaboratively with local and central government."

Cr Darby says although Fullers say they are open to a review, "I don't see them being open to having the exempt status removed.

"There is so much advantage for them, particularly commercial advantage."

The councillor says Fullers could give 15 days notice and relinquish its exempt status.

"About a year ago Fullers went to AT and said 'it's no longer profitable for us to run this (Stanley Bay ferry service) as a contract service', and they gave notice that they would relinquish the exempt status. Under the law, all they have to do is give 15 working days notice.

"Since becoming a contract service, the patronage on the Stanley Bay service has increased substantially, and the reliability of the service has gone up as well."

Although the ferry company can relinquish its exempt status on the Waiheke and Devonport routes, it's unlikely, and in the meantime board chair Cath Handley says she's hopeful that as long as the current momentum remains the chances of achieving change are good.

"Albeit it's always at a cost to someone. If Waiheke were to get reduced fares, they would be subsidised by either ratepayers or government. It's another step for council to work that out." • Sophie Boladeras



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