

Mayor asks for exemption to be revoked

Following a private meeting last week to address Waiheke ferry users' concerns, Auckland Mayor Phil Goff spoke with *Gulf News* about what can be done to improve the situation.

"My personal view is that ferries are an integral part of the Auckland public transport system, subsidised or not, and that they should be integrated with the overall system and be subject to the same oversight - that's my preference."

In a letter to the Minister of Transport Phil Twyford, the Mayor and Councillor Chris Darby said, "recent media attention and our discussions with Auckland Transport, the Chair of the Waiheke Local Board, Fullers and other stakeholders have reinforced our view that you should consider revoking the exempt services status of these ferry services."

The letter dated 7 June went on to say that revoking Fullers' exempt status would allow Auckland Transport to drive improvements to service standards and provide better integration of ferry services with on-land timetables and pricing for bus and train services.

"In order to provide quality assurance and predictability to Waiheke and Devonport residents, we request that the New Zealand Transport Agency

commence the process to transition to services contracted to Auckland Transport under the Public Transport Operating Model."

Mr Goff says of particular concern is a discrepancy between Fullers statistics and commuter and public feedback.

"Fullers are saying their performance shows that they are running at 99.5 percent reliability in June and that punctuality for the month was 99 percent. That is not the perception of Waiheke Islanders, and I've



Mayor Goff says that in the first instance, the quickest way to remedy issues with ferry cancellations, delays and people being left off sailings is to work directly with Fullers.

suggested that (Waiheke board chairperson) Cath Handley and Mike Horne get together so we're working with a common database."

Mr Goff says that in the first instance, the quickest way to remedy issues with cancellations, delays and people being left off sailings is to work directly with the ferry company.

"A wider discussion is around the exemption and whether there should be accountability by Fullers to Auckland Transport. Fullers' response on that is that they are already exceeding

the standards required by AT around reliability and punctuality and they are also saying if you want to remove the exemption, then you're going to have to subsidise us."

Mr Goff says he welcomes the fact that Fullers has acknowledged that there is inadequate transparency around the nature of the services.

"We have referred the exemption to the minister already, saying there should be some proper oversight as to the quality of the service being given, with or without subsidies. Before Wellington intervenes, let's see what we can achieve directly between Fullers and the local community because that's the quickest way of addressing the concerns that exist."

Fullers say changes have been made since the public meeting held on Waiheke on 9 June and the company is seeing positive results coming through in this month's performance indicators.

"We understand that one delay or cancellation can disrupt a customer's day and negatively impact their perception. While we can't control disruptions due to fog, we're working hard to make improvements in areas we can control," says CEO Mike Horne. Although the recent public meeting provided Fullers and ferry users with direct communication, Mr Goff says there is a need for improvement in "communication and expectations about what people require from Fullers and what Fullers can deliver". • *Sophie Boladeras*

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