

RO-RO AT PORT RAMSGATE

A note prepared for Ramsgate Regeneration Alliance 19th January 2023.

THE PROPOSAL

- On 28th October 2022, TDC released a detailed statement of their proposals for the regeneration of Port Ramsgate utilising £3,510,000 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF), to be supported by an un-sourced £1,000,000 in match funding, for infrastructure regeneration to accommodate a proposed freight only ro-ro service between Ramsgate and Oostende. The expenditure of £3,510,000 will be used to regenerate the infrastructure, berths 2 and 3, required to facilitate docking. Loading/unloading, customs clearance and parking required by the operation required to process accompanied and unaccompanied freight vessels.
- Vessel operators will book berthing slots on an ad hoc basis for freight movements between Ramsgate and Ostende, a sailing time of 4.5 hours.
- The proposed service will require 48% of the surface area of the port being 63,360 sq meters of the total area of 132,000 sq meters.
- TDC have not produced a business plan to support this proposal but have expressed confidence in the general proposition and stated that they have had discussions with some interested operators.

OUR CONCERNS

Since the collapse of TransEuropa Ferries in 2012/13, TDC have been attempting to bring a ferry operation back to the port. These attempts, whilst enthusiastically promoted by TDC, have largely failed with the exception of an ad hoc GEFCO car importation service from 2015/16 to 2019/20.

In the period 2017 to 2019 TDC were in negotiation with Seaborne Freight to establish a new service to Oostende. These negotiations collapsed with the result that no service was implemented, the Secretary of State resigned, the Government had to pay compensation to other cross channel operators of £50,000,000. In fact, since the Trans Europa failure:

- 7 port proposals never got out of the starting blocks
- 9 operators have considered and rejected the port
- a number of 'investment claims' have failed to materialise, Seaborne being the most significant.

Whilst these attempts to re-establish a service were ongoing, the financial performance of the port has been appalling. The attached analysis is revealing, specifically:

- Cumulative losses for the period 2010/11 to 2020/21 stand at £32 million
- Average expenditure during that period has been £4,264,000 per year
- Average income in the same period has been £ 1,350,000 per year – that is, expenditure has been on average 3.6 times greater than income.

The underlying cause of these losses has been the relatively high fixed cost of maintaining the port infrastructure required for a ferry service which never materialised.

Whilst the claim is now made that further LUF investment of £3,513,750 will redeem the situation, no verifiable business model has been provide to support this contention.

History clearly demonstrates that the future of the port as a freight ferry operator must be seriously questioned and, indeed, alternative uses for the space zoned for this purpose should be urgently considered especially since the present zoning places significant restrictions of other possible uses.

We would be pleased to work with TDC to define these options and have an immediate proposal relating to the proposed Green Campus which we offer consideration.