



Embargoed 3.30PM 19 November 2025

Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme

Media Briefing

Date: 19 November 2025



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Overview

Introduction:

The Government is announcing the plan for the Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme on 19 November 2025, confirming two new rail-enabled ferries to be delivered by 2029. The plan upgrades and reuses parts of Wellington's existing port infrastructure, while rebuilding Picton's facilities and delivering new assets for both ports. This approach offers an efficient and cost-effective solution to replace the ageing Interislander fleet and ensures long-term resilience for cross-strait transport.

Summary:

Since its launch in April 2025, Ferry Holdings Limited has delivered on its foundational commitments by embarking on a closed tender process for two new rail-enabled Cook Strait ferries and progressing port infrastructure agreements with CentrePort and Port Marlborough. These milestones were achieved within the first six months and demonstrate FHL's ability to meet government timelines. The company's early progress underscores its role in leading a nationally significant infrastructure programme that supports safe, reliable, and resilient inter-island transport.

Key Messages – Ship Procurement Work Programme

- **Ferry Holdings delivers on Governments promise of two new Cook Strait Ferrys to enter service by 2029.**
- Ferry Holdings is delivering two new rail-enabled ferries in 2029 that will provide a safe, reliable, and future-ready inter-island transport solution across Cook Strait. These vessels are designed to meet growing demand, improve environmental performance, and enhance resilience to climate-related challenges.

Supporting detail or statistic

Each ferry will be 200 metres in length and 28 metres in width with capacity for 1,530 passengers, and 2.4 kilometres of lanes for trucks and 40 rail wagons—significantly increasing capacity compared to the current fleet. They are structurally designed for a minimum 30-year service life and will incorporate energy-saving features to reduce carbon emissions and comply with future environmental standards.

- **Quote:**
“These vessels are not just replacements, they are a generational investment in New Zealand’s maritime and rail future, built to deliver value, resilience, and sustainability for decades to come.” Chris Mackenzie, Chair Ferry Holdings Limited.



A digital video and other ship graphics can be accessed here:

[Download Media - Ferry Holdings](#)

For more information on the two new ferries please visit www.ferryholdings.co.nz¹

¹ This site will be updated at 3.30pm on 19 November 2025.

Infrastructure Work Programme

- ***Ferry Holdings is delivering fit-for-purpose port infrastructure in Wellington and Picton to support the new rail-enabled Cook Strait ferries, using a “minimum viable and maximum reuse” approach to reduce costs, and delivery.***
- The programme incorporates climate adaptation planning using the SSP3–7 GSG² emissions framework, and is progressing commercial arrangements with CentrePort, Port Marlborough, and KiwiRail to maximise reuse of existing assets and deliver value-for-money outcomes.
- Working with CentrePort, Port Marlborough, and KiwiRail, Ferry Holdings is maximising the reuse of existing port, rail, and roading assets, while undertaking targeted upgrades where required.
- Infrastructure design is informed by climate adaptation modelling (SSP3–7 GSG)
- The commercial arrangements are structured to ensure transparency, value for money, and alignment with national infrastructure goals.
- Ferry Holdings is purchasing two new linkspans for both Picton and Wellington. The procurement process for this infrastructure will be led by Port Marlborough with input from CentrePort.
- *“We are delivering the infrastructure New Zealand needs—by reusing what works and upgrading only what’s essential. It’s a smart, sustainable approach that puts public value first.” Chris Mackenzie – Chair Ferry Holdings*
- For more information on the overarching Infrastructure Work Programme please visit www.ferryholdings.co.nz³

Stylised and simplified port infrastructure graphics can be accessed here:

[Download Media - Ferry Holdings](#)

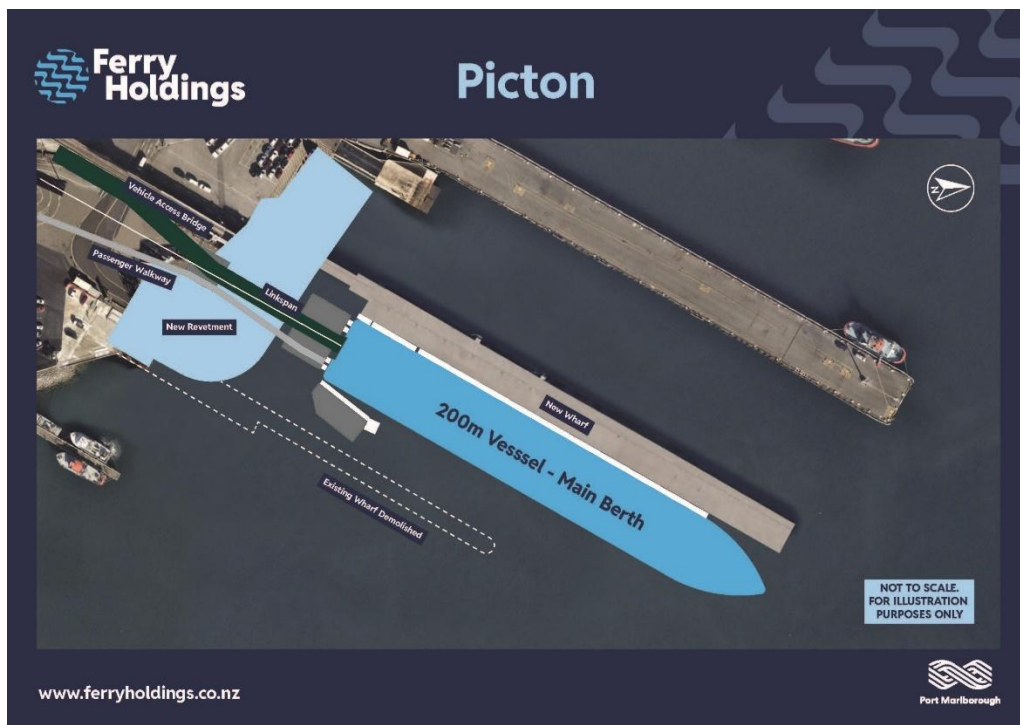
² SSP3–7.0, is a higher emissions scenario used to model future climate change impacts like sea level rise. Ferry Holdings will allow for potential sea level rise in line with this modelling within the design of the new port -test port infrastructure—such as linkspans and wharves—against projected climate conditions, ensuring resilience and operational reliability over a 30-year service life.

³ This site will be updated at 3.30pm on 19 November 2025.

Port Marlborough Infrastructure Work Programme

Port Marlborough and Ferry Holdings are investing in new infrastructure to support the next generation of ferries and ensure safe, reliable, and efficient operations for passengers and freight.

These upgrades will replace aging infrastructure, improve connectivity, and allow ferry and port operations to continue smoothly during construction.



Key works include:

- **Replacing end-of-life infrastructure:** Some of Port Marlborough's existing infrastructure has reached the end of its service life and needs to be replaced. To support the arrival of new ferries, the port will construct a new wharf, a new linkspan, a vehicle access bridge, and a passenger walkway.
- **Defined scope of works:** Port Marlborough has developed concept designs, and the scope of work is well defined for this stage of development. Details such as the final location of the linkspan will be refined through ongoing design work.

- **Transition infrastructure during construction:** Temporary infrastructure will be put in place to ensure the Interislander and other port activities can continue during the build whilst ensuring efficient operations. Only the minimum level of transition infrastructure needed to maintain operations will be delivered.

Port Marlborough is partnering with KiwiRail and other stakeholders to design infrastructure solutions that support efficient ferry operations and help future-proof the port for regional growth.

“The ministerial announcement today on funding and procurement gives us a clear pathway forward. Our priority is to deliver the infrastructure for the next generation of Interislander vessels while keeping New Zealand’s supply chain moving smoothly. Cook Strait ferries are a critical link for the country, and Port Marlborough is ready”. Port Marlborough Chief Executive Rhys Welbourn

For more information on the detailed Port Marlborough programme please visit

<https://portmarlborough.co.nz/waitohi-ferry-redevelopment-project/>

Stylised and simplified port infrastructure graphics can be accessed here:

[Download Media - Ferry Holdings](#)

CentrePort Infrastructure Work Programme

CentrePort and Ferry Holdings are upgrading Wellington's port infrastructure to support future ferry services, balancing the reuse of existing assets with new construction to ensure safe, efficient, and future-ready operations.

These upgrades will enable CentrePort to accommodate new ships, improve passenger and freight connections, and support Interislander's long-term growth—while working to minimise disruption to port activities.



- **Key works include:**
 - **Upgrading existing infrastructure:** The current wharf and berthing pockets will be upgraded, and the vehicle access bridge will be largely retained to support operations.
 - **Building new infrastructure:** A new dual-level linkspan, linkspan approach structure, and passenger walkway will be constructed to accommodate the new ships. Initial plans to reuse the existing linkspan and approach structure were found to be technically infeasible.
 - **Assessing operational impacts:** The project team is evaluating how these changes may affect Aotea Quay operations. CentrePort is in the early phases of design. Further work is underway to finalise the specifications

for the linkspan, rail alignment, and the length of wharf extension required.

CentrePort is working closely with its key partners to develop solutions that meet operational needs while supporting KiwiRail's projected long-term passenger and freight growth.

"The design specification requires that the connections to the new ferries (by vehicle, rail car or on foot) from the port will meet an operational lifespan of 30 years. CentrePort can meet this requirement while focusing on reusing what works and only upgrading the essentials." Lachie Johnstone - Chair CentrePort.

For more information on the CentrePort programme of work please visit [<https://www.centreport.co.nz/what-we-do/ferries>]

Stylised and simplified port infrastructure graphics can be accessed here:
[Download Media - Ferry Holdings](#)

KiwiRail Infrastructure Work Programme

KiwiRail and Ferry Holdings are investing in modest infrastructure upgrades to enable seamless integration of new ferry services and enhance operational efficiency across the Wellington and Picton terminals.

These improvements will reduce local traffic congestion, support more efficient freight and passenger movement, and ensure long-term resilience of New Zealand's inter-island transport network.

Key works include:

- **Rail overbridge at Dublin Street, Picton:** This enables more efficient port operations and reduces local traffic congestion.
- **Terminal upgrades in Wellington and Picton:** Modest but essential improvements to support rail operations linked to new ferry services.

KiwiRail will coordinate the delivery of their infrastructure projects to ensure seamless integration and timely completion of all works by 2029.

KiwiRail is working with its key partners to deliver land-based infrastructure to meet today's operational demands but also lay the foundation for sustainable, long-term growth.

“The Government’s signing of a contract for two new rail-enabled Cook Strait ferries and confirmation of the port improvements needed in Wellington and Picton to accommodate the new ships is welcome news.” KiwiRail Chief Executive, Peter Reidy.

For more information on the detailed KiwiRail programme please visit

<https://www.kiwirail.co.nz/our-business/interislander/cook-strait-ferry-replacement-programme/>

Roles and responsibilities of key partners

Ferry Holdings works in partnership with KiwiRail, CentrePort, and Port Marlborough to deliver new ferries and port facilities for Cook Strait. We also work closely with the Treasury and the Ministry of Transport.

CentrePort and Port Marlborough will deliver the required infrastructure work programmes for the successful operation of the new ferry service. KiwiRail is providing rail and customer experience expertise across the project, will be making some changes to existing terminal rail and vehicle yards to align them with the ports' new infrastructure, and is building a new road bridge over the rail line in Picton to remove a level crossing.

NZTA enables safe and efficient access to ferry terminals by managing state highways, delivering key infrastructure like the Picton State Highway Improvements project, and working with partners to align transport networks.

Cook Strait Ferry Replacement timeline

- The New Zealand Government established Ferry Holdings in March 2025 to procure two new rail-enabled ferries for Cook Strait and deliver the required infrastructure in Picton and Wellington
- Following an extensive procurement process, Guangzhou Shipyard International Co Ltd. (GSI) has been confirmed as the successful shipyard, with construction beginning in 2027.
- Both ferries will be completed by 2029, alongside upgraded port infrastructure in Wellington and Picton, ensuring a fully integrated transport solution.

Total estimated costs of the Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme

The overall cost of the programme is currently estimated at \$1.86 billion but less than \$2 billion.

The total taxpayer contribution will be less than \$1.7 billion.

Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme estimated costs	\$m
Ship contracts	596 ⁴
All Picton works	531
All Wellington works	325
Programme management and total contingencies	415
Total	1,867

⁴ This value is based on the estimated foreign exchange rate

Media assets available – embargoed until 3.30pm 19 November 2025

These materials are provided to support the Minister for Rail's announcement on 19 November 2025.

- **Media statements**
 - Ferry Holdings Chair – Media Release
 - CentrePort Chair – Media Release
 - Port Marlborough Chief Executive – Media Release
 - KiwiRail Chief Executive – Media Release
- **Images** These digital assets can be downloaded from [here]
 - Ship video
 - Stylised ferry graphics
 - Stylised port infrastructure graphics
- **Fact sheet**
 - Ferry Holdings ship specification fact sheet
 - Guangzhou Shipyard International fact sheet

Spokespeople

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ferry Holdings Media Statement



Media Statement – Ferry Holdings Limited **Embargoed until 3.30 PM, 19 November 2025**

Ferry Holdings Limited welcomes the Government’s investment decisions to progress the Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme.

This announcement marks a significant milestone in delivering a resilient, low-emission, and future-ready transport solution for New Zealand. The procurement of two new rail-enabled ferries, alongside targeted infrastructure upgrades at Wellington and Picton, reflects a collaborative commitment to modernising inter-island connectivity.

“These vessels are not just replacements, they are a generational investment in New Zealand’s maritime and rail future, built to deliver value, resilience, and sustainability for decades to come,” said Chris Mackenzie, Chair of Ferry Holdings Limited.

Ferry Holdings is also delivering fit-for-purpose port infrastructure using a “minimum viable and maximum reuse” approach to reduce costs, and delivery risk. “We are delivering the infrastructure New Zealand needs—by reusing what works and upgrading only what’s essential. It’s a smart, sustainable approach that puts public value first,” added Chris Mackenzie.

Since its establishment in March 2025, Ferry Holdings has worked closely with KiwiRail, CentrePort, Port Marlborough, and government agencies to ensure the programme meets national transport needs and delivers value for money.

‘We look forward to continuing our partnership with stakeholders to deliver safe, reliable, and sustainable ferry services in 2029.’

For media enquiries:

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Appendix 2 Port Marlborough Media Statement



19 NOVEMBER 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED until 3.30pm Wednesday 19th November

Port Marlborough welcomes the Government's announcement confirming funding, procurement of the new ships, and the next phase of the Cook Strait Ferry Replacement Programme. This decision brings the certainty needed to progress the delivery stage of the Waitohi Ferry Redevelopment Project and ensures the national State Highway connection is ready for the future.

In Waitohi Picton, the redevelopment project is delivering the infrastructure required to support the new vessels and to maintain continuity for all customers during construction. This includes a new wharf, a new linkspan, upgrades to terminal connections, and the relocation and reuse of the existing passenger walkway. KiwiRail is also progressing the new Dublin Street overbridge to improve safety and efficiency by separating road and rail movements.

The project team is carefully staging works to maintain business continuity across the port. This includes enabling works and operational planning to ensure customers remain supported through each phase.

"The ministerial announcement today on funding and procurement gives us a clear pathway forward. Our priority is to deliver the infrastructure for the next generation of Interislander vessels while keeping New Zealand's supply chain moving smoothly. Cook Strait ferries are a critical link for the country, and Port Marlborough is ready.

As the South Island facilitator of New Zealand's State Highway and main rail connection, we bring proven operational expertise, a complete and modern towage fleet, and a project team with deep engineering and infrastructure experience. Port Marlborough has managed ferry and cruise activity in the Sounds for many years, and that experience positions us well for what comes next. We are ready to progress and support the next stage of programme delivery," said Port Marlborough Chief Executive Rhys Welbourn.

Port Marlborough looks forward to moving into the delivery phase of this nationally significant project, and will continue working closely with Ferry Holdings, KiwiRail, central and local government, iwi partners, and industry stakeholders. Our shared goal is a ferry

Embargoed until 3.30PM 19 November 2025

precinct that supports safe, reliable, and sustainable services while enabling regional development and long-term transport needs. **# Ends**

For media enquiries: Connie Smith – GM Communications and Engagement |

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Appendix 3 CentrePort Media Statement



19 November 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

CentrePort welcomes ferry programme investment

CentrePort today joined with Minister for Rail Winston Peters in announcing the Government's investment to continue to progress the Cook Strait Ferry Replacement programme.

CentrePort Board Chair Lachie Johnstone says CentrePort remains committed to supporting this project and working collaboratively with the multiple parties involved.

"This is another positive milestone to have reached in the programme and heralds more clarity about what will be delivered," Johnstone says.

He echoes the Minister's comments about the new ferries being a generational investment that considers value, resilience and sustainability.

"CentrePort places a high value on these things as a private entity that is owned by two shareholding councils. We like to ensure that what we do is good for business and for people, which this project will provide for the benefit, safety and resilience of freight and passengers across the Cook Strait."

Mr Johnstone says that confirming a 'minimum viable and maximum reuse' approach to the project's maritime infrastructure will still offer long-term benefits and allows for the region's longer-term aspirations for a multi-user ferry terminal located at Kaiwharawhara.

"The design specification requires that the connections to the new ferries (by vehicle, rail car or on foot) from the port will meet an operational lifespan of 30 years. CentrePort can meet this requirement while focusing on reusing what works and only upgrading the essentials."

CentrePort looks forward to working with Ferry Holdings, KiwiRail, Port Marlborough and Government Ministers as the Ferry Replacement Programme progresses and to celebrating further milestones on the passage to new ferries being delivered and put into service from 2029.

ENDS

For queries, please contact: Andree Kai Fong
CentrePort Communications and Engagement Manager
Email: andree.kaifong@centreport.co.nz

Appendix 4 KiwiRail Media Statement



KiwiRail proactive media statement – 19 November Ferry announcement Embargoed 3.30pm 19 November 2025

The Government's signing of a contract for two new rail-enabled Cook Strait ferries and confirmation of the port improvements needed in Wellington and Picton to accommodate the new ships is welcome news, KiwiRail Chief Executive Peter Reidy says.

"There is still a lot of work to do ahead of the new ferries arriving in 2029, but this announcement is another milestone in securing the crucial rail connection between the North and South islands.

"The new ferries will ensure the competitive operating cost for rail freight and increased capacity for road transport operators and passengers."

Mr Reidy says KiwiRail is working closely with Ferry Holdings Ltd, CentrePort and Port Marlborough NZ on the rail and customer experience aspects of the ferry design and landside infrastructure.

"There will be temporary changes at both Wellington and Picton as the two port companies carry out their infrastructure upgrades, and we will work closely with them to ensure there is minimal impact on customers.

"KiwiRail will be making some rail and vehicle yard changes at the two terminals, to align them with the new port infrastructure. We are also leading the delivery of a new road bridge over the rail line in Picton's Dublin Street, improving safety by removing the existing rail level crossing. This builds upon State Highway improvements NZTA is undertaking in the area and Marlborough District Council's planned truck park."

The Dublin St overbridge is currently going through the design process.

"Until the new ships arrive, Interislander will continue providing a reliable and safe Cook Strait service with our current ferries Kaitaki and Kaiārahi," Mr Reidy says.

"Interislander's reliability remains at 100% for the financial year to date and was on target at 98% the previous year. Our road bridging operation for rail freight is running well, and we are ready for the busy summer peak."

For queries, please contact: Britton Broun Mobile: 027 406 7345

Appendix 6 Cook Strait Ferry Programme Ships Fact Sheet

Deck layout

The new ships have 11 decks:

- Three of the decks will be accessible for passengers
- Three decks will be accessible for freight, rail and cars
- One deck will be crew accommodation
- The remaining three decks will house operational equipment.

Ship dimensions:

- 200 metres long and 28 metres wide.

Capacity:

- 1530 passengers and 70 crew.
- The new ferries will be integrated with the rail system, featuring efficient active loading/unloading arrangements and port compatibility.
- The two new ferries will boost freight lane metres by 44%, accommodate both road and rail, and provide 63% more passenger space. Their design allows for efficient transport of mixed freight types.

Portside infrastructure working to maximise reuse for the new ships:

- The new ships will maximise the use of existing infrastructure as much as possible.

Advanced hybrid propulsion and enhanced ship control systems

- The new Cook Strait ferries use a modern power and propulsion system called a diesel-electric hybrid with batteries. This means they are fitted with diesel engines that can use diesel or biofuel to generate electricity for main propulsion and onboard services, but they also have electric batteries to store energy and to supplement power for the ship. These batteries have the capability to be recharged at sea and using power from the shore, which helps save fuel and is better for the environment.
- One of the key features is that the ferries can easily switch between using diesel and electric power. This helps them use less fuel, produce fewer emissions, and keep running smoothly, even in tough weather or sea conditions. The batteries provide additional redundancy with a spinning reserve.
- For steering and docking, the ferries have special steering units called azimuth thrusters. These can turn in any direction, making the ships easy to control.

and allowing them to dock quickly and safely. The propulsion system and bow thrusters have been specified to be capable to crab the ship⁵ at 1 knot in 40 knots of wind from any direction. This capability is far greater than current Interislander ferries.

- The azimuth thrusters reduce vibrations and underwater radiated noise.
- Overall, these new ferries are designed to be safer, cleaner, and more reliable for everyone travelling across Cook Strait and for the marine environment.

New Cook Strait ferries lead the way in sustainable transport with hybrid technology

- The new Cook Strait ferries are designed to be environmentally friendly, featuring hybrid propulsion and battery technology that enables significant emissions reductions.
- Their hulls and propulsion systems are optimised to minimise wake energy, protecting shorelines and sensitive marine environments. Additionally, the ferries comply with international maritime standards for emissions, ballast water management, and noise control, ensuring a sustainable and responsible operation.

Sustainable hull and propulsion design

- The new Cook Strait ferries are designed with modern technology to make crossings more efficient, comfortable, and environmentally friendly.
- Using diesel-electric hybrid power plant and advanced hull designs, the ferries use less fuel, reduce emissions, and protect New Zealand's coastline and marine life.
- Passengers and cargo benefit from improved safety and smoother journeys, even in challenging conditions.
- The ferries meet strict environmental standards, including international regulations for pollution control, and can be upgraded to use cleaner fuels as technology develops.
- These new vessels are expected to cut carbon emissions compared to the current fleet, leading to a significant reduction in KiwiRail's overall emissions.

⁵ "Crab the ship" refers to a manoeuvre where the vessel is intentionally angled or steered slightly sideways relative to its forward motion to compensate for external forces like wind or current. This technique is commonly used in ferry operations when:

- **Docking or berthing:** Ferries often need to approach a wharf in strong crosswinds or tidal currents. By "crabbing," the captain keeps the vessel's actual track aligned with the dock while the bow points slightly into the wind or current.

They are built to operate safely in emergencies and will help New Zealand's transport sector become more sustainable.

- These vessels are purpose-built for the unique conditions of the Cook Strait, incorporating advanced diesel-electric hybrid propulsion systems with battery support. This setup allows for flexible switching between diesel and electric power, reducing fuel consumption and emissions while maintaining operational resilience in challenging weather and sea states.
- The hull and propulsion systems are optimised to minimise wake energy, helping protect sensitive coastal and marine environments. The ferries also meet international standards for emissions, ballast water management, and noise control, and are capable of future upgrades to cleaner fuels as technology evolves.
- From a safety perspective, the vessels are designed to comply with the latest international safety standards, including Safe Return to Port requirements and Operational Reliability Class Notation. The design philosophy treats the ship as its own lifeboat, with multiple layers of redundancy built into critical systems.
- In the event of a maritime incident, the Cook Strait ferries are designed to Safe Return to Port rules, and are equipped with fit-for-purpose, robust safety and operational systems designed to remain fully functional.
- These key systems—including power and propulsion, navigation, communications, fire safety, watertight controls, and critical monitoring—ensure the vessel can continue safe operations for up to 12 hours at reduced speed, even in severe weather conditions.
- This capability enables the ferry to reach a safe port without external assistance, prioritising the safety of passengers and crew while maintaining essential vessel integrity.

New ferries designed for long-term carbon reduction and sustainable transport

- The new Cook Strait ferries are built to reduce carbon emissions over their 30-year lifespan by using innovative designs, hybrid propulsion systems, and are capable of shifting to more sustainable fuels.

Delivery of a comfortable and enjoyable experience for passengers.

- The new ferries are designed to provide passengers with a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable journey, reflecting a commitment to high standards of customer experience and seamless travel.

- They are designed to minimise noise and vibration to provide passenger and crew with a comfortable living environment.
- Interior wise, the layout is highly flexible, with areas that can be closed off to save energy and reduce crew requirements depending on the demand.
- Despite the customisation, the design leverages standard equipment and smart choices to keep costs in check. The ferries will accommodate up to 1,530 passengers and 2,400 lane metres of vehicles, including full rail capability significantly improving capacity and efficiency compared to the current fleet.

Appendix 7 Guangzhou Shipyard International (GSI)

Guangzhou Shipyard International (GSI) is a leading shipbuilder with a strong international reputation for quality and innovation. Key strengths include:

1. **Extensive experience:** GSI has delivered quality Ro-Pax vessels for major European ferry operators and government clients, with seven new ships scheduled through 2029.
2. **Comprehensive in-house capabilities:** All stages of shipbuilding are managed in-house, supported by a dedicated team of over 1,500 engineers and flexibility to work with external designers as needed.
3. **Advanced design, engineering and production facilities** GSI offers advanced steel production, laser cutting, large dry docks for multiple ferries, and extensive fit-out quays. Their facilities enable efficient, high-quality production, with most major construction completed on-site.
4. **Structured project management:** GSI uses structured project management and clear procurement planning to ensure timely delivery.
5. **Quality, compliance, and innovation:** Accredited for quality, occupational health and safety, and environmental management, GSI upholds strict standards for subcontractors.
6. **Crew training and aftercare:** GSI provides comprehensive pre-delivery crew training and onboard maintenance support during the warranty period for technical assistance.

Ferry Holdings



Port Marlborough

