

FRIENDS OF ISLES OF SCILLY TRANSPORT

FRIST Newsletter New Year 2018

At the start of the New Year, FRIST reviews the transport needs of the Islands. Priorities are:

- **Positive and immediate news of the start of the helicopter service.**
- **Significant improvements in freight services which are currently stifling investment in the Islands**
- **A firm IOSSG commitment to a replacement for the Scillonian III**
- **IOSSG to set up Public Consultation Panel**
- **A winter ferry service.**
- **Aid of a Social Character and other economic support.**
- **Publication of a Government plan for transport resilience.**

Christmas 2017 travel again disrupted by fog

For some days before Christmas 2017, there was no flying between Land's End and St Mary's, due to poor visibility. There was a humid westerly wind which turns clear air into fog as it rises up over Land's End – and sometimes St Mary's.

Hundreds of residents and visitors wanting to return to the Islands for Christmas with their families became more and more anxious at the thought of spending Christmas on their own in an hotel in Penzance.

Thankfully, a combination of Tresco boats and St Mary's boats organised high speed jet boat services to Penzance and back –

two hours each way – and managed to get most if not all passengers to their Scilly destinations before Christmas Eve. The crews of these fast boats deserve a massive 'thank-you' for their hard work; the seas were not that calm and some passengers sat outside for the two hour trip – but they got there!

Three days without flying is not uncommon; jet boats are an alternative if there are enough passengers to justify the trip and if it is reasonably calm, but the uncertainty and worry for passengers does take its toll. It is difficult to describe the level of stress and anxiety induced by such disruption, particularly with a knock-on effect on Christmas festivities, carol services and reunions. For some, the discomfort of winter travel is off-putting,

but days of uncertainty and waiting make it intolerable. Nobody can help the weather but an inadequate response and lack of contingency plans is, without doubt, the responsibility of the management of the IOSSG who should make reliability a number one priority. To rely on other passenger transport providers in these circumstances is not fulfilling their duty.

In FRIST's view the only solution is a combination of the new helicopter service and a winter ferry service. The IOSSG should think again about its still ongoing judicial review of the planning application for the Penzance heliport, and listen to the over 9,000 people who signed a petition earlier this year urging the Company to drop its opposition and think of its customers.

IOSSG News and Accounts

IOSSG's Chief Executive Rob Goldsmith resigned in September 2017. Mark Howarth, one of the Non-Executive Directors and Chairman Andrew May, have jointly taken executive roles for the next six months with Mark Howarth as Managing Director.

The announcement comes at a difficult time for the IOSSG. The Company has been reviled for its pursuit of Judicial Review of the handling of the Penzance Heliport planning application by Cornwall Council. The legal challenge was interpreted by many as a naked attempt to protect the Company's effective monopoly on transport between the mainland and the Isles of Scilly at the expense of Islanders' interests.

The IOSSG filed its statutory accounts for the year ending 31 Mar 17 in early January. It shows a rather lacklustre set of figures, given that Cornwall generally experienced a very strong tourism season

in 2016/7. One gets the impression that the Company is capacity constrained such that even in a good trading year it simply has not got the seats to sell. Skybus made a small loss on a £9m turnover (-£48k) versus a small profit £173k in 2015/6.

The strategic report from the CEO notes the £2.585 million investment in purchasing and converting the Mali Rose. This investment is reflected in the accounts with tangible assets rising to £15.2 m (2016 = £12.2m) and a drop in net current assets (going negative £160,460 whereas 2016 was positive £1.701m). There were major costs after 31 March 2017, so the current picture will be grimmer. Perhaps the idea is to sell the Mali Rose for £3m to recover its costs. The Company is lucky it has all those advance ticket sales.

IOSSG filing history/downloads here <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00165746/filing-history>

New Council of the Isles of Scilly

In the May 2017 Council elections, the results reflected strong community concerns about transport links to the mainland. Robert Francis, known for his forthright views on passenger and freight transport, received the most votes in St Mary's. Other candidates whose track records and manifestos emphasising the vital importance of transport improvements were high on the list. Ted Moulson was elected Chairman and Robert Francis elected as Leader of Place (covering transport and infrastructure) and the new Council Chairman issued a statement in July:

'The Council of the Isles of Scilly will be encouraging initiatives to help develop a strong, affordable and resilient passenger

and freight offer for the Island community and our visitors, year round.

'An increase in capacity, competition and a choice of operators is key to a vibrant growing economic environment on the Islands and in West Cornwall.'

The principal priorities are to achieve the greatest level of resilience with a probable combination of the helicopter service and an all year ferry service. Ministers need to find a solution to the vulnerability of these transport links so that the island economy is not decimated if one or more of them fail for whatever reason. 'Aid of a Social Character' is needed to give islanders as individuals reduced fares on any transport modes to enable residents to travel at reduced costs. It would be administered by the Council of the Isles of Scilly and funded by the Department for Transport and available to all on the IOS electoral roll.

FRIST looks forward to supporting the new Council on these and other important initiatives.

IOSSG – fit for purpose?

Some five years ago, during discussions on the Route Partnership, the project to upgrade quays, facilities and craft between the mainland and Scilly, there was an unwritten deal when the scheme was cancelled that the public sector would upgrade the quays and airports and the Steamship Company would procure and fund a new replacement to the Scillonian and aircraft. In 1977 when the current Scillonian was built using a government loan of £1m, the agreement was that the Company would create a sinking fund for when the next replacement vessel was needed.

It is recalled that the Chairman of the IOSSG in 2011 had commented directly to

DfT and Council of the Isles of Scilly officials, that it would be easy to find a second-hand vessel suitable to take over from the Scillonian III. IOSSG had earlier withdrawn from any involvement in the Route Partnership Scheme when it became clear that the use of public funding would require a tendering process for the use of the proposed new vessel. Seven years on, where is the Scillonian IV?

The IOSSG Board continues to state that the company can fund a replacement Scillonian themselves and so did not need the Route Partnership vessel, which would have been specified and owned by Cornwall Council and leased to an operator under certain operating and fares/charges requirements. It was widely believed at the time that the company would have been in a good position to win in a tender process, being already in possession of buildings and facilities to enable a smooth continuation which any outside company would have had difficulty in matching. Nevertheless, IOSSG has always been vociferous that they did not want any subsidy or other Government control.

Now, the public sector has done its best, although hampered by 'Friends of Penzance Harbour', a local opposition group, but where is the replacement for the Scillonian and what is the state of the sinking fund? Every year, the IOSSG directors refer to the replacement, but nothing happens; there is no consultation on the design or timetable for new ship(s).

At the IOSSG 'listening meetings' on each island in late Autumn 2017, islanders expected to be informed about the new passenger vessel, but no information was forthcoming. However, the company stated that the promised public consultation panel would commence in the New Year.

Could this be because the IOSSG cannot afford it, and is wasting what money it has in a freight ship called the Mali Rose? This was bought to replace the Gry Maritha, thought to be too old, too slow and too small. The Mali Rose, by comparison, is very large, so large in fact that it has difficulty in getting into the Wet Dock at Penzance without hitting things. It was not a good buy; it needed a massive amount of replating to its underwater hull where plates were too thin, a defect due to a lack of cathodic protection and apparently not picked up in a survey before the company bought it. Then there was a lot of work to change its use from a Norwegian fish farm support vessel, including housing the crew in a portacabin on deck. Eventually it went out on a sea trial with the MCA inspector on board, during which the bow thruster propeller fell off.

With this repair sorted, the Mali Rose started its commercial service to St Mary's, but on the return, on entering the Penzance dry dock, its control linkage failed and, instead of turning hard to starboard, it accelerated hard forward into a fishing boat. Nobody was hurt, but some serious repairs were needed to the bows of the Mali Rose and, no doubt to the side of the fishing boat.

Then the Mali Rose was reported to have hit the dock wall whilst leaving the dock; this resulted in the Harbourmaster telling the IOSSG that the ship was not going to operate from PZ again until he was satisfied that it could operate regularly and safely without hitting things.

It appears from the 2016/7 accounts, that the Mali Rose has now cost the IOSSG around £3m without doing more than a day's work. It is a very large ship for Penzance wet dock so, if it is allowed to continue to use it, expect a few more accidents. Alternatively, it may be that a

tug will be required to help it manoeuvre.

Why does not the Board admit it made a mistake, sell the Mali, and continue with the Gry Maritha (which now has a new crane, much to the relief of islanders who have had no goods requiring a crane delivered for several weeks before Christmas), supplemented by more freight capacity on a new Scillonian IV?

It is evident that staff morale has been low, although many passengers comment that staff and crews are very friendly and helpful. In particular, the crew of the Gry Maritha work tirelessly to provide a vital freight service to the Islands in hostile weather conditions. The return of the Scillonian each year is always greeted by islanders with relief and affection.

But the Board needs to get a grip! £3m could make a good contribution to a new Scillonian; instead, shareholders see £3m down the drain. Will they hold directors and management to account?

Are the Islands getting the transport services that residents and visitors need?

The present services, Skybus all the year round (subject to 29% of flying days disrupted due to weather), Scillonian March to November and the Gry Maritha for freight, with high costs and often poor service quality, are seen by many as having a substantial impact on consumers – both visitors and residents.

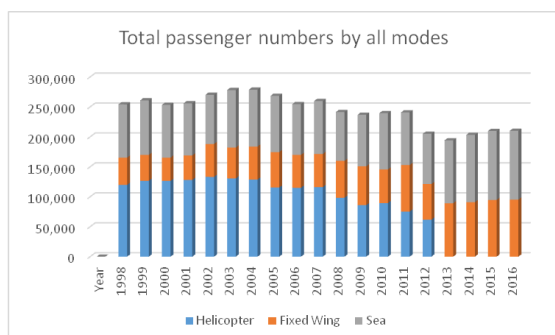
The Isles of Scilly, as a remote part of the UK, are totally reliant on transport supplied by one company for all goods and services both for freight and passengers. Where is the resilience in the event of the Scillonian failing its seaworthiness tests or otherwise being unable to operate? Where are the Government's contingency plans or will

they abandon 2,500 residents and the economically important visitors to oblivion?

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are the only Less Developed Region identified by the European Union in England and, with South Wales and the Valleys, the only two in the UK.

There are implications for healthcare, care of elderly etc., extortionate charging for non-NHS stretcher passengers or those who are unable to climb the steps into the plane. 'Patients' must be strapped into a stretcher and then have the flight to themselves, a very dispiriting as well as expensive experience for some people. There are also difficulties in accessing healthcare due to capacity on flights and lack of resilience.

The economy of the Isles of Scilly is suffering. In recent years, west Cornwall is doing very well with tourism, particularly in the shoulder periods, but this is not replicated in the Isles of Scilly, generally because of transport problems. The decline on Scilly has continued and been



far more aggressive than in Cornwall.

The Islands are at a 'tipping point'. As part of the evidence from the Economic Impact Island Futures Report, submitted as part of the planning application for the Penzance Heliport Scheme, the applicant

collected letters from Scilly based businesses which reported delaying investment until there was improvement to transport links to the Islands.

The 2018 fares quoted to and from the Islands are very high compared to fares on the mainland and to the Islands of Scotland and Northern Ireland:

Skybus: Land's End to St Mary's from £80.00.

Newquay to St Mary's from £102.50

Scillonian: from £49.50

Some of this information is misleading. For example, we recently checked the range of fares and found that only 2% of the Skybus fares on offer were at the lowest quoted figure of the range, and most were up to £10 higher.

The helicopter saga

'Despite all the advantages the isles of Scilly have compared to comparable Islands around the UK, **it is economically and socially stunted by its dependence on a complacent, inefficient transport monopoly** which puts its own interests way ahead of the community interests which it pretends to defend'

FRIST Response to the Isles of Scilly Steamship Group's statement on its application for a judicial review of the planning permission for Penzance heliport.

Islanders and others were delighted when they heard that a helicopter service to and from the mainland would start. They remember with affection the previous service, which was more weather resilient than the fixed wing service that started some years later. The helicopter service competed from 1964 against a passenger ferry service operated by ISSG from 1920 and a fixed wing air service started in

1984. The three services worked well together to provide greater reliability and choice for passengers until 2012.

The helicopter service stopped in 2012 when the company ceased operating this service, largely because of the age of the craft. In its final year, the operation had deteriorated mainly due to the expense and delay in procuring necessary spare parts to keep the craft airborne.

Since then, islanders have suffered from unreliable fixed wing services and a venerable and aged Scillonian which only operates in the summer months.

The new helicopter service, planned by Tresco Estates, would operate between a new heliport at Penzance, St Mary's airport and Tresco. Cornwall Council granted planning permission in February 2016 for the heliport but, soon after, the Isles of Scilly Steamship Group (IOSSG) launched a Judicial review of the planning decision.

Most people saw this as a blocking exercise to stop the heliport and force the new service to run from Land's End Airport. Unfortunately, Land's End Airport has worse visibility restrictions than Penzance and is less convenient for onward transport. Also, it is owned by the IOSSG, albeit having been built with a large percentage of tax-payers' money. It is feared that the IOSSG would ensure that any competing service did not prosper.

The judicial review process is still outstanding, although we understand that Tresco is submitting another planning application to seek to avoid the endless and expensive high court planning hearings that companies with bottomless pockets seek to use to protect their own interests. In terms of public relations, it is difficult to see a reputational recovery of

the IOSSG in the foreseeable future.

The IOSSG is seeking to compromise the range and quality of essential transport services offered to consumers wishing to get to/from the Isles of Scilly. Scheduled passenger services by sea are not available from November to mid-March and so islanders and visitors are wholly dependent upon air transport over the winter months. The introduction of a competing helicopter service would positively impact reliability, quality and choice for customers. There is considerable support from the Isles of Scilly and Penzance residents and business communities for re-establishing a helicopter service as demonstrated by the petition from more than 9,000 signatories.

The IOSSG's stated reason for objecting to the plans for a new Penzance heliport is that the overall investment into transport to and from the Islands would be diluted.

The IOSSG was quoted in the Sunday Times (20 August 2017) 'the IOSSG...denied that it was protecting its monopoly position, saying that it had offered to host the new service at its Land's End Airport.' Although Land's End Airport has, since its rebuild, the most pleasant of the terminal facilities in which to wait (and sometimes wait and wait) the company pays no heed to the time and distance along winding roads from Land's End Airport from the railway station and IOSSG is quoted in the same Sunday Times article that a new heliport at Penzance 'lumbers an already fragile transport system with unnecessary costs and risks.' FRIST however believes that it is the IOSSG actions in pursuing a judicial review that are really damaging the current and future economies of the Isles of Scilly and Penzance opportunities for

PETITION FOR A HELICOPTER SERVICE BETWEEN PENZANCE AND THE ISLES OF SCILLY Campaign created by Samantha Mallon.

In early summer 2017, St Mary's resident Samantha Mallon started a petition:

"We, the residents, visitors and friends of the Isles of Scilly, object to the actions of the Isles of Scilly Steamship Group in seeking to deny us a helicopter service from Penzance.

Penzance is the only logical site as it suffers less from low cloud and fog than Land's End, is close to transport links and has existing tourist facilities.

We demand that the Directors of the Isles of Scilly Steamship Group put islanders first and cease their attempts to prevent a new helicopter service from Penzance.

Why is this so important?

We need a stronger transport system that provides resilience, reliability and choice."

The number of signatures on the petition reached over 10,000, whereas that the total population of the Isles of Scilly is only some 2,300.

growth and investment through improved transport services. See <http://penzanceheliport.co.uk/latest-news/>

STOP PRESS – AMENDED PLANNING APPLICATION SUBMITTED 12 JAN
[://penzanceheliport.co.uk/amended-planning-application-submitted/](http://penzanceheliport.co.uk/amended-planning-application-submitted/)

Instrument approach procedures for St Mary's and Land's End airports

Over a number of years, many on the councils and in the IOSSG have claimed that a new instrument approach system for aircraft at Land's End and St Mary's would dramatically reduce disruption due to fog, which affected flying on 29% of flying days last year.

So FRIST Advisory Group members met Stuart Lindsey, CAA Manager of Airspace Legislation, and Will Nathan, to discuss latest developments on instrument approach procedures.

It was noted that many people referred to EGNOS but the correct overarching

terminology should be RNAV (GNSS) Instrument Approach Procedures. There is no physical installation at each airport, it is literally an RNAV Instrument Approach Procedure to each end – to be published in the UK Aeronautical Information Publication.

RNAV needs a separate installation on each runway and each direction of approach, so that for both St Mary's and Land's End, there are four installations; work is progressing and consultation locally may be required. At present, the St Mary's airport has beacons to allow instrument landing, but only on two runway directions, those most commonly used in poor visibility – landing into the south west or north west. With perhaps 180-degree wind direction capability RNAV will of course give 360° potential.

However, it seems that the level of cloud allowed will not change significantly from the current 400 to 500 m above sea level allowed with the beacon system. The only benefit from RNAV will be if the wind is from the East and there is low cloud.

The other issue is the need for pilots to be trained to use RNAV. We learned little about this, but there must be concern about the cost and time spent on such training and the high turnover of pilots may not encourage Skybus to use it.

Given that the IOS Council would have funded the St Mary's RNAV, one may question whether the small benefits of being able to land in low cloud and east winds is value for money compared with the beacons, when RNAV cannot apparently enable landing in lower cloud levels than the beacons allow at present.

Scotland

FRIST continues to keep in touch with Scottish transport and ferry/air interests, both to understand the latest thinking on fares, services and the economy of the Islands, which are so important to Scotland politically. We visited a few ferries and met operators and others involved in the Scottish ferry network.

We also met Camille Dressler, who is co-ordinator of the Scottish Island Federation. Unlike any similar organisation in England, the SIF has produced a very interesting and comprehensive report on the impact of BREXIT on the Scottish Islands.

<http://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk/?s=brexit>.

It covers the importance of EU Cohesion policy, European Structural and other funds, local authority roles and responsibilities, EU-wide collaboration and what happens to the Islands post-BREXIT. Anyone who has concerns about the effect of BREXIT on the Isles of Scilly should read it and reflect on what can be done in mitigation.

We have also received, from friends in Plymouth Marine Laboratories, some

useful wave data for the waters between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly, These indicate that around the Seven Stones lightship the wave heights can be greater than in the Pentland Firth!

Island Transport problems well aired in House of Lords

The House of Lords debate (20th July) on "Transport. Remote Island Communities in England" initiated by Lord Berkeley can be read in full in Hansard:

<http://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-07-20/debates/0B5680F1-79D7-49BE-A358-7E32E9824278/TransportRemotelIslandCommunitiesInEngland>.

Lord Berkeley was well supported by other peers. The debate pulled no punches as far identifying the problems islanders and passengers in general suffered and the attitude of the single monopoly provider.

Lord Berkeley and other peers got little support from the Government's Transport Minister Lord Callanan who stated:

.... passenger traffic is increasing. The services continue to be operated on a commercial basis. I accept the points noble Lords have made about the desirability of increased connections—of course, everybody would like increased connections and better services to their communities—but there is no evidence of a detrimental effect on the community.

After the debate Lord Berkeley told FRIST:

'The support from many peers for improvements to transport was very heartening. The minister's response indicated a complete disregard for the realities of life in a small island and the transport needs of islanders and visitors. The minister said "The services continue to be operated on a commercial

basis....but there is no evidence of a detrimental effect on the community.” I with others will seek to ensure that he receives even more evidence that the present services are seriously detrimental to the future economy of the Islands.’

The debate was reported at length in the Cornishman (27 Jul). The paper includes quotes from Rob Goldsmith CEO IOSSG saying “*Many of the criticisms levelled against the steamship group were ill-founded or ill-informed, and it is disappointing that the debate was used in this way to attack the company that has provided lifeline services for almost 100 years*”. Rob Goldsmith went on to compare what had been paid out in dividends in the last 5 years with the £12.5 million invested in the air and sea services in the last 5 years.

The Government’s position that there is a commercial service and there has been no detrimental effect on the community reflects years of denial by the then Council of the Isles of Scilly that anything was amiss with transport services to the mainland, other than an occasional ‘lack of resilience’. Those who have experienced life on one of the similar sized Islands elsewhere in the UK will appreciate just how abnormal the Isles of Scilly situation is and the distorting effect that transport limitations (cost, winter service, limited schedule, limited capacity) have on the community and the island economy.

Forum – A Vision for Transport

By the autumn of 2016, the Islands’ transport users were hugely frustrated at being unable to effectively respond to the Government’s request for ‘the Islands to speak with a single voice on transport issues.’ The former Council was not sufficiently proactive and, as a result, there were many local organisations

involved in the peripheral debate.

So together with the CTI (Community Transport Initiative) FRIST organised a conference entitled ‘A Vision for Transport’.

About 40 transport users and experts attended the event ‘to define options for mainland links from the viewpoint of the transport users’. Held at Tregarthen’s Hotel, the Forum was chaired by Cornwall resident and former MEP Lord Robin Teverson and was attended by local business campaigners, representatives from the Islands Partnership, Penzance Chamber of Commerce, the Duchy of Cornwall, Department for Transport, Council of the Isles of Scilly, Tresco Estates, Cornwall Council, Healthwatch, Isles of Scilly Steamship Group and operators from Scotland and elsewhere, as well as the Isles of Scilly Transport Development Group CIC.

The Forum heard presentations about customers’ needs: capability, capacity, connectivity and competitive pricing and communications, covering passenger and freight issues and were welcomed by the Chairman as ‘good evidence based information.’

Lord Teverson closed the conference with a promise to return within a year to see what progress had been made in defining a clear direction of travel. We are already late, and reports in the Newsletter demonstrate slow progress.

Freight

Freight transport remains a problem. Apart from not having any price list for freight transport, the ongoing question is around the freight vessels. The Gry is not able to carry enough deck cargo; there are huge problems when waste skips are often carried both ways taking up valuable

space for outsize pallets, for plasterboard etc. Customers often have to wait many weeks to get large items such as vehicles or roof trusses carried.

At the Autumn 2016 conference, information on freight services was of particular concern and has all been reiterated more recently at the 'Listening Meetings' held on each island a year later. At the time of the conference, freight charges were quoted as £257 per tonne between Penzance and St Mary's compared to an average £20 per tonne elsewhere within the TR postcode. Without any published list of freight charges, it is difficult to report accurately. The 'Listening Meetings' however did offer some hope of improved management of freight and evidence of the improvements and better communications is eagerly awaited. The improved attitude and helpfulness from the new joint CEO, Mark Howarth and other staff bodes well.

Sadly, the freight disorganisation at Penzance is as bad as ever, with several lorries from places as far away as the Midlands with loads for the Islands recently being sent back without being unloaded. As one speaker noted – 'it is a third world scenario.'

Freight issues are currently stifling investment in the Islands. Change has to come to this unacceptable situation, Parity of tariff with other freight offerings in the UK is needed so the Islands' economy can thrive into the future.

Solutions?

An early introduction of the helicopter service to Penzance will significantly improve the reliability of the air service

offer. However, the costs and charges are likely to be similar to the Skybus fares from Newquay to St Mary's, so an all-year-round ferry service is also important for the future wellbeing of the Isles of Scilly. To achieve this, the current monopoly of Skybus and Scillonian and Gry Maritha must end.

One recommendation is for the IOSSG to create two totally separate companies, one to operate the air and the other to operate the sea services. It appears that, at present, the sea service subsidises the fixed wing air services. Perhaps it is time for them to compete as two completely separate companies.

If the IOSSG will not do this, then another ferry operator could be encouraged to set up a competing service to the Scillonian, perhaps starting in St Mary's in the morning and returning there in the evening. Elsewhere, competition on ferry routes is quite normal, and welcomed by passengers. It is expected that the IOSSG will do its best to frustrate any new service in the same way as they are currently trying to kill any idea of a helicopter service, but we are confident that many of those 9,000 people who signed the petition regretting the IOSSG seeking a judicial review will recall why they signed it and want to try a new service.

The Company's plucky determination to remain independent and free of any public funding, whilst considered by some as an admirable stance, does not necessarily benefit the customers. FRIST believes that the time has come for 'Aid of a Social Character' to be made available to island users of any transport mode.

At the start of the New Year, FRIST reviews the transport needs of the Islands.

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- **Publication of a Government plan for transport resilience.**

STOP Press – amended planning application for Penzance Heliport submitted 12 January 2018!

This is welcome news. The IOSSG is strongly urged to take the opportunity to act in the best interests of the islanders by demonstrating acceptance of the greater choice and resilience to the transport offer, and by resuming the practice of working collaboratively as well competitively with another operator!

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Friends of the Isles of Scilly Transport

Members of the FRIST Advisory Group are Tim Guthrie, Richard Larn, Nick Jenkins, Mike Peaker, Dick Cliffe, Tony Berkeley and Marian Berkeley (Co-ordinator).

Friends of Isles of Scilly Transport (FRIST) is a campaign group, set up in 2011, to press for improvements to the Islands' transport links to the mainland.

Advisory Group members meet their own expenses. However, contributions towards the cost of newsletter production will be gratefully received.