

= Woolwich Ferry =

The Woolwich Ferry is a free vehicle ferry service across the River Thames in East London , connecting Woolwich to the south with North Woolwich to the north . It is licensed and financed by London River Services , the maritime arm of Transport for London (TfL) . The service is operated by Briggs Marine under licence from TfL and carries both foot passengers and vehicles . Around two million passengers use the ferry each year .

There has been a ferry operating in Woolwich since the 14th century , and commercial crossings operated intermittently until the mid @-@ 19th century . The free service opened in 1889 , following the abolition of tolls across bridges to the west of London . Traffic increased in the 20th century owing to the rise in motor vehicle use , and because of the lack of nearby fixed crossings of the Thames it has remained popular , although pedestrian use has dropped as a result of the construction of a parallel foot tunnel and the extension of the Docklands Light Railway through to Woolwich Arsenal station . Alternatives such as the Thames Gateway Bridge and the Gallions Reach Crossing have been proposed as replacements , but there are no immediate plans to discontinue the Woolwich Ferry as long as there is a demand .

= = Services = =

The service links Woolwich in the Royal Borough of Greenwich with North Woolwich in the London Borough of Newham . It also links two ends of the inner London orbital road routes : the North Circular and the South Circular .

On weekdays , the ferry operates from 6 @.@ 10 am until 8 pm with a two @-@ boat service (10 minutes nominal interval between sailings) ; on Saturdays , from 6 @.@ 10 am to 8 pm with a one @-@ boat service (15 minutes nominal interval ; the last south @-@ to @-@ north sailing is 15 minutes earlier at 7 @.@ 45 pm) ; on Sundays , from 11 @.@ 30 am to 7 @.@ 30 pm with a one @-@ boat service (last south @-@ to @-@ north sailing at 7 @.@ 15 pm) . The ferries can carry heavy goods vehicles and other road traffic across the river , up to a maximum height of 4 @.@ 7 metres (15 ft) and width of 3 @.@ 5 metres (11 ft) . The service is free for all traffic ; in 2012 Transport for London (TfL) estimated a subsidy cost of 76.5p per passenger .

= = = Nearest alternative crossings = = =

The nearest alternative crossing for pedestrians is the Woolwich foot tunnel that runs parallel to the ferry . A Docklands Light Railway (DLR) station , Woolwich Arsenal on the south side of the Thames , was opened in January 2009 as the new terminus of the London City Airport branch . King George V DLR station , on the opposite side of the river , is close to the north ferry dock .

The nearest vehicle alternatives are the Blackwall Tunnel about two miles (3 km) upstream to the west , or the Dartford Crossing around ten miles (16 km) downstream to the east . Both tunnels have height restrictions for heavy goods vehicles , and users of the Dartford Crossing incur toll charges .

= = History = =

= = = Early services = = =

There has been a connection between what is now Woolwich and North Woolwich across the Thames since the Norman Conquest . The area was mentioned in Domesday Book as 63 acres (25 ha) belonging to Hamon , the dapifer (steward) , " which belong to (pertinent in) Woolwich " ; the " pertinent " here refers to the portion of land north of the Thames yet also part of the county of Kent . State papers in 1308 show that a service was running between North Woolwich and Warren Lane . That year , William de Wicton sold the business to William atte Halle for £ 10 . The ferry was

subsequently sold in 1320 for 100 silver marks .

Cross @-@ river traffic increased following the establishment of the Royal Arsenal in 1671 . To enable movement of troops and supplies , the army established its own ferry in 1810 . The following year an Act of Parliament established a commercial ferry company , but it was dissolved in 1844 . In 1846 the Eastern Counties and Thames Junction Railway extended its lines to include a Thames wharf branch ; eventually three steam ferries operated , but they proved inadequate to meet the growing demand . In October 1880 a public meeting was held in Woolwich to discuss setting up a locally run steam @-@ ferry service , but the cost was seen as prohibitive .

Following the establishment of the Metropolitan Board of Works , which had taken over toll bridges in west London and opened them to free public use , it was suggested that the Board should fund a free crossing of the Thames in east London . Proposals were made to provide services at Woolwich and further upstream at Greenwich , but the latter plan was abandoned . In 1884 the Board agreed to provide two steam @-@ powered ferries , each costing £ 10 @,@ 650 , and asked chief engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette to lead design and construction . In September 1887 Messrs Mowlem and company were awarded contracts valued at £ 54 @,@ 900 to build approaches , bridges and pontoons .

= = = Modern service = = =

The service was officially opened on 23 March 1889 , with the paddle steamer Gordon . Two days before the first service , the Metropolitan Board of Works was replaced by the London County Council (LCC) , and the opening ceremony was conducted by Lord Rosebery instead of the expected Bazalgette . The sister vessel , Duncan was introduced on 20 April .

By the end of the 1920s the rise in motor traffic had put pressure on the ferry 's capacity . A proposed bridge between Shooter 's Hill and East Ham was rejected as it would be too obvious a target for wartime bombings , and a third vessel was introduced instead . Because of the lack of a fixed crossing , the Thames became a psychological barrier for those living in the East End of London , who could only use a limited number of routes to cross the river , including the Woolwich Ferry . The lack of a suitable alternative route was instrumental in creating plans for what eventually became the Dartford Crossing further downstream .

By the 1950s it was still quicker for ferry traffic to divert via the Blackwall Tunnel even with all three vessels operating at full capacity . In April 1963 the ferry service was upgraded to a Roll On Roll Off model , reducing waiting times on the approach roads . The LCC continued to operate the ferry until it was replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC) on 31 March 1965 . In 1964 Marples Ridgeway and Partners started building the current reinforced concrete terminals , which can operate over a 30 feet (9 @. @ 1 m) tidal range . The three ferries in use today were built in 1963 and the current terminals were opened in 1966 .

After the abolition of the GLC in 1986 the responsibility for operating the service was transferred to the Secretary of State for Transport , who contracted the then London Borough of Greenwich to run the service . Asset ownership and operating rights were subsequently transferred to Transport for London (TfL) on the establishment of the Greater London Authority , but the London Borough of Greenwich continued to operate the ferry on behalf of TfL .

In March 2008 the London Borough of Greenwich gave TfL notice that it would cease operating the service from 30 September 2008 . On 12 September TfL announced that the outsourcing group Serco would take over the operation of the service from 1 October 2008 ; the contract ran initially until 31 March 2010 . In December 2012 control of the crossing passed from Serco to Briggs Marine , who were expanding into public passenger services . The company was awarded a £ 50 million 7 @-@ year contract , which began in April 2013 .

= = = Incidents = = =

On 3 August 2011 a 19 @-@ year @-@ old ferry worker died after falling off the boat into the river Thames . The MAIB report published in August 2012 blamed " unseamanlike working practices "

during the unmooring operation for the death .

= = Fleet = =

The first ferries were the side @-@ loading paddle steamers Gordon , Duncan and Hutton , named after General Gordon of Khartoum , Colonel Francis Duncan MP and Professor Charles Hutton . Each was powered by a condensing engine manufactured by John Peen & Son of Greenwich producing 100 nominal horsepower .

The initial fleet was eventually replaced , starting in 1923 with The Squire (named after William Squires , a former mayor of Woolwich) , and in 1930 with the Will Crooks (Labour MP for Woolwich , 1903 ? 21) and the John Benn (Sir John was a member of London County Council , Liberal MP for Wapping , and grandfather of Tony Benn) .

The current three vessels were built in Dundee in 1963 by the Caledon Shipbuilding & Engineering Company to replace the paddle steamers , and were each named after prominent local politicians : John Burns , Ernest Bevin and James Newman (Newman was mayor of Woolwich , 1923 ? 25) . These ferries feature Voith @-@ Schneider propulsion systems for manoeuvrability . A cycloidal propeller is fitted centrally at either end , and each is driven by a 500bhp 7 @-@ cylinder Mirrlees National diesel engine . In 2014 Transport for London introduced an Art On The River scheme , showing decorative artwork on the ferry vessels .

= = Passenger numbers = =

The ferry typically attracts about two million passengers a year ; occupants of vehicles (including drivers) are counted as passengers . Ferry patronage is still high for vehicles , but has fallen away to minimal numbers for foot passengers . In 2012 the ferry carried around 20 @,@ 000 vehicles and 50 @,@ 000 passengers weekly .

At all times of day , but particularly at peak hours , it is common for vehicles to have to queue beyond the next ferry departure . Several rearrangements and improvements have been made to the vehicle queueing arrangements over the years , especially to avoid impact on other local traffic .

For foot passengers , bus services converge on both terminals . There is a small bus station on the north side , but some cross @-@ river foot passengers take the foot tunnel instead . About 300 foot passengers used the ferry daily between 1983 and 1985 . Further competition arrived in 2009 with the extension to Woolwich of the Docklands Light Railway , which crosses under the river to the east of the crossing and the tunnel .

= = Future = =

The ferry service provides one of the few available crossings of the River Thames east of London . Although there are seventeen river crossings in the 20 miles (32 km) west of Tower Bridge , there are only three the same distance east . As long as there is a demand for a vehicle ferry it is unlikely to be discontinued , and it would require changing an 1885 Act of Parliament to do so .

In 2004 planning applications were submitted for a new bridge , the Thames Gateway Bridge , close to the location of the Woolwich Ferry . However the project was cancelled in 2008 . In 2012 , the Mayor of London , Boris Johnson , announced the Gallions Reach Crossing , a replacement ferry service running further east from Beckton to Thamesmead expected to open in 2017 . The option of a bridge is still popular , with an alternative option of a tunnel in the area . TfL planning director Richard de Cani has said that the ferry will continue to operate as long as there are no alternatives , and there are no current plans to discontinue the service .

Tolls cannot be levied on the ferry without changing the 1885 Act of Parliament . However , it is possible that the service may eventually be tolled in conjunction with other projects such as the Gallions Reach Crossing , which is likely to be tolled itself .

= = Media appearances = =

The Woolwich ferry has made several appearances on TV and film . The John Benn is seen being destroyed by the titular monster in the film Behemoth , the Sea Monster . A detailed scale model is used to interact with a model of the monster 's head , which capsizes the ship in the Thames . In " Strained Relations " , a 1985 episode of the TV series Only Fools and Horses , the character Uncle Albert asks Rodney , played by Nicholas Lyndhurst , if he had ever been on board a ship to which he replied " Yes " but then added it was " only the Woolwich Ferry " .