

Figure 3.15 There are over 50km of unsealed roads on communities in the Torres Strait



Figure 3.16 Key community roads, such as those connecting barge ramps to airstrips, have been progressively sealed



3.4 Freight

Freight, almost all emanating from Cairns, sustains all community life in the Torres Strait. This is due to there being no other sources for food, fuels, consumables and to the limited availability of commercial construction materials in the area. Most of the freight is shipped directly to Port Kennedy from where supplies to the OTSI communities are transhipped.

Shipping to all OTSI communities is done via smaller barges able to manoeuvre in the relatively shallow channels that form the entrances to most communities. Siltation of channels is a major concern for shipping companies, and access to a few communities is limited to periods of high tide and good weather.

Freight costs are relatively high and increasing due to recent rises in fuel and labour costs. Operators are also concerned about the comparatively high charges incurred in using port facilities to unload and

tranship. Altogether, this was calculated to add almost \$20 per tonne to freight costs, compared to around \$3 per tonne in Cairns.

The Port of Thursday Island, like all of the PCQ ports, is managed financially by PCQ as an individual business unit. The costs of managing each port (operational, capital and maintenance costs) must be recovered by PCQ from the activities in that particular port. Port of Thursday Island throughout is very small (approximately 90,000 tonnes) compared to other ports (Cairns 1.16 million tonnes), and provides a low base to collect income from. The cost of infrastructure provision in the Torres Strait is also much higher than the comparable costs in mainland ports such as Cairns. Because of these two factors, the cost of providing port facilities in the Torres Strait will always be much higher than ports such as Cairns.

Some transshipment is done through Seisia, and Endeavour Shipping has indicated that they will be providing additional barge services to the OTSI communities in the near future.

Figure 3.17 Shallow channels limit the size of barges that can access OTSI communities



Figure 3.18 All communities vitally depend on shipping from Cairns over 1000km away



3.4.1 Seaswift

Seaswift, based in Cairns, operates a fleet of cargo and other vessels servicing the freight and, to a lesser extent, passenger needs of the Torres Strait and the Cape York Peninsula. The majority of sea freight services for Port of Thursday Island and the OTSI communities are provided by Seaswift.

Two main line haul vessels, the MV Trinity Bay (see Figure 3.19) and MV Newcastle Bay, depart Cairns once each week to deliver cargo to Horn Island, Thursday Island and Bamaga. Capacity is such that freight movements are normally able to be completed ex-Cairns within seven days to even the most remote community, and within four days to the Port Kennedy area.

Figure 3.19 Seaswift Main Line Haul Vessel – MV Trinity Bay



The OTSI cargo is transhipped at Horn Island to three landing barges, the Malu Titan, Malu Chief, and normally the Malu Warrior, to deliver general cargo to the fifteen OTSI communities each week.

The freight to the OTSI is usually delivered using two of these vessels, with a third used when volumes are above normal, and to also provide redundancy. One of the landing craft is 50m, while the other two are slightly smaller. Seaswift believe that the 50m size vessels enable the maximum use of deck areas to carry cargo in containers, and are also the maximum size vessel that can utilise the existing facilities.

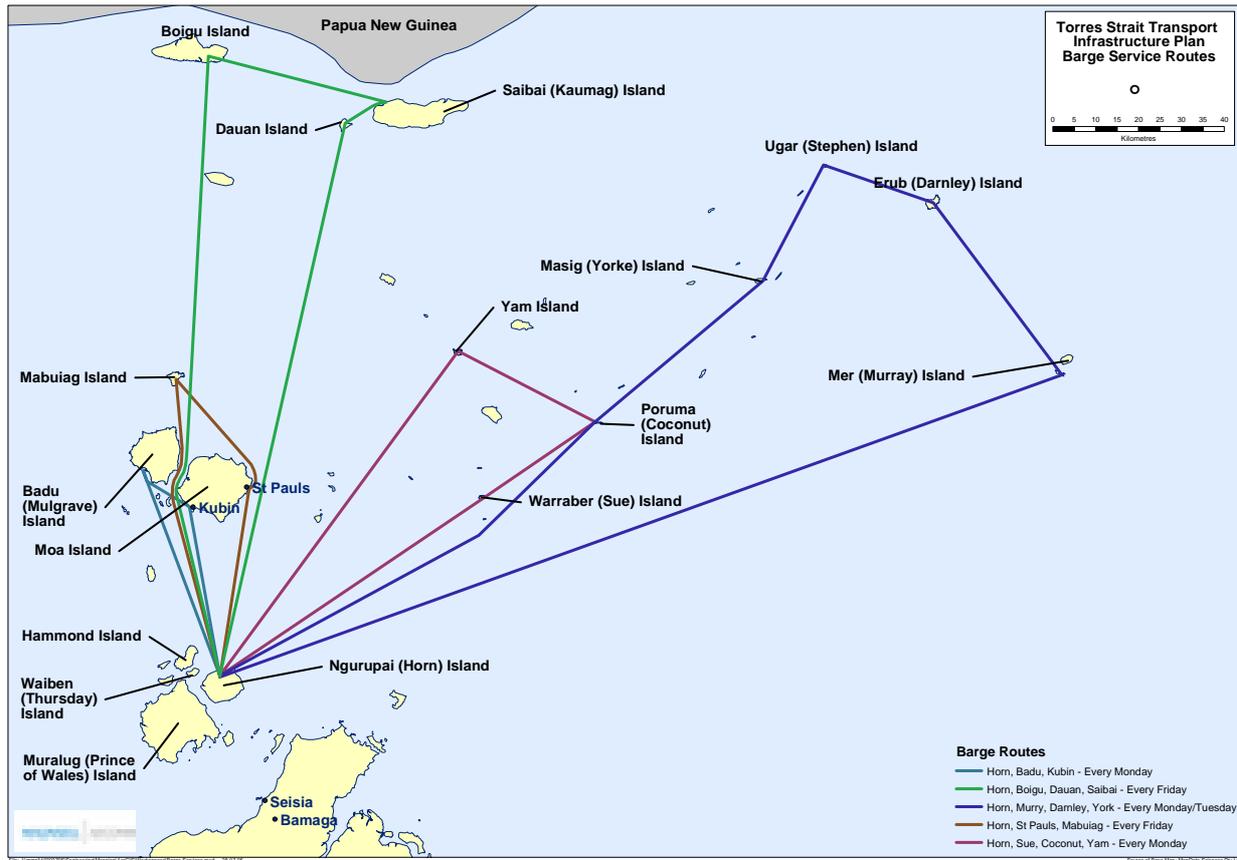
Collectively, Seaswift have the capacity for an extra 50% cargo volume if all vessels were used and the time spent in port was reduced. In addition to the three landing craft, a large 'dumb' barge is also available for project work and general cargo, and is currently utilised for three months each year.

Seaswift focus on the handling and delivery of perishable items, fresh fruit and vegetables and milk in particular. They consider that careful ongoing management through the supply chain to the customer is essential in trying to keep the cost of such items as low as possible.

Currently, most general freight items are delivered to the ramp sites in containers. Cargo is then taken from the containers for delivery around the island, ensuring that the cargo has good protection from the elements prior to arrival at island ramps. Seaswift plan to upgrade of one of the barges to more appropriately handle container requirements. However they noted that support from QT with their ramp upgrade programme is essential in maintaining the scheduled services to these islands.

Existing Seaswift barge routes are shown in Figure 3.20.

Figure 3.20 Existing Barge Routes



3.4.2 Endeavour Shipping

Endeavour Shipping (Perrott Salvage & Construction) operates a once weekly freight service, the Pacific Discovery, to Bamaga and Weipa ex-Cairns. The freight is then transhipped to Horn Island from Bamaga. Approximately one third of each vessel’s cargo is for the NPA or Torres Strait.

Although Endeavour could not provide freight volume figures for their routes, they consider that freight quantities and rates within Torres Strait justify the entry of a second major carrier, and have subsequently commenced a weekly service from Cairns to Thursday Island.

3.5 Public Transport

There is limited formal public transport within the Torres Strait, although some communities provide transport services for older people and people with a disability. A subsidised commercial bus service operates on Thursday Island, run by the local Community Council Public Bus service.

Commercial public transport initiatives are constrained by a lack of general infrastructure, weather conditions and topography, and the low passenger base.

Proposals for ferry services in the outer islands have not been commercially viable. However three routes are currently in operation or under consideration. These are Dauan / Saibai and Ugar / Darnley, and a potential daily service between Badu / Kubin and Thursday Island.

Taxis are a significant form of transport on Thursday and Horn Islands, supported by a relatively low number of private vehicles. Several communities also have had a taxi service, although the viability of such services is unknown.

3.6 School Transport

There are primary schools on every community and high schools at Thursday Island and Bamaga. School transport is operated by local transport operators with financial support from QT under the School Transport Assistance Scheme. The services normally carry eligible students to their nearest school (either by bus or ferry), and is usually a kilometre-based services. Operators providing school transport services in the Torres Strait include:

- Kilometre-Based School Bus Service Operators:
 - Sea Cat Charters Pty Ltd, (Peddell's) school bus service from Engineers Wharf to Thursday Island schools;
 - New Mapoon Community Council school bus service from Sesia and New Mapoon to Bamaga schools; and
 - Injinoo Aboriginal Council school bus service from Injinoo and Umagico to Bamaga schools.
- Student Ferry Service Operators:
 - Mallee Organum Pty Ltd, (Tom Lee) school ferry services from Horn Island and Prince of Wales Island to Engineers Wharf and Thursday Island; and
 - Hammond Island Council school ferry service from Hammond Island to Engineers Wharf and Thursday Island.

In the financial year 2004/05, the Hammond Island Council received approximately \$85,000 in revenue from the state government for the school ferry service.

In addition to school bus and ferry services, QT has provided funds to Peddells for ferry concessions on this service operated between Thursday Island and Sesia albeit without a contract.

The school ferries also carry adult passengers. There is no organised school transport outside the Port Kennedy area.

3.7 Walking and Cycling

Walking is the most common form of travel in all communities, sharing the very serviceable and historically safe roadways with a small number of 4WDs, motorcycles and cars. Bicycles are commonly used by children, and also by people journeying to work. In 1996 more than 50 trips per day were by bicycle on Thursday Island (a similar number was reported in the 2001 census).

With the exception of Badu, Moa, Horn and Thursday Islands, housing areas on other islands are constrained by available land area, and travel by motor vehicle only occurs for reasons of status, or to service people with special needs.

3.8 Transport for the Sick and People with Disabilities

Travel options for people with disabilities have not been well catered for in the past and investigations should be undertaken to determine what need there is for special facilities. The general lack of public transport however limits the options for improved transport for people with disabilities, competing, as it has to, with funds for even basic facilities.