



# Energising tomorrow

by Alexa Ivy

**Interferry, the association representing the ferry industry worldwide, urges governments to use their carbon tax revenues to invest in onshore power supply (OPS) infrastructure for battery charging, something critical in the ferry industry's journey towards net-zero emissions.**

Ferries of all sizes serve as lifelines to communities across the globe, offering essential transportation services for passengers and goods.

**According to a 2021 study conducted by Oxford Economics on behalf of Interferry,** the sector is far larger than many might assume. It carries approximately 4.3 billion passengers and 373 million vehicles annually, underpinning its vital economic and social role. What sets ferries apart from many other maritime sectors is their operational profile. With most crossings lasting between 30 minutes and two hours, ferry routes are particularly well-suited to battery-electric propulsion.

"Ferry operators are already the prime trailblazers in adopting battery-based propulsion," says Interferry's CEO, Mike Corrigan. "But to meet the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) and the EU's ambitious decarbonisation targets, the land side urgently needs to follow suit." Corrigan

stresses that the deployment of a robust OPS infrastructure is the critical missing link in enabling ferries to reach their full emissions-reduction potential. He underscores, "Investment in OPS infrastructure is key to the energy transition of ferry operations worldwide. It supports the adoption of battery technology and helps reduce reliance on scarce supplies of alternative clean fuels."

Corrigan also points out that too much attention has been paid to 'cold ironing' – providing ships with shore power while at berth – while overlooking the need for high-capacity charging systems capable of powering ferry propulsion batteries. "We need to shift the focus beyond the electricity for the hotel load alone. It's the ability to recharge propulsion batteries efficiently and affordably that will truly move the needle."

## **Technology – ready; infrastructure – not**

In recent years, ferry operators in Europe and North America have made

significant investments in hybrid and full-electric propulsion systems, enabling zero-emission operations on shorter routes and hybrid performance on longer ones. Some Interferry members are even preparing for medium-distance routes using battery capacities as large as 100MWh. "The technology is there, and ferry operators are ready to invest," Corrigan states. "But without the corresponding battery charging infrastructure in place, many operators remain in limbo about committing to full-electric or hybrid vessels."

He notes that governments and utilities are often reluctant to invest aggressively in OPS development. This hesitation is acting as a bottleneck to further progress. "As an organisation, we've been lobbying governments, port authorities, and electricity suppliers for years to prioritise OPS," Corrigan says. "Yet we're seeing that OPS deployment still lags

behind onboard battery installations by up to 10 years.”

Most existing OPS facilities serve only the vessel’s electricity needs while at berth, without accommodating battery charging. Interferry’s CEO emphasises that without investment in grid capacity and port-side infrastructure, battery-powered ferries cannot reach their full potential. To address this funding gap, Interferry proposes a simple but powerful solution: reinvest carbon tax revenues into OPS infrastructure.

**Driver of the green change**

With the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) and other carbon-based schemes generating significant revenue, Corrigan argues that a big portion of these funds should be earmarked for OPS deployment: “Billions of Euros are collected under the EU ETS, yet we face the challenge of accessing those funds at the national level.” He furthers, “We believe that EU Member States must prioritise OPS funding for ports based on operational scale and the number of ferries served.” Doing so would require coordinated collaboration among port authorities, energy utilities, and municipalities, ensuring that investment flows to where it can make the most meaningful impact.

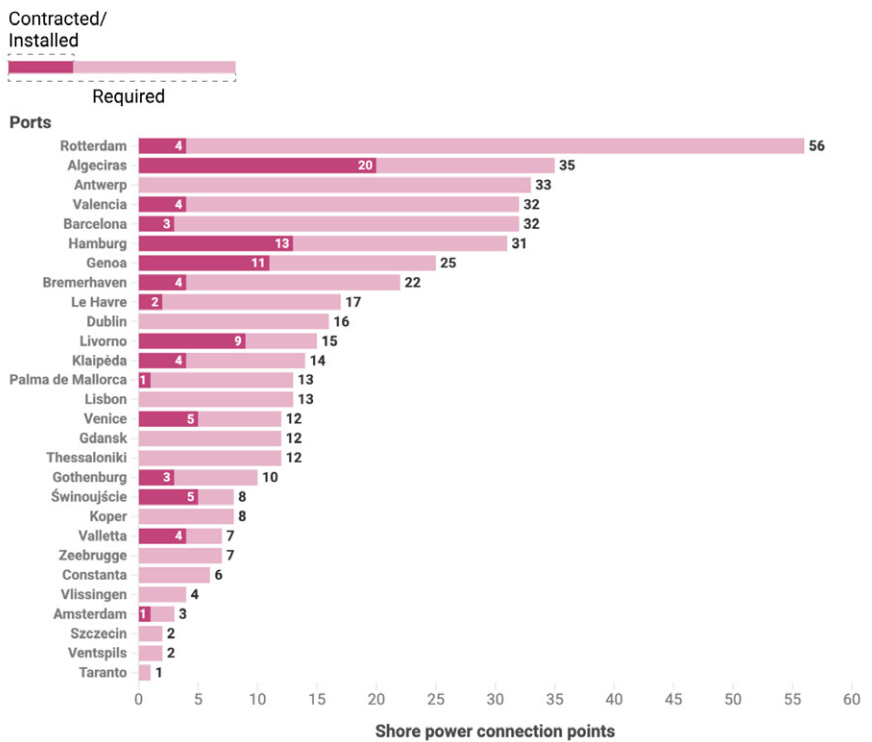
Corrigan also warns that some utilities are charging ferry operators unsustainable rates for OPS usage. “This is utterly disappointing,” he remarks. “When prices are artificially high, operators may choose to recharge their batteries using fuel-based generators instead, completely undermining the goal of reducing emissions.” He calls for transparent and fair pricing models that encourage rather than deter the use of clean shore power.

Looking ahead, Interferry’s CEO says the energy infrastructure in many industrialised countries needs a more strategic and coherent approach – one that considers the rising importance of electric transport, including ferry shipping. “This includes upgrading the entire port infrastructure,” he says. “The EU can lead the way and set a global benchmark for OPS deployment. A strong, coordinated push today will enable us to meet the critical greenhouse gas reduction targets for 2030 and 2040.”

Corrigan concludes by reaffirming the ferry industry’s position as a leader in sustainable maritime innovation. “Our sector is a driver of green propulsion technologies. OPS is a cornerstone of our decarbonisation efforts, and it must

**Ports are slow to install shoreside electricity infrastructure**

By delaying shore power, ports are failing to cut easily avoidable pollution



Source: T&E, DNV report. Three ports (Ghent, Rouen and Terneuzen) were removed as they are not mandated to install maritime shore power. Only required connections are taken into account.



Photo: Port of Kalundborg

be supported with the appropriate infrastructure. We need a holistic approach – from ship to shore – to make meaningful reductions in carbon emissions.” □



Interferry is a highly respected global ferry trade association with consultative status at the IMO and similar influence at the EU, as well as with many other maritime governance authorities. Speaking on behalf of more than 280 companies and representing 2,200+ individuals in over 40 countries, its primary purposes are to represent the ferry industry on regulatory and policy matters, including safety and sustainability, and to facilitate networking and communications among its members. Ferry to [interferry.com](https://www.interferry.com) to learn more.