

SailLink expands along the Channel, with the trial of a second route using a faster sailing vessel between Sussex (UK) and Normandy (France)

A series of crossings between Shoreham-by-Sea and Fécamp, sailed on the catamaran of double Vendée Globe winner Michel Desjoyeaux

Shoreham-by-Sea (West Sussex, UK) / Fécamp (Seine-Maritime, Normandy), 8 to 13 September 2026

SailLink, the operator behind the first sailing ferry between Dover and Boulogne-sur-Mer, will run a pilot phase between the town-central marina berths of Shoreham (West Sussex) and Fécamp (Normandy) from 8 to 13 September 2026. The pilot phase will continue the company's focus on low impact, high experience cross-Channel connection for a maximum of 12 passengers with or without their bikes. Bringing this boat, this skipper, both ports and the necessary clearances together is a rare alignment, and this pilot may not be repeated. If the results of the test are positive then the company and ports will be looking to bring a second regular cross-Channel sailing service into operation just as soon as possible.

Now in its second season of operation, the testing of a new route with a high performance vessel is a major step and a reflection of the public interest as well as the development potential of SailLink's mainly wind-powered services. SailLink will use the sailing catamaran *Mer Agitée* of Michel Desjoyeaux (double winner of the Vendée Globe), with Desjoyeaux at the helm and SailLink founder Andrew Simons as his crew.

A crossing that retraces history

The route follows the path of King Charles II's 1651 escape to France, when he fled Shoreham for Fécamp after the Battle of Worcester. The escape is still commemorated each year by the Royal Escape Race, organised by the Sussex Yacht Club in Shoreham, which sails to Fécamp. Nearly four centuries later, the same crossing will be made again under sail, this time as a scheduled passenger service for a very limited test phase.

A modern international tourist connection for Sussex

Sussex will now have three international connections to the outside world to support the tourism industry. Gatwick Airport, Newhaven Port with its regular and 200 year old connection to Dieppe in Normandy, France and now Shoreham will be connected to the Port of Fécamp passing the Rampion and Fécamp Wind Farms. Fécamp is also the home port of the sail-powered cargo and passenger company (formerly TOWT), which runs transatlantic connections to North and South America. It will soon be possible for a cyclist from the UK to use this wind powered network to cycle across South America on the same bike.

A racing pedigree, reused

The 18-metre *Mer Agitée* is built from reused ocean-racing parts: floats from the ORMA trimaran Gitana, mast and rudders from the IMOCA 60 Foncia, Desjoyeaux's own former race boat. A 23-metre mast, 165 m² of sail and a pair of foils give it the pace of a competition boat, while its large sheltered cockpit makes it a rare platform for carrying guests and media at sea. For SailLink it is a fitting partner: performance without waste, built from boats that have already crossed oceans.

A crossing built for cyclists

SailLink carries bikes inside the boat, sheltered from salt and spray, and the new corridor plugs straight into the cycle networks on both coasts. On the English side it links to National Cycle Route 2 along the south coast and the Downs Link path heading inland. On the French side it meets La Vélomaritime (EuroVelo 4) along the Normandy seafront, and the GR21 coastal path above the Alabaster Coast. For cyclists it turns the Channel crossing into part of the ride, not a gap in it.

How we cross

The four crossings will be made under sail, wind permitting, in keeping with SailLink's approach: low impact, adventure first. SailLink does not promise sea or weather conditions in advance; these are communicated as the dates approach. Passport control is carried out at the pontoon in both ports, as on the Dover to Boulogne service.

"We started SailLink to prove that a wind-powered ferry could be a real, scheduled crossing, not a stunt. Taking that idea to a new coast, with a boat and a skipper like this, tells us the demand is there and the model travels. September is a test, and we will learn a lot from it."

Andrew Simons, Founder and Skipper, SailLink

"I am delighted by the organisation of this pilot phase between Fécamp and Shoreham, which marks an important step in the development of new, more sustainable maritime mobility between the two shores of the Channel. This innovative initiative draws on Fécamp's deeply maritime identity and contributes to reviving the historic ties between Normandy and the south of England. It shows that we can imagine new ways of travelling that combine performance, discovery of the regions and respect for the environment. Beyond the technical and sporting feat, this link is a remarkable opportunity to showcase the tourist appeal of the Alabaster Coast, its port, its landscapes and its emblematic routes. It will allow British visitors to discover our region in a different way, while offering Normandy residents an original way to cross the Channel. I want to commend the commitment of SailLink, the State services, the local authorities and all the partners mobilised to make this trial possible. This first step opens promising prospects for the development of new maritime and tourism cooperation, serving the wider appeal of Seine-Maritime."

Alain Bazille, Vice-President of the Seine-Maritime Department, President of the Joint Association of Seine-Maritime Ports

“We are delighted to see Shoreham Port collaborating with SailLink and Port of Fécamp, part of the Seine-Maritime group to offer this unique cross channel travel experience. With global warming challenging how we travel wind power presents a compelling low impact alternative, this new route retraces the journey of King Charles II's historic 1651 flight to Fécamp from Shoreham adding a historical reference to the adventure.”

Tom Willis, Chief Executive, Shoreham Port

“A new low impact tourist link between Sussex and Normandy is taking shape, as an alternative to the carbon-emitting ferry. Fair winds!”

Graham Precey, Investor and CEO, Living Newhaven and a proud Sussex Onion

Practical details

- **Route:** Shoreham-by-Sea (West Sussex, UK) to Fécamp (Seine-Maritime, Normandy) and return
- **Dates:** a series of crossings, 8 to 13 September 2026, alternating direction
- **Vessel:** *Mer Agitée* (18 m), skippered by Michel Desjoyeaux
- **Operator:** SailLink (pilot / test phase)
- **Capacity:** up to 12 passengers and 8 bikes per crossing
- **Crossing time:** around 8 hours, conditions permitting
- **Fares:** £220 per crossing, £440 return, bikes £10
- **Passport** control at the pontoon in both ports
- Passengers carry their **bikes** on board
- **Booking and live information:** saillink.co.uk/shoreham-fecamp-pilot

About SailLink

SailLink operates the first sailing ferry between Dover and Boulogne-sur-Mer, carrying up to 12 passengers and their bikes, between town-central marinas, under sail. Independently financed and run by three people, it carried 465 passengers and 135 bikes in its 2025 season, nearly 70% of crossings completed under sail. The model is low impact, not zero emission: the boat runs engines when the wind drops and in harbours. The 2026 season runs April to mid-September.

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Notes to editors

- Reuters (Lucien Libert, Senior TV Producer) covered SailLink in April 2026
 - The Guardian (Rhiannon Batten) featured SailLink in July 2026.
- The September pilot uses a chartered vessel (the Catamaran *Mer Agitée*) and is distinct from SailLink's regular Dover to Boulogne service aboard the catamaran Echoes.
 - Images and drone footage are available at saillink.co.uk/press-centre