HorizonLink: Clifftop Resort Mobility System

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

HorizonLink introduces a coordinated clifftop transit and smart-booking platform tailored for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole's coastal topography.

The project combines physical micro-mobility lift infrastructure with a unified digital application, connecting clifftop accommodation zones directly with beachfront traders.

By coordinating hotel bookings, beach rentals, and food orders, the system drives sustainable, year-round economic growth across the seafront promenade.

The Better Everyday

What if reaching the shoreline from a clifftop hotel felt like a seamless continuation of your stay rather than a steep, exhausting trek?

- The HorizonLink concept combines an automated, solar-powered clifftop lift with an integrated booking platform to bridge steep elevation changes. The system allows users to reserve transit slots, pre-book beach loungers, and order local food and beverages directly to their seaside spot.
- Picture a sunny afternoon in Westbourne. A family steps out of a clifftop hotel and glides smoothly to the promenade in a quiet, glazed cabin. They bypass crowded zig-zag paths entirely, having already secured their beach umbrella and transit slot with a quick tap on their phone. They spend their afternoon relaxing on the sand instead of hauling heavy beach gear down dusty slopes.
- The system addresses the age-old challenge of coastal elevation. Currently, people must carry heavy bags down steep paths or avoid the beach entirely. Existing funiculars are often slow and disconnected from modern booking systems, leaving visitors guessing about wait times and beach availability. This digital and physical integration turns an exhausting journey into an effortless pleasure.
- This seamless connection could fundamentally redefine how residents and visitors interact with challenging urban topography. If physical movement and retail booking integrate successfully here, other local businesses, hill-bound transport links, and steep-sided neighborhoods might adopt similar combined systems. People will soon expect all public transit and local venue booking to operate as a single, coordinated service.

Who It Could Matter To

An integrated transit link reshapes daily life for overnight holidaymakers, local independent operators, and residents managing mobility challenges.

The Multi-Generational Visitor

- A grandparent visiting Boscombe with young grandchildren and heavy beach bags.
- They encounter the system when planning their afternoon trip down from the clifftop guest house.
- They enjoy a safe, step-free journey to the sand without worrying about physical exhaustion or carrying heavy pushchairs.

The Independent Beachfront Trader

- A local kiosk owner on the promenade who sells fresh seafood and rents deckchairs.
- They connect to HorizonLink to receive pre-orders and hire requests from clifftop guests.
- They see increased afternoon sales and predictable demand, provided the ordering system integrates with their simple kitchen setup.

The Hillside Resident with Limited Mobility

- A local resident who lives near the cliff edge but rarely visits the seafront due to steep slopes.
- They use the platform during off-peak hours when the lift is quiet and concession prices are lower.
- They regain access to the coastal promenade, relying on clear real-time updates about lift reliability and step-free access paths.

What This Could Change for BCP

Connecting high-elevation hospitality directly to the seafront can transform seasonal tourism into a year-round, accessible coastal economy.

- This system aligns with BCP Council's ambition for sustainable, inclusive town centre regeneration. Better beachfront access distributes footfall evenly between accommodation zones and the promenade.
- This physical and digital bridge stimulates year-round coastal activity. Visitors descend to seafront cafes during cooler months, boosting off-season trade. This turns a seasonal trip into an all-weather experience.
- Success here could spark similar micro-mobility installations across BCP's coastal neighbourhoods. Clifftop cafes and beachfront kiosks can form cooperative networks to share bookings. It builds a collaborative blueprint for connected urban spaces.
- The main trade-off is balancing private hotel privileges with public access. Paying guests expect priority, but residents must not feel excluded from public assets. Deciding on a fair access hierarchy requires careful community negotiation.

Who Must Connect

Turning a clifftop transit concept into reality requires a shared network of hospitality, technology, and public space operators.

- A hotel consortium would act as the lead operator. They would partner with an experienced lift manufacturer to build and maintain the physical structure. This partner ensures daily safety and smooth mechanical operation.
- Local accessibility groups and neighborhood residents would actively shape the design of the cabins and booking app. They would participate in workshops to ensure the physical interface and booking screens remain usable for everyone.
- BCP Council must grant planning permission and easement access to connect public clifftop land with the promenade. The council will work with operators to ensure environmental compliance and safety.
- Hotel guest fees and a share of beach concession sales will fund ongoing operations. A local maintenance team will service the lift, keeping it safe and clean year-round.
- The missing link is a shared digital protocol between competing hotel management platforms and independent beachfront kiosks. Silicon South could facilitate workshops for local developers to design an open API that lets diverse businesses connect easily. This collaborative effort must begin with a joint roundtable hosted by the hoteliers.

Why This Fails

Without ongoing coordination, clear economic value, and robust physical upkeep, a clifftop transit system risks becoming an expensive, idle eyesore.

- **Unviable operating costs** arise if mechanical maintenance outweighs booking revenues. Salt air will corrode lift machinery, causing frequent breakdowns. The first warning sign is a growing backlog of unresolved repair tickets.
- **Concession software fragmentation** occurs if beach kiosks find the digital platform too complex. If traders drop out, hotel guests lose the booking benefits. The first warning sign is negative app reviews complaining about inaccurate orders.
- **Public space conflict** develops if residents feel the system privatises public views for wealthy tourists. This could lead to local protests and planning challenges. The first warning sign is a surge of formal objections on the council's planning portal.

One Experiment to Start

Before investing in heavy physical infrastructure, you must validate whether guests will actually use a digital booking tool to coordinate their beach day.

- The main uncertainty is whether guests and traders will adopt a unified digital booking system. If users prefer cash, phone calls, or spontaneous walk-downs, the digital platform fails. This behaviour must be validated before anchoring steel into the cliffs.
- You can test this with a two-weekend autumn pilot using a manual concierge service instead of a lift. Staff will use a messaging app to help guests pre-book loungers and order food. A runner will carry orders down the zig-zag paths to simulate delivery.
- Keep going if guests make repeat orders and report high satisfaction with the beachside service. Stop or rethink if traders struggle to fulfill orders, or if guests bypass the app completely. You will learn if guests truly value digital convenience over walk-up purchases.
- **Next step:** A local hotel manager can spend one afternoon interviewing three nearby beachfront kiosk owners to draft a simple joint menu for a weekend trial.