

**Report to Partnership Meeting 10 April 2015**

**RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

**Online Ferry Booking Availability Study**

**Purpose of Report**

To invite Members to support the Scottish Government's announcement to roll out the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) across the remainder of the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services network and to approve a proposal to extend the Online Ferry Booking Availability Study for 2015 to cover additional routes and services operated on the CalMac network.

**Background**

Since 2011, Outer Hebrides Tourism has carried out research on the availability to book car spaces on the CalMac website on selected routes to and from the Western Isles.

In 2013 and 2014 this research was financially supported by carried out, and included routes to Coll / Tiree and Islay. This research was financially supported by HITRANS, CnES and Argyll and Bute Council.

A copy of the full 2014 report is included for information with the Board papers and is also available on the HITRANS website at the following link,  
[http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Ferry\\_Online\\_Booking\\_Availability\\_Review -  
\\_Summer\\_2014.pdf](http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Ferry_Online_Booking_Availability_Review_-_Summer_2014.pdf).

**Proposal for 2015 Study**

The work undertaken by the OHTIA on behalf of HITRANS, CnES and A&BC in 2014 and previous years has helped to highlight the significant issue of the lack of online booking availability for vehicles on several routes operated by CalMac. It has also identified the concerning trend that both, the number and the percentage of affected sailings has increased year on year on the majority of services with the exception being the Kennacraig to Islay route where additional capacity has helped achieve a reduction in 2015.

In addition, the Scottish Government has just confirmed the welcome roll out of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) scheme across those routes on the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services Contract which were not previously entitled to the discount scheme.

The accompanying press release (26.03.15) notes that "lower fares will inevitably lead to an increase in traffic on these services, but CalMac will have the opportunity to bring forward plans to manage this demand. The operator will engage with communities in due course, and any demand management measures will be agreed with these communities before they are introduced."

HITRANS and its partner local authorities see the data gathered by the Online Ferry Availability Study as an essential tool to help inform this committed engagement and

highlight the severe concerns about the increasing lack of available capacity that many of the communities on those routes that have benefited from RET have already experienced. It is therefore proposed that the study in 2015 be extended to include a number of additional routes including Oban to Craignure, the return journeys on some of the routes already covered and the inter-island routes between Barra and Eriskay and Leverburgh and Berneray.

**Recommendation**

Members are invited to support a proposal to fund a larger study for 2015 in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll and Bute Council. This study will cover additional routes and services including those which will be impacted by the introduction of RET later in 2015.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>RTS delivery</b>	√	This work supports several strategic objectives of the RTS.
<b>Policy</b>	√	This work supports the development of the RTS Delivery Plan
<b>Financial</b>	-	Funding of £7,550 to cover HITRANS contribution will be allocated in the 2015/15 Business Plan if approved.
<b>Equality</b>	-	Improvement of public transport services helps reduce social exclusion by improving access to employment and services for those living in our most remote areas.

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**Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015