

**HEBRIDES FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP  
(Barra, the Uists, Lewis and Harris)**

Minute of Meeting held through Microsoft Teams, on 3 June 2021 at 11.00am.

<p>IN ATTENDANCE</p>	<p><b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILAN SIAR</b>          Cllr Uisdean Robertson (Chairman)          Cllr Kenny Macleod (CNES)          Cllr Iain MacNeil (CnES)          Cllr John Mackay (CnES)          Cllr Iain Macleod (CnES)          Cllr. Paul Steele (CNES)          Cllr. Iain M. Macleod (CNES)          Mr Kenneth Morrison (CNES)          Ms Mairi Sine Macdonald (CNES) (Clerk)</p> <p><b>TRANSPORT SCOTLAND</b>          Mr Laurence Kenney          Mr Richard Hadfield          Ms Caroline Connelly          Ms Athena Avratidis          Mr Mark Hoskins          Mr Richard Holburn          Mr Paul Flynn          Ms Alison Wills          Mr Liam Seaton          Ms Carol Nowbaveh</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LTD (CALMAC)</b>          Mr Robert Morrison          Mr Finlay Macrae          Mr Don McKillop          Ms Fiona Galbraith</p> <p><b>FERRIES COMMUNITIES BOARD</b>          Mr Eoin MacNeil          Rhoda Campbell</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD. (CMAL)</b>          Mr Kevin Hobbs          Mr Brian Fulton</p> <p><b>HITRANS</b>          Mr Neil Macrae          Mr Ranald Robertson          Ms Sarah Compton-Bishop</p> <p><b>HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE)</b>          Ms Rachel Mackenzie          Mr Nicky Sobey</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES COMMERCE GROUP</b>          Ms Gail Robertson</p>
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	<p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM</b> Mr Rob Mackinnon Mr Alan Graham</p> <p><b>ROAD HAULIERS ASSOCIATION</b> Mr D.R. Macleod</p> <p><b>ULLAPOOL HARBOUR TRUST</b> Mr Kevin Peach</p> <p><b>STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY</b> Mr Alex MacLeod</p> <p><b>SCOTTISH CITYLINK</b> Mr Ker Corbett</p>
APOLOGIES	<p>Ms Joanna Peteranna (HIE) Mr Angus Campbell (Ferries Community Board) Mr Iain A. MacNeil (CNES)</p>

1	Minute of Meeting held on 3 December 2020	The Minute of Meeting of 3 December 2020 was <b>approved</b> .
2	Matters Arising	<b>Ranald Robertson drew members attention to the Action Tracker included within the meeting papers. The Chair confirmed that he had written to Transport Scotland and Cal Mac to request chartering of additional tonnage around the dry dock period.</b>
3	Caledonian MacBrayne Operational and Performance Presentation covering (CFL)	<p>The CalMac operational and performance report covered the following relative to the Outer Hebrides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CalMac Hebrides Region Update</li> <li>• CalMac Commercial Team Update</li> <li>• CalMac Community Fund</li> <li>• Youth and Philanthropy initiative</li> <li>• CHIFS (Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services) Contract Commitments</li> <li>• Timetable Integration and Consultation Update</li> <li>• MV Pentalina</li> <li>• Turn up and Go capacity utilisation Summer 2021</li> </ul> <p>The Region update stated that the period had been dominated by lockdown and travel restrictions which lifted on 26 April 2021 and fully opened by 17 May 2021. The Report indicated that outwith any technical disruptions and redeployments required to provide relief service, the winter timetable operated as normal until the end of March 2021, with very low demand on services. The Report further indicated that car deck capacity remained at normal levels, but there remained a Covid constraint in relation to the maximum number of passengers.</p> <p>Fiona Galbraith, Area Manager (Hebrides) and Finlay Macrae, Head of Operations provided a route overview for the last six months and highlighted the breakdown of MV Loch Seaforth in early April which impacted the Stornoway Ullapool route and also affected the capacity on the Lochboisdale service due to the MV Isle of Lewis being removed to cover the Stornoway service. The Loch Seaforth had resumed service this week. The Barra - Oban service had suffered long periods of disruption and capacity constraints on the shared service and the capacity on the Triangle route had been affected due to Covid restrictions and the suspension of the use of the mezzanine deck. In Tarbert phase 1 of the new pier continued with a completion expected in September 2021. In regard to the both Sounds, capacity was</p>

slight restricted with passengers having to remain in cars. Fiona Galbraith wished to note her thanks and appreciation to all the communities for their work, support and engagement over a very difficult period.

The following points were raised by stakeholders in regard to the various routes and issues arising from the breakdown of MV Loch Seaforth:

#### Sound of Barra

Donald Manford CNES, asked if a reduction in winter sailings and an increase in Summer sailings on the Sound of Barra could be a cost-effective solution to address summer capacity issues.

#### Lochmaddy - Uig

Gail Robertson, Outer Hebrides Commerce Group requested that the two additional return sailings on the Lochmaddy - Uig route be retained. These had been introduced to support the disruption in Lochboisdale and appeared to be well received and relieved pinch points allowing freight to access the early or late sailings.

#### Lochboisdale - Mallaig

Alan Graham, Outer Hebrides Tourism in reference to capacity issues, suggested that priority be given to having the Lord of the Isles provide a dedicated service twice a day on the Lochboisdale – Mallaig route, which had been included in the Comhairle's proposals. Finlay Macrae said it was a medium term option to be explored in the context of the wider deployment plan and when additional tonnage and capacity issues had been addressed.

#### Communication

Rachel Mackenzie, HIE referred to the challenges faced due to the breakdown of the Loch Seaforth and the resulting furore due to the impacts on the public, commerce and tourism and questioned the rationale for ferry traffic cancellations during periods of disruption and called for more transparency and open communication by CalMac. People generally respond rationally to clear decision making and she made a plea to CalMac to provide parameters and further detail on the protocol for cancellations going forward to safeguard local businesses, to prevent animosity and unrest from the communities and the negative impacts on tourism.

Robert Morrison, Operations Director and Finlay Macrae responded and explained the challenges faced to get the balance right and stated that wherever possible CalMac endeavoured to ensure that lifeline supplies were prioritised. Whilst recognising the balance between tourism and commerce there were times that difficult choices had been required dependent on the different circumstances on each of the sailings over the 7-8 week period of disruption.

Finlay Macrae stated that the recent disruption had been a learning curve and the communities voices had been heard loud and clear. He acknowledged that there could be improvements within relationship management and the transfer of operational information within the organisation as well as to key stakeholders and gave a commitment that a piece of work would be undertaken to address this and report back to a future FSG.

Rob Mackinnon, OHT concurred with the points made by Rachel Mackenzie and stated his disappointment that he had not received any information from CalMac on cancellations and had been aware directly from customers and as a result he did not have the tools to deal with the enquiries. Another issue he raised was that the notification text to customers provided a contact number which, due to the volume of enquiries resulted in long delays. He made the point that if the onus was being put on the customers to make contact there was an obligation for CalMac to provide accurate and timely responses.

Rob Mackinnon had requested information from CalMac on the number of cancellations over the period of disruption to which he had not yet received a response. Rachel Mackenzie commented that she was surprised that CalMac did not have real time data access to provide this information and for monitoring demand.

Robert Morrison apologised for the lack of stakeholder communication which would be addressed and stated he was not aware of the issue with the contact text. Finlay Macrae accepted that there had been communication failures over the last few weeks and CalMac were reviewing it urgently and highlighted that a change to the telephony system to IIP had caused the text problems. He further indicated the information on the cancellation numbers was being collated and he would provide the information to Rob Mackinnon along with the correct contact details.

It was noted that a Sub-Group of the Ferries Community Board with a remit to look at communications were to meet the following week with CalMac's Commercial Director. This offered reassurance that the issues were being acknowledged and addressed to ensure that both stakeholders and the public are better informed going forward.

Iain M. Macleod, CNES asked if Transport Scotland were enforcing penalties on CalMac for not meeting target turnaround times given the tight timetabling currently in place. He further raised the relationship between CalMac customer services and the port during periods of disruption and that there was a discord between the two and if this would be addressed by the new booking system.

Finlay Macrae responded and confirmed that there is a performance regime within the contract regarding punctuality with Transport Scotland and that and he would respond directly to Iain M. Macleod with further detail. He stated that information was disseminated from a central hub and acknowledged there was a disjoin and that CalMac were working to improve the flow and messaging within and outwith the organisation and also to balance the amount of information provided.

The Commercial update indicated that brand development work continued in consultation with internal and external stakeholders including Community Boards. The website upgrade was anticipated to be completed in January 2022 and a food and drink pilot was being closely monitored on the Arran route and dependent on feedback it may be disseminated across other routes. Marketing promotion had been restricted to supporting DMOs in delivering responsible messaging to tourism i.e. motorhomes.

The Report further stated that Youth and Philanthropy activity centred around the Wood Foundation initiative which included mentoring partnerships with four schools in the Western Isles.

In respect of the CHFS (Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services) Contract Commitments the Report showed 95.5% commitments complete or on track with current focus on Harbour Access Agreements with the various port authorities. The Summer 2022 timetable consultation was underway and responses required by 15 June 2021 and the Socio Economic Report had been deferred until 2022.

In regard to the MV Pentalina, the Report stated that CalMac continued to engage with both Transport Scotland and Pentland Ferries to discuss the feasibility of chartering the vessel on a long-term basis to introduce some resilience within the network. It was indicated that should the arrangement go ahead, it would likely see Pentland Ferries being sub-contracted to deliver aspects of the CHFS service on CalMac's behalf, although the exact nature of the service delivered would be subject to negotiation.

		<p>The Report concluded with an update on ‘turn up and go’ capacity which had been changed following a review in May 2021 and stated that since the roll out of the changes on 5 May 2021, there were only 13 instances where turn up and go capacity had been used, accounting for just 1% of sailings with all other sailings having sufficient bookable space. That suggested that ‘turn up and go’ capacity was not required and it would continue to be reviewed over the coming weeks and months.</p> <p><b>It was agreed:</b></p> <p><b>(1) to note the Report; and</b></p> <p><b>(2) following discussion on the route update that Finlay Macrae, CalMac would undertake to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. explore the suggestion for the Sound of Barra on the basis of cost balance and resource availability;</b></li> <li><b>2. investigate the proposal to retain the additional sailing on the Lochmaddy-Uig route;</b></li> <li><b>3. report back to a future FSG on transparent protocol for traffic management on ferries during prolonged periods of disruption;</b></li> <li><b>4. respond to Rob Mackinnon, OHT and Rachel Mackenzie, HIE in regard to the data on cancellation figures; and.</b></li> <li><b>5. respond to Rob Mackinnon, OHT to provide clarity on the cleaning regime and the impact on the use of the mezzanine on MV Hebrides.</b></li> </ol>
4	Ar Turas/New Ticketing System	<p>CalMac submitted a Report on the new ticketing system indicating that work was progressing with e-Dea Transport Technology, a leading provider in the Ferry Industry, on the development of the new system ‘Ar Turas’. The Report provided a plan for the development of the system which was anticipated to go live in January 2022 with the following timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Configuration Workshops (January – April 2021)</li> <li>• Configure Software and Integrations (April – August 2021)</li> <li>• System Acceptance and Testing (July – November 2021)</li> <li>• Training (October 2021 – January 2022)</li> <li>• Phase 2A – Go Live (January 2022)</li> <li>• Summer Timetable Go-Live (March 2022)</li> </ul> <p>Mr Finlay Macrae, CalMac stated that regular dialogue continued with e-Dea on progress and indicated that training was scheduled for the autumn/winter. In reference to earlier discussions on cancellations, assurances were given that the data and dissemination of information should greatly improve with the new system and customer interface would change with the introduction of electronic check-ins etc. Finlay Macrae encouraged Members of the Group to contact him directly if they had any questions or required further detail. It was noted that the system did not have the ability to capturing unmet demand which was disappointing given the level of stakeholder representations on this.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the Ar Turas Ticketing System project update.</b></p>
5	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Strategic Direction Proposal	<p>A joint letter had been sent from the Comhairle’s Leader and Chair of Transportation and Infrastructure to the first Minister on 17 May 2021 seeking the new Government to prioritise future lifeline ferry services and offered strategic direction by way of short, medium and long term measures</p>

		<p>as the basis of a manifesto for change. The Chairman indicated that the proposals had been well received by the community and it was hoped that the points raised would be received as a constructive contribution to assist Ministers to deliver the best solutions for the islands. The letter also sought a meeting with the newly appointed Minister as early as possible. A formal response had not been received from the First Minister at the time of the meeting.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s Strategic Direction Proposals for ferry services.</b></p>
6	<p>Transport Scotland Update – including Island Connectivity Plan and Investment Programme</p>	<p>Laurence Kenney, Transport Scotland addressed the Group and referred to the challenges of the past number of weeks due to the disruption and acknowledged the frustrations of the communities affected and gave an assurance that the new Minister for Transport was taking this very seriously and had undertaken a number of meetings and engagements and was prioritising ferries in his early time in office. He also thanked all the CalMac teams, specifically frontline staff, for their hard work during that period. He was pleased to report that from today all vessels were back in position and operational across the network.</p> <p>Laurence Kenney touched on the topic of additional tonnage and confirmed that Transport Scotland were involved in the discussions on chartering the Pentalina and were also scouring the world for other available vessels. In regard to physical distancing which was being led by Public Health colleagues he indicated that the First minister was reviewing this and that the outcome was imminent. He stated that CalMac had worked hard to maximise capacity within these restraints and currently undertook high levels of cleaning on their vessels and were planning for any changes which would be rolled out across the network.</p> <p>The Group questioned the lack of urgency and the length of time on the Pentalina discussions and requested a timeline which Transport Scotland declined to confirm due to the commercial sensitivities around the negotiations.</p> <p>Richard Hadfield, Transport Scotland referred to the presentation provided in the Agenda Papers and provided the following overview. The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) was the successor to the Ferries Plan 2013-22 and that objectives would be developed to support delivery of NTS2 and the National Islands Plan and which represent value for money. The ICP will be closely linked to the outcomes of the STPR2, in order to consider island connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel. The ICP will cover the following broad topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Needs Assessment/Market Needs</li> <li>• Fares</li> <li>• Decarbonisation</li> <li>• Investment</li> <li>• Integration</li> </ul> <p>Richard Hadfield provide further details on the Community Needs Assessment and the 6 steps of the evidence-based and repeatable Routes and Services Methodology (RSM) and gave assurances that there would be community engagement at each stage and that a reference Group would oversee this part of the process. A marketing assessment would also be undertaken to establish service requirements, assess the “adequacy” of current services and to consider whether an adequate service could be provided by the market without government intervention which should not be an issue for the Hebrides routes.</p>

In reference to the Long-term Plan and Investment Programme, summary information was provided from the VRDP (CHFS) Report 2020 and the specific investment priorities:

- Safety
- Resilience
- Reliability
- Capacity
- Accessibility
- Standardisation
- Emissions
- Value for Money

In reference to the options in the Comhairle's paper which Transport Scotland had acknowledged, a number of these were active or included in Transport Scotland's paper and they looked forward to having further discussion with the Comhairle on these at their next scheduled meeting on 10 June 2021.

Transport Scotland concluded that they would continue to engage with all stakeholders and to work closely with CMAL to deliver:

- (1) a replacement vessel programme;
- (2) port improvement; and
- (3) new port developments

The Group raised some points and Transport Scotland responded as follows:

Group

- You did not listen to the communities in 2011, can you guarantee you will this time?

- The two hulls in the Clyde (801 and 802) were not considered to be value for money when the communities call was for two smaller vessels at less cost

- The communities may not engage if they feel they were not listened to previously.

- The Islay Ferry consultation was raised as an example where concerns by the community have been ignored similarly with the consultation on the Loch Seaforth 10 years ago

Transport Scotland

- We will listen
- We cannot always deliver what everyone wants
- Value for Money and affordability have to be considered
- Learnt from previous experience
- Hold us to account through the process

- We acknowledge the points but we cannot revisit previous decisions

Kevin Hobbs responded:

- Two stakeholder sessions held with extensive Q&A
- Not feasible or possible to please everyone
- value for money analysis undertaken - two smaller ferries less resilient and more costly
- Inaccurate and not accepting criticism

Freight services were not included in the Report and in reference to the Stornoway - Ullapool freight services Transport Scotland confirmed that the Clipper Arrow was on their radar and was not available for purchase at this time and that options continued to be explored by Transport Scotland, CMAL

		<p>and CalMac. It was noted that freight services would be discussed at the scheduled meeting with the Comhairle the following week.</p> <p><b>It was agreed that Transport Scotland, as soon as practicably possible, would contact HITRANS on the outcomes of the Pentalina negotiations for dissemination to FSG members.</b></p>
7	Infrastructure Update	<p><b><u>CMAL Update</u></b></p> <p>The CMAL report included details on Net Zero, Ferry Replacement Programmes, Ferguson Marine and Port Infrastructure. In regard to Phase 2 of the small Vessel Replacement Programme there had been initiation internally with Transport Scotland and CFL on the Mallaig/Lochboisdale (Armadale ) LoTI replacement. It was noted that the consultation on the small Vessel Replacement Programme would commence shortly and all FSG's will be contacted. The dates for delivery of the 801 and 802 remained as June 2022 and February 2023 respectively. The port infrastructure projects of interest were Tarbert which was progressing well with a completion date of October 2021 and the new terminal building currently tendered will follow completion. There were plans for the building at Castlebay i.e. refurbishment and expansion and projects had been initiated at Lochboisdale (Gasay) new ferry terminal and pier structure and also fendering and bollard replacement work at Castlebay. Both projects had been delayed due to Covid and scheduled to start over the summer.</p> <p>Kevin Hobbs, CMAL provided a general position statement stating that CMAL's perspective during Covid was to prioritise lifeline services during the first and second lockdown. There had been delays on projects last summer due to constraints and this had reduced the effect of any outages as the network had been quiet. The focus was to catch-up and do as much as possible this summer which has been inhibited by a lack of accommodation on islands for workers. For example, in Colonsay the working day had to be extended to 18 hours to meet completion dates. Despite these challenges it was anticipated that during the course of the summer projects deadlines would be achieved.</p> <p>In regard to a query from the Harris Community to retain the temporary bund at Tarbert for additional carparking. Kevin Hobbs confirmed that this would not be considered due to the marine consent process and the exorbitant costs. The current project and the new build to follow will allow for an extension to the marshalling area and a location for rapid charging units.</p> <p>Caroline Connelly, Infrastructure Manager, Transport Scotland provided an update on the Uig Pier Project. Two bids had been received by Highland Council and subjected to a rigorous evaluation process. A preferred bidder had been identified and discussions continued with Transport Scotland the Sky Triangle Infrastructure Programme and meeting of the Steering Group was schedule for the afternoon.</p> <p><b><u>Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Update</u></b></p> <p>Kenneth Morrison, Harbour Master provided an updated on the Lochmaddy Pier project. Invitations to tender would be issued in the following week for return at the end of August 2021 with a view to award in November 2021 and a start date in January 2022 and completion in January 2023. The enabling works continued with a scheduled completion date of mid-July 2021.</p> <p>The Lochmaddy linkspan power packs had also been replaced and there was work ongoing, in collaboration with CalMac, on Traffic Management on both Sounds to draw up plans by mid-summer and commence work later in the year.</p> <p><b><u>Ullapool Harbour Trust</u></b></p>

		<p>Kevin Peach provided an update on a waterfront project to improve the Shore Street approach road. This had been a aspiration for nearly four years and community support had been sought through three public events and the project was currently in the planning and licencing stage which would take three months. It was anticipated that works would commence in November 2021 for a 30 week period to provide a full width trunk road to improve connectivity and traffic flow. Further information was available on the Trust website.</p>
8	Ferries Community Board Update	<p>The Communities Board submitted a Press Release issued in May 2021 which called for immediate action to address failure in the ferry services to the islands and to bring forward investment plans as a matter of urgency to prevent further social and economic damage to the islands. The specific items referred to in the Press Release were drydocking and maintenance, future investment, the use of existing assets and contracts and structures.</p> <p>Rhoda Campbell addressed the meeting and stated that there had been some reassurance from a recent Board Meeting and from today's discussions that the Transport Minister had a good understanding of the seriousness and urgency of the issues raised.</p> <p>The feedback from all the communities was that Covid impacts had brought business to their knees and this had been further compounded by the recent weeks of disruption. The return of the Loch Seaforth was a relief but there needed to be a short term contingency plan in place and the Comhairle's options paper was a good starting point. The Board looked forward to the lifting of restrictions and the outcomes of discussions on relief vessels which in the coming weeks may help capacity and called for a decision on the Pentalina as a matter of urgency. The Board also received representations from communities for accountability at what was happening at Ferguson Marine in regard to the spiralling costs and delays on the 801 and 802 and sought confirmed deadlines for these ships coming into service.</p> <p>The Board further sought better communication at both strategic and operational level and continued engagement between stakeholders to ensure that the communities had vessels fit for purpose and maximised timetables to suit specific needs. Many communities considered it now to be as bad as it has ever been with an aging fleet with little confidence of improvement and that serious government investment in lifeline services was long overdue.</p> <p>It was noted that the Board had been renamed the Ferries Community Board – Clyde and Hebrides and that an advert for a Lewis Board member would be issued in the next couple of weeks.</p> <p>In response to a query from Rhoda Campbell on the group's remit and how to escalate action points from the FSG to Government level, Neil Macrae indicated that the FSG, subject to agreement by Members were happy to take any actions forward. The action tracker would also be updated and circulated with the draft minute to all Members.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the Ferries Community Board update.</b></p>
9	Scottish Islands Passport	<p>Sarah Compton Bishop, Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager, HITRANS submitted a Report providing an update on the Scottish Islands Passport Project. The Report stated that despite the challenges over the past fourteen months, work had continued to develop the functionality and content of the Scottish Islands Passport App. The Report highlighted that the app was currently going through final checks and content updates before embarking on the process of app store technical approval, with a view to making version one publicly available later in the summer. Further information was detailed within the Report under the following headings:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch</li> <li>• Community and Stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Marketing and brand building</li> <li>• Funding and resource</li> </ul> <p>In light of the ongoing challenges and sensitivities around travel it was anticipated that there would be a soft launch of version 1 of the App next month focussing on recovery. Stakeholder engagement would commence on an island by island basis and additional resources had been secured to assist in that process. Assurance was also given that messaging would be included in the App on guidance for visitors under the current constraints. A live demo online event was scheduled for later in the month and those interested could register by emailing <a href="mailto:passport@hitrans.org.uk">passport@hitrans.org.uk</a></p>
10	Confirm Pre-agreed Date of Next Meeting	It was agreed that the next meeting of the Hebrides Ferry Stakeholder Group would take place at 11.00am on Thursday 2 December 2021.