

## **Craignure Pier STAG response from The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee**

### **Context of the Craignure Pier STAG**

Since the first introduction of RET fares in 2008, and the subsequent roll-out in the 2012 Ferries Plan, it has been known that additional capacity would be required on the Oban – Craignure route. From the 2012 Ferries Plan:

*65. An additional passenger and vehicles vessel will be made available on this route during the summer timetable period. The impact of this change will mean a significant enhancement over the current level of service provision. As well as an increase in the frequency of sailings on a typical operating day, we anticipate early morning departures from Craignure (around 7 am) on most days of the week, and daily evening sailings at around 8 pm and 10 pm.*

The need to make improvements was recognised in the Council's Capital Planning Pack from 2014:

*Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) will have an impact on piers and harbours with the need to invest in infrastructure to meet the demands of additional ferries, increased foot and vehicular traffic and the increase in ferry size. In line with the Scottish Ferries Plan and the proposed deployment of 2 ferries on the Oban to Craignure route. Transport Scotland have intimated that the Isle of Lewis will be deployed and this requires extensive investment to ensure that the pier remains fit for purpose. Works will include the potential lengthening of the pier, new fendering, a new passenger access gangway and marshalling facilities.*

Transport Scotland's Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan (VRDP), first published in 2014 and reviewed annually thereafter, repeated the need for a second vessel operating on the Oban – Craignure route. Had the procurement and construction of the new CMAL vessels 801 and 802 proceeded according to plan, the MV Isle of Lewis or some other similarly-sized major vessel such as the MV Hebrides would have been deployed on the route from 2018. With the delay to these vessels, the earliest this may now happen is summer 2020.

In order for 2 vessels to operate on the route, it is necessary for one vessel to berth overnight in Craignure, because there are insufficient berths in Oban. **Therefore it has been known since 2012, and confirmed publicly by the Council in 2014 and again in every annual VRDP since, that a major vessel of at least the size of the 90-metre long MV Isle of Mull would need to berth overnight in Craignure.**

In order to meet the uplift in demand generated by RET, in 2016 CalMac had no option but to deploy the 65 metre MV Coruisk as a partner to the 90 metre MV Isle of Mull. This is the only vessel of significant vehicle-carrying capacity that CMAL have in its fleet that can safely over-night at Craignure pier. CalMac have long made it clear that they consider Craignure Pier unsuitable for over-nighting the MV Isle of Mull on a regular basis. (The Coruisk overnights in Craignure, and the Isle of Mull overnights in Oban.) Despite the need being known since 2012, no work has been undertaken by the Council to prepare for the over-nighting of a major vessel at Craignure. It was not until 2017 that it appears initial engineering surveys and then this STAG process were prompted by lobbying from The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee. This is a major planning failure of Argyll and Bute Council. Had hull 801 been deployed according to plan, then this failing would have been made even more

stark in summer 2018 – the MV Isle of Lewis or MV Hebrides would have been ready to deploy on the route, but the pier would have been incapable of accepting either.

The latest Transport Scotland VRDP identifies the Oban – Craignure route as the most congested on the entire CalMac network:

Peak 9 Weeks Vehicle Capacity Utilisation

	Forecast 2016*	Actual 2016	Forecast 2017	Forecast 2018	Forecast 2019	Forecast 2020	Forecast 2021	Forecast 2022	Peak 9 weeks Ending
Ardrossan-Brodick	64%	68%	<b>77%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>67%</b>	29-Aug
Kennacraig-Islay	65%	<b>81%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>87%</b>	07-Nov
Mallaig-Lochboisdale		69%	69%	<b>72%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>79%</b>	29-Aug
Oban-Coll/Tiree	<b>74%</b>	65%	68%	69%	<b>71%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>74%</b>	15-Aug
Oban-Castlebay		43%	43%	45%	46%	47%	48%	50%	22-Aug
Oban-Colonsay	36%	20%	20%	20%	21%	21%	21%	21%	29-Aug
Oban-Craignure	<b>76%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>98%</b>	66%	67%	68%	<b>70%</b>	29-Aug
Uig-Tarbert/Lochmaddy	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	15-Aug
Ullapool-Stornoway	62%	69%	<b>72%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>80%</b>	22-Aug

\*-Based on July and August 2015

Note-Values in excess of 70% are shown in bold.

This edition of the VRDP planned for the route to be served by the MV Hebrides and either MV Isle of Mull or MV Isle of Arran from 2019. Through the Argyll Ferry Infrastructure Group, the Council has been aware of the needs of the VRDP, but it remains unclear how the Council intends to meet its obligations. As mentioned above, it is only due to the delay in the new hull 801 that a year's grace has been granted, and it will now be 2020 before this re-deployment happens.

There are two possible outcomes from Council decisions on the interim options in this STAG:

1. A suitable interim solution will be completed before summer 2020, enabling redeployment of either the MV Isle of Arran or the MV Hebrides as planned in the VRDP. Projected demand will be met and a transport crisis on Mull will be averted.
2. Interim solutions will either be delayed or rejected, meaning that CalMac will be unable to fulfil the vessel redeployment plan. There will be no option but for the MV Coruisk to remain on the summer service indefinitely, whilst the community waits in hope for the long-term replacement of the pier. Given that this is likely to take at least 10 years to come into fruition, a crisis in ferry provision to Mull will be unavoidable. Capacity utilisation will remain at 98% or above for the foreseeable future. Mull will have the most congested ferry service in the CalMac network for years to come, as a result of this potentially catastrophic Council decision.

## **The STAG interim options**

The STAG report as presented at the public meetings in Craignure appears to make no direct mention of Transport Scotland's Vessel Replacement and Deployment plan, which is the relevant top-level policy document. It does however make reference to the need to accommodate vessels the size of the MV Isle of Arran and MV Isle of Lewis. However, there seems to have been no refinement of those basic requirements, in particular no consideration is given to whether the interim works should enable over-night or daytime berthing of each vessel. This is critical, because the requirements of each are different.

### **Interim option 1**

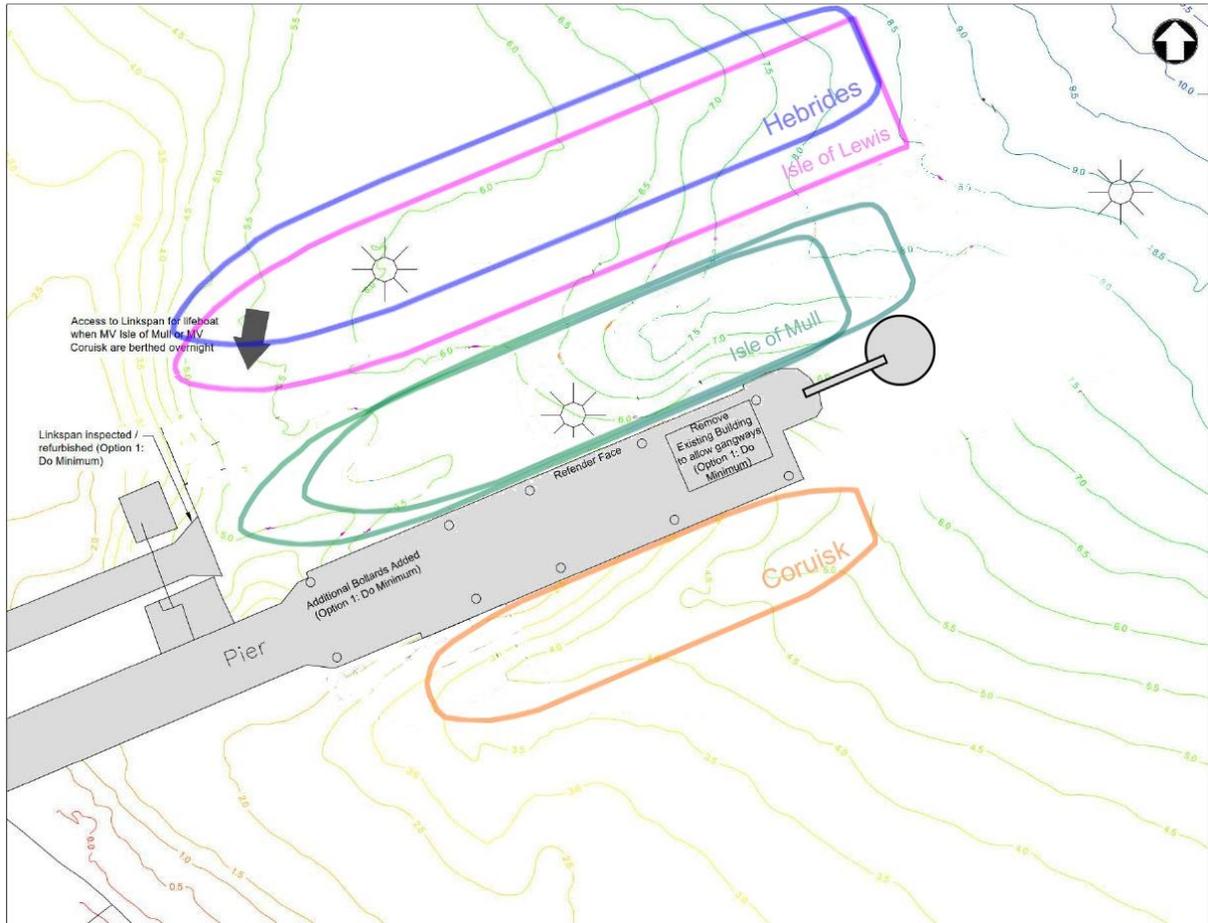
This 'do nothing' option is not an option at all. It may prevent a further deterioration in service, but it will do nothing to meet the Council's obligations under the VRDP, will not meet the aspirations of local users, nor do anything to address the crisis of capacity on the Oban-Craignure service. It is inevitable that unless repair and improvements are carried out urgently, then the condition of the pier will begin to impact of service reliability even more than it does now. As a recent and illustrative example, CalMac cancelled the 21:45 ex Oban and 06:45 ex Craignure on the 17<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup> November. This was because despite the moderate forecast of Easterly winds of 7-10 mph, the Master judged it unsafe to berth without risking damage to the pier. That the Master should have these concerns in such moderate conditions demonstrates deteriorating confidence in the condition of the structure. Any option that allows this to continue is unacceptable and it should therefore be rejected.

### **Interim option 2**

It appears that it has been assumed that this interim solution should accommodate both the current vessel, MV Isle of Mull, or the largest vessel MV Isle of Lewis over-night. In fact, it should be clear that it is only necessary to over-night the smaller MV Isle of Mull. The pier should be capable of regular day-time berthing of the larger vessel, but it appears that the engineering has been designed around the overnight berthing needs of the MV Isle of Lewis.

This is a critical point. Any interim works will of course be assessed very keenly on a value-for-money basis, because by their very nature they are short-term. It also follows that because they are short-term, the design requirements should be very keenly tuned. Interim option 2 appears over-inflated and over-engineered for what is required in the interim. In order to enable the MV Isle of Mull to over-night (the minimum interim requirement), it is not necessary to build a 30 metre long berth extension at a projected cost of £12 - £18 million.

The over-night requirements of the MV Isle of Mull could easily be met by the addition of a much simpler, smaller and cheaper dolphin, as illustrated below:



This would give sufficient berthing length and appropriately positioned mooring points for the Isle of Mull to pull back from the linkspan and berth overnight on the North face of the pier. It would also allow either the MV Hebrides or the MV Isle of Lewis to berth in normal service during the day. The MV Coruisk is shown above in the position she currently adopts for over-nighting, though of course she could equally easily berth on the North face.

This round dolphin solution is common-place and simple, particularly when an economical pier extension is required. See the example below from the CMAL-owned Tarbert pier, where two round dolphins have been added as successively larger ships were deployed on the route.



### **Interim Option 3 (1)**

We are unclear why a large area of dredging has been included, just so that the Coruisk can berth on the South face of the pier. The Coruisk already overnights on this side of the pier in all states of tide. In any case there is sufficient space on the North face for the Coruisk, and so there would seem to be no benefit from any dredging on the South face of the pier unless it facilitates the over-night berthing of the MV Isle of Mull.

### **Interim Option 3 (2)**

Enabling the MV Isle of Mull to berth on the South face of the pier is what the Ferry Committee has been advocating for several years as this facilitates a winter timetable allowing a full day on the mainland 12 months of the year. It is not stated why this solution is unsuitable for the MV Isle of Mull, but a note on the drawing suggests this. We have had several discussions with CalMac in recent years and they have been happy with this general arrangement, given sufficient new mooring points, gangway access and dredging. Argyll and Bute Council was provided with CalMac's technical drawings of their requirements almost 2 years ago. This could be the cheapest means of meeting the Council's obligations under the VRDP.

It should be remembered that when constructed in 1965, the pier was designed for two-face operation, and water depths on both sides were equal. It is due to the lack of routine dredging and because the fenders have been allowed to deteriorate, that this option is as costly as it is. A great deal of the expense here is for work that can justifiably be called repairs rather than improvements.

### **We consider either option 3(2) or a scaled-down option 2 to be the best interim solutions for the pier.**

It is imperative that Argyll and Bute Council proceed with the best value interim option that will enable the MV Isle of Mull to safely berth overnight, every night. This requirement has been well flagged for more than 6 years, and must be viewed as an obligation by the Council in order for it to enable the successful roll-out of the current Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan. Oban-Craignure is the most congested route in the entire CalMac network; and in 18 months CalMac will have the vessel available to alleviate the situation. It is imperative that the Council provides a pier that facilitates this redeployment. Without this, Mull will be the most poorly-served island in the entire Hebrides, in terms of sailing availability. This would be an unacceptable constraint on economic and community development.

As well as meeting VRDP obligations, the small investment required would enable the year-round island-focussed service that this committee has long argued for. We are the only near-mainland island in the UK not to have a ferry service that enables a full day on the mainland 12 months of the year. Since 2010 the community have been lobbying to bring the Mull service into line with other islands which benefit from a full day on the mainland, and now there is a growing sense that we are being actively discriminated against. By enabling the year-round basing of the MV Isle of Mull in Craignure, this small investment would be transformative to the island's economy, long term growth and sustainability.

The spending required (perhaps £3 – 4 million for Option 3 or a down-scaled option 2 as pictured above) is very modest when compared with the revenue generated by Craignure Pier. Below are the income / expenditure records for Craignure Pier over the past 8 years, provided through a recent

FOI. Annual profits have been over £1million for the past four years, with considerable growth since the introduction of RET. With annual profits of £1.4million, it is easy to see that the expenditure needed would be paid back in 2 or 3 years. That is well within the remaining lifespan of the pier. The positive financial case is therefore quite clear.

Moreover, in the context of considerable annual profits from Mull’s main ferry terminal, and the evident long-term lack of maintenance and investment in the pier (note the poor state of the South berth and the second-hand and unsuitable PAS system), **it would be morally unjustifiable to withhold the modest funds needed for an interim solution to Mull’s emerging ferry crisis.**

Income & Expenditure For Craignure Pier 2010-11 to 2017-18								
Sum of YTD Actual Craignure	Year							
	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18
<b>Exp</b>	<b>85,669</b>	<b>99,805</b>	<b>58,263</b>	<b>79,357</b>	<b>55,073</b>	<b>151,678</b>	<b>144,224</b>	<b>84,761</b>
1 - Property Costs	23,161	18,651	21,673	23,278	22,611	23,278	12,863	32,369
2 - Supplies and Services	913	8,051	0	821	3,171	250	0	384
3 - Transport Costs	19	445	405	180	419	-180	62	
4 - Third Party Payments	61,576	72,657	36,185	55,079	20,025	109,064	112,039	35,734
7 - Support Services Charges					8,848	19,265	19,260	16,275
<b>Inc</b>	<b>-956,575</b>	<b>-983,345</b>	<b>-1,043,333</b>	<b>-1,062,369</b>	<b>-1,119,971</b>	<b>-1,191,938</b>	<b>-1,384,639</b>	<b>-1,563,922</b>
6 - Income	-956,575	-983,345	-1,043,333	-1,062,369	-1,119,971	-1,191,938	-1,384,639	-1,563,922
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>-870,907</b>	<b>-883,540</b>	<b>-985,070</b>	<b>-983,012</b>	<b>-1,064,898</b>	<b>-1,040,260</b>	<b>-1,240,415</b>	<b>-1,479,161</b>

#### **Alternative Interim Option 4**

Turning to the STAG Transport Planning Objectives defined in the report, in particular your first objective:

***Transport Planning Objective 1: The ferry infrastructure should reliably facilitate a year-round ‘full day’ for Mull residents and businesses on the Scottish Mainland.***

We are concerned that the fourth option which has been discussed at length with Argyll and Bute Council and Transport Scotland has not been included in this report.

As the pier is not a safe overnight berth for CalMac, the community have an agreed ferry timetable which would provide a full day on the mainland 12 months of the year but requires the vessel to berth overnight in Oban. The timetable does incur cost as additional crew and fuel would be required and due to Calmac commercial confidentiality rules we have been unable to ascertain the exact cost, however our own estimate, which Calmac has not disabused, puts the figure at around £600,000pa.

If Argyll and Bute Council have concerns regarding the verisimilitude of investing ‘good money after bad’ by undertaking the necessary works to the pier then they can put an end to what is seen by many islanders as blatant discrimination by funding this alternative timetable. It is important to understand that Mull is not asking for more sailings, or an enhanced service, the islanders simply want the same number of sailings as we have now, configured slightly differently; the only reason this cannot be implemented immediately, or indeed 8 years ago when we first started asking, is because the pier is now not considered a ‘safe’ overnight berth in the winter by the operator. To add insult to injury, we are now experiencing cancellations to our life line service directly blamed on the inadequacies of the pier. This cannot be a sustainable position.

## **The STAG Long Term Options**

The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee met after the STAG presentations to discuss the long term options and we ensured we had Calmac representatives present who were able to share their expertise. The Ferry Committee are clear that the overarching consideration must be given to the operator's view regarding the location of the new Craignure Pier to provide the most reliable service for the islanders. We also understand that these plans are at a very early stage and further detailed plans and weather modelling are required.

At the start of the conversation, for complete transparency, 3 committee members present declared their interest as they have businesses or property in the immediate vicinity of the proposed new piers.

### **Long Term Option 2b**

This was discounted as it has 'nested' berths, parallel to the shore, and Calmac advised that these were not optimum for berthing in all conditions; all present also agreed that the position was very exposed in moderate weather.

Committee members also felt there was additional infrastructure in terms of access which was not desirable and that it could adversely affect the village businesses by taking the pier away from the centre.

### **Long Term Option 3b**

This was discounted as it has 'nested' berths, parallel to the shore, and Calmac advised that these were not optimum for berthing in all conditions. All present also agreed that the scale and length of the development was overly large and would dominate the village disproportionately.

### **Long Term Option 3a (North of the existing pier)**

The finger berth design we were told, by Calmac, provides the most flexibility when berthing in a variety of conditions. We were advised that this option would be more restrictive to manoeuvrability as the sea room is restricted and depth of water falls away significantly to the north. Masters on the route have commented that the wind behaviour may be less favourable with the pier in this position as there is not much protection from the hills. Some committee members expressed concern at the scale of the development overall, but were heartened that the STAG consultants had indicated that the plans had been drawn to maximum requirements and that there was scope to reduce it somewhat.

### **Long Term Option 2a (South of the existing pier)**

This was the Ferry Committee's favoured option, but please see comments.

The finger berth design we were told, by Calmac, provides the most flexibility when berthing in a variety of conditions. We were advised that this option is also more restrictive to manoeuvrability as the sea room and depth on approach will be reduced compared to that enjoyed by the existing pier. Masters on the route have commented that the wind behaviour may be more favourable with the pier in this position as there is more protection from the hills. Some committee members expressed concern at the scale of the development overall, but were heartened that the STAG consultants had indicated that the plans had been drawn to maximum requirements and that there was scope to reduce it somewhat.

There was a general consensus that an even better option could be to flip the marshalling etc to a position south of the proposed pier, in filling by the old Stevenson pier, and moving the slipway to the north of the proposed pier. The entire area along the southern shore of the bay could then be

used as community amenity space, incorporating the village hall etc. We also understand the local land owner is open to this concept.

## **Conclusion**

Argyll and Bute Council's lack of appetite for maintaining Craignure Pier up to code, and its tardiness in undertaking basic repair work required by the operator – an obvious example is the 2 years it has taken to reinstate essential fendering – is now directly responsible for cancellations we are suffering on our lifeline ferry service.

The community has been lobbying for a full day on the mainland 12 months of the year since 2010. We have been in regular talks with all stakeholders for 3 years now and the Council has been provided with technical drawings from Calmac detailing their specific requirements for safe operation on the pier during the winter. The community has been trying to achieve a tweak to the existing winter timetable to end the discrimination and threat to our economic prosperity which it poses – the timetable does not require additional sailings, it simply requires a pier which is a safe berth in the winter.

We now know that our summer timetable is under threat as the Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan cannot be implemented as set out due to the inadequacies of the pier.

It is now essential that Argyll and Bute Council

- 1 – Immediately implement a workable solution to the short term inadequacies of Craignure Pier to allow the operator to fulfil their responsibility in delivering the life service. We would suggest the alternative interim option 4 which provides the desired winter timetable for £600,000 pa the quickest to implement and the most cost effective.
- 2 – Press forward with the new pier without any delay in the hope that we may have a fully operational, safe pier in the minimum time possible (5 -6 years we are advised)

The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee will continue to work closely and collaboratively with all the stakeholders, our MSP and the Minister, but do not be under any illusion that simple platitudes will suffice – the economic impact of the restrictive winter timetable and the risk to the summer timetable which we have to suffer due to the condition of Craignure Pier is beginning to bite hard and both businesses and families are now making difficult decisions as a direct result.

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