

Ferry Committee Meeting 12th May 2020

(Via Zoom)

Present: Joe Reade, Chris James, Finlay MacDonald, Jim Corbett, Colin Morrison, Neal Goldsmith, Elizabeth Fergusson, Simon Thomason, Ben Wilson, Iain Erskine, Keith Robbie, Moray Finch

In Attendance: Iain Erskine (CalMac), Don McKillop (CalMac)

Apologies: Douglas Wilson, Andy Knight, Claire Simonetta, Jim Corbett.

Matters Arising from meeting on 29th January 2020

Links with Coll and Tiree

- There have been opening discussions with representatives from Coll and Tiree about the possibility of restoring ferry links between these islands and Mull.
- This matter is no further forward due to the spread of Covid-19

What is MIFC role in respect to Covid-19

- **N.G** stated that MIFC role is to ensure there are adequate sailings are available to maintain the essential lifeline and to create a balance when lockdown is lifted to ensure that the island does not get flooded by tourists which could potentially create a wave of Covid-19.
- **E.F** enquired as to what the booking status is for Mull ferries.
- **D.M** replied that they are not taking bookings at present.
- Calmac are trying to gauge what the community needs moving forward and are looking at the possibility of a phased return. Any decisions made will be based on a wide range of feedback and government guidelines.
- **N.G** urged committee to look to the future beyond lockdown and to be prepared.
- **J.R** stated that the issue will be reviewed as the timetable begins to change, but that MIFC will restrict its role only to issues directly related to the ferry service.

Video Meeting with Robbie Drummond

- Joe Reade and Finlay MacDonald held video meeting with Robbie Drummond to discuss service.
- Talked at length about cancellation issues.
- Statistically, last year the network as a whole had a record number of cancellations.
- However, Craignure/ Oban did not comply with this trend.
- **J.R** stated that working with data and statistics is an effective way of getting point across.
- **F.M** stated that face to face meetings allow for more open discussion and a better understanding of where both sides are coming from.
- **B.W** stated that there has been considerable progress made since discussions on cancellations opened. Dealing with facts and continually bringing up the subject with Calmac is the right way forward.
- **J.R** stated that MIFC will keep building and demonstrating the case and sending cancellation stats to Calmac, Transport Scotland, government and others as appropriate.
- It is hoped that the topic of cancellations will be brought into consideration when discussions on procuring a new boat arise.
- **I.E** stated that it is essential that ferry committee's represent the communities they serve.
- **J.R** will post latest cancellation data on website to keep community informed on actions and progress.
- Concerning the Island Focussed Timetable request: J.R said it was made clear that if enough savings are made to fund extra sailings, there is no contractual agreement for those savings to be used for service improvement and so any efforts made by MIFC to find savings may not help the case.
- **B.W** stated that this seems like a change of stance and against the spirit of the whole exercise.

- **E.F** stated that this change of stance is unacceptable under the same contract.
- **N.G** suggested that if Calmac are going to take this stance MIFC should go straight to Transport Scotland.

Video Meeting with Transport Scotland

- With regards an Island Focused Timetable, “some hundreds of thousands” of savings have been found.
- However, this is not enough for TS to recommend approval to the Minister.
- Some alterations to crewing has been found and an agreement has been made with Argyll & Bute Council that there will be no increase in pier dues (as arranged by MIFC)
- **J.R** has contacted Paul Wheelhouse and Mike Russell in the hope of finding a positive conclusion.
- Seems highly unlikely that Mull will get desired timetable this winter.
- **E.F** asked to see exact financial figures that Camac are working with.
- **J.R** replied that Calmac did not disclose exact figures.
- **J.R** stated that in the procurement process, the user and route needs must come first. However, our experience seems to suggest that needs of the company and influence of RMT is more powerful than user groups.
- **J.R** and **F.M** received feedback from Transport Scotland that they want to improve the way procurement and vessel choice is handled.
- **J.R** reported that island connectivity was also discussed and that in the future ‘Islands Connectivity Plan’ there would be more emphasis on connectivity in the round, rather than individual routes.
- Transport Scotland welcome credible arguments and evidence which will positively influence ferry procurement for Mull.
- **F.M** reported that all suggestions given were positively received and that a meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday 19th with Jim Anderson and Kevin Hobbs. [note – now delayed due to Covid19]
- **N.G** suggested that **J.R** and **F.M** have same conversation with Kevin Hobbs who can carry information back to Paul Wheelhouse.

Update on Craignure Pier

- **J.R** reported that progress is behind schedule due to Covid-19 restrictions
- Consultants progressing with interim outline business case.
- Some other imminent works: linkspan hydraulic rams to be replaced.

Potential Alternative vessel solutions for Oban and Craignure

- The ‘Pentalina’ is currently on the market and may be a suitable vessel for Oban/ Craignure route.
- She was originally available for charter but may now be available for purchase.
- MCA and Calmac have inspected her and are happy with her general technical suitability for Oban-Craignure and Ardrossan-Brodick.
- She can berth overnight, use piers in current state and has good car and passenger capacity.
- However, she only has one stern ramp and so turnaround at each port may be slower. Ramp and winches will need modification.
- She has not been well maintained and will need money spent.
- **B.W** enquired as to how she would fit in to current operations.
- **J.R** suggested that she could be a year round ferry (thus enabling Island Focussed Timetable) with perhaps the Isle of Mull operating as a summer supplement. But there are significant compromises – particularly the lack of bow ramp.
- **J.R** shared copies of Catamaran which is currently ‘in build’ but no longer wanted for original purpose. It is also available for purchase.
- As it is still ‘in build’ superstructure changes are still possible.

- **S.T** stated that it would be a considerable risk purchasing a boat which has never been in the water. The ‘Pentalina’ has a fantastic track record and operates comfortably in British waters. She would be a safer option.
- **J.R** stated that reliability and length of operating days are the 2 key factors in community feedback and any future vessels will need to fulfil these.
- **M.F** stated that before MIFC put too much work into investigating the purchase of the catamaran, they need to gauge whether it will be possible.
- **N.G** suggested putting question to Kevin Hobbs before taking matter much further.

Calmac Communities Board

- Elizabeth Fergusson joined CCB in February 2020.
- CBB stands independently from Calmac and represents users on the whole of West Coast but does not take any powers away from ferry committees.
- It focuses on strategic issues and works together with other islands.
- Robbie Drummond communicates directly with board members and attends some of the board meetings.
- The last board meeting was held in the end of February 2020 and the next is to be held at the end of May 2020.
- **E.F** represents Lismore, Coll, Tiree, Kerrera, Mull and Iona.

New Constitution

- New constitution circulated
- **J.R** asked for members to give feedback.
- The biggest issue faced by MIFC is that it represents 2 islands and so it needs to always strike a balance in the constitution. Amendments already suggested will be circulated for further comments with a view to adopting at AGM.

A.O.B

- In advance of meeting scheduled for Tuesday 19th, **J.R** requested that members send in views on topics for discussion. [note – now postponed]
- MIFC needs to raise some funds.
- Iona Community Council has agreed to donate some money.
- Mull Community Council will be asked for donation, but some wider fund raising may be needed.
- **J.R** reported that he is no longer a member of MCC but will attend as many meetings as possible as member of the public to help ensure good comms between the two organisations.
- Iain Erskine offered a vote of thanks to Mull and Iona for compliance with government guidelines throughout lockdown and reducing travel.
- **LE** enquired as to whether committee would be happy for Lochaline/ Fishnish ferry to be on ‘sailing by request’ status on Boxing day 2020 and 2nd January 2021.
- No objections from committee.
- Don McKilop reported that the current essential lifeline timetable has been extended until 31st May.
- Calmac are will wait to hear from Transport Scotland before any further decisions are made and will circulate fresh information as soon as possible.
- In a bid to support social distancing, the layout of Oban ferry terminal has undergone some changes and additional signage has been installed.
- In the next phase, the timetable may be impacted by the new cleaning regime which will occur at each port at turn around and they will continue with cashless payment system.