

Ferry Committee Meeting, 30th June

Via Zoom

Present: Joe Reade, Elizabeth Fergusson, Ben Wilson, Keith Robbie, Finlay MacDonald, Colin Morrison, Jim Corbett

Apologies: Don McKilop, Neal Goldsmith

MATTERS ARISING

Island Focussed Winter Timetable request

- Mike Russell had meeting planned with Paul Wheelhouse for last Wednesday.
- This fell through and is being re-scheduled.
- No confirmation on matter.

Craignure Pier

- Draft report for outline business case for pier extension is almost ready.
- It has taken much longer than expected.
- Hydraulic rams are currently being refurbished.

Specification of Operational Requirements re 801/802

- Has sent multiple e-mails to Edward Mountain, chair of rural enterprise and connectivity committee.
- Has had no response as of yet but will keep trying. If unsuccessful there, J.R will approach the Information Commissioner.
- No objections to J.R pursuing matter.

CORONA VIRUS UPDATES

- J.R has been updating website as regularly as possible to keep community informed as changes are made.
- The recent survey obtaining community opinion on how ferry service should move forward within pandemic has been very successful and Islay have been in touch to say they are going to carry out a similar survey.
- 2 meter rule is currently under review.
- Confirmation will be a given on Thursday.
- As it stands, passenger capacity is 104 and this could increase to 208 if 2 meter rule is relaxed.
- J.R received e-mail from Robbie Drummond to say that they are intending to sell outside deck tickets on a 'turn up and go' basis.
- This would provide passage for potentially another 100 people.
- Arran and Rothesay will be operating on a similar system.

- Rolling booking window seems to be causing complications due to the 2 week window does not allow passengers to plan travel and accommodation which suits their purpose and is causing problems within the tourism industry on the island.
- J.R has sent an e-mail to Robbie Drummond.
- R.D responded by saying that it is a temporary measure. It is not going to change.
- It may change with the introduction of the new timetable in July.
- E.F stated that some islands advocated for a 7 day window
- Calmac capacity calculations have been based on group sizes being 1.33 on average but this is unrealistically low.
- Another key issue which has been flagged up is how locals and passengers with emergency appointments etc. will be assured passage.
- If outside ticketing and social distancing is relaxed, this may reduce problems surrounding this.
- E.F Mull is looking O.K. in terms of capacity at present.
- J.R stated that the other main issue arising is the question of what should happen if somebody falls ill with Corona on the island and what should happen if an islander falls in on the mainland.
- Several people have been following up on this.
- Looking to get practical protocol put in place.
- J.R e-mailed Richard Hadfield and the matter is currently being looked into by Health Department.
- F.M stated that passengers should stay in cars on open deck vehicles but asked if there was anything in place for public transport passengers.
- This has not been confirmed.
- E.F has contacted other routes to find out what guidelines are in place and there are different solutions for different routes.
- Colin Morrison enquired as to why helicopters with isolation bubble have not been considered as there was talk of using them before.
- J.R stated that this would not be practical solution for family groups.
- F.M stated that one of the problems is that it is impossible to be tested for C19 on Iona and Mull at present.
- It depends on what government instruction takes priority. One instruction is to go home; the other is not to use public transport. If clarity can be given, then the protocol should become simple.
- J.R hopes that those in the relevant departments will sort the issue out as it has been repeatedly highlighted as a community concern.
- F.M has been working on timetable for Iona and this has now been given the go ahead from Don McKilop.
- J.R Oban Craignure route continues to be sub-optimal for connections from Iona and also some other public transport connections.
- F.M stated that the half hour turn around has caused difficulties in marrying bus and train connections. This means long waiting times in Oban.
- J.R when draft timetable for Oban-Craignure was first circulated, the first issue to be highlighted by F.M was the first sailing on a Monday has been allocated to the Coruisk, and it

is unclear whether she will have the capacity to accommodate all school children travelling from Ross and Iona.

- Had there been more consultation on the timetable, this could have been avoided.
- F.M has spoken to Don McKilop on the matter and has been told that this will be looked at again closer to term time.
- They are also going to look into making the 3:30pm sailing from Oban on a Friday later, so that school children don't have to leave school even earlier than they do now.
- J.R commended F.M on the hard work he has put into sorting out the details of the Iona timetable.
- J.R stated that the Coruisk is only going to be operating 3 sailings a day. It was hoped that she would do 5 per day, but there are crewing issues which limits to 3.

POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE VESSEL SOLUTIONS FOR OBAN-CRAIGNURE

- Since the last meeting J.R has been looking further into possibility of obtaining the 'in-built' vessel which was discussed at the last meeting.
- It seems to be a fantastic opportunity as CMAL have been tasked with finding second hand vehicles to add to the current fleet.
- J.R contacted Kevin Hobbs to enquire, as did Roy Pedersen.
- The key deficiency listed in his response was its deadweight capacity. He calculated it as inadequate.
- J.R responded with an e-mail containing a list of all deadweight requirements for all routes on the network and pointing KH to his mis-interpretation of the figures on the GA drawing. Vehicle capacity / deadweight is more than adequate.
- There has been no communication between CMAL and STS to discuss vessel suitability and so there have been misinterpretations of what is shown in drawings.
- J.R has contacted Mike Russell who is happy to take the matter up in support of the potential procurement of this vessel.
- Why are CMAL not keen to investigate the vessel?
- J.R is under the impression that they are not keen to have catamarans in the fleet.
- The concept of de-carbonising shipping has been heavily discussed and the purchase of a lighter catamaran would move in that direction.
- F.M stated that Paul Wheelhouse was on board with this concept during their meeting in February.
- F.M The passenger capacity of the catamaran seems to be too small. If it were running alongside the MV Isle of Mull, this would not be too much of an issue, but if it were to be a replacement, perhaps finding a catamaran with a larger passenger capacity would be a better option.
- J.R stated that there are some practical issues such as passenger capacity, passenger access and crew accommodation which could all be resolved if an additional deck was added behind the bridge.
- CMAL have been instructed to procure any vessel that they can find which is basically suitable, and we are trying to demonstrate that this vessel is fit for purpose and is very good value for money.
- The remit of the Ferry Committee to improve the service for the users' benefit.

- This vessel would allow for an island focused timetable as it can stay overnight in Craignure pier without any modification and additional operating costs.
- It improves reliability as it is far better suited to sailing in strong winds and is more manoeuvrable.
- It increases vehicle capacity as it can take 81 cars. Isle of Mull capacity is 65.
- The argument in favour of purchase should be built around user benefit as it allows for all improvements that users have stated that they want.
- J.R will keep pursuing matter and in the event that we are unsuccessful in procuring this vessel, it rehearses the argument that Mull will not accept an unsuitable vessel.
- B.W stated concern over the political hurdles faced by procuring a ship out with Fergusons. They are a design and build ship yard. It could be difficult to remove the design aspect.
- J.R Politics dictates that large proportion of and new vessels are built at Fergusons but there is no reason why Fergusons couldn't start building catamarans.
- STS has introduced a new vessel design to the ferry industry and would like these vessels to be built at Fergusons in the future and he could provide the expertise.
- D.W raised concerns over crewing. The catamaran operates with less than 10 crew, where the MV Isle of Mull operates with approx. 30 crew.
- B.W suggested that this may be holding the idea back.
- J.R It needs government leverage from the likes of Mike Russell and his colleagues.
- J.R asked for committee feedback on how best to move forward with vessel procurement even if the proposed catamaran falls through.
- J.R suggested creating a "Specification of User Requirements" similar to the "Specification of Operational Requirements" produced by Calmac.
- This would include items such as reliability in poor weather, ability to berth at Craignure pier etc.
- D.W suggested that a simple business case would be just as successful as it would outline reduction in crewing costs, and not having to extend Craignure Pier.
- Government have a responsibility to provide sustainable, reliable service which this vessel could offer.
- J.R asked for committee feedback.
- J.C commented that although he is fully behind the principle of the catamaran, he is not convinced that the vessel in question is right for Mull.
- J.C suggested pursuing the idea of a catamaran but not necessarily this one.
- J.C concerned that they will come up against opposition from the union which protects Calmac employees when it comes to the greatly reduced number of crew.
- J.C further stated that any vessel to be considered for the route should have fore and aft loading otherwise the turnaround time is too long for the service required.

NEW CONSTITUTION

- J.R circulated draft of constitution prior to meeting.
- J.R has simplified content to make more readable.
- Emphasis on the importance of a 'Code of Conduct' and 'Register of Interest' which can be drawn from where necessary.

- J.R referred to Areas of Representation and pointed out that he has removed Calmac employees. Split Haulage and construction to separate areas instead of one collective.
- J.R suggested adding other island based organisations, which should be represented, to the list such as representative from public transport.
- J.R suggested broadening user representation
- E.F felt that there was a slight imbalance in the list as there is currently only one representative from tourism.
- C.M agreed.
- F.M stated that he felt it was the duty of the member representing tourism to glean feedback from other tourism based businesses and organisations on the island.
- F.M stated that it is difficult to assess what type of independent user is of use to the committee as they don't represent anybody in particular.
- We have occasionally had independent representatives in mind but they have been unable to attend or commit to meetings.
- F.M suggested that perhaps 20 representatives are perhaps too many.
- J.C stated that currently there are 2 agricultural representatives and this is perhaps unnecessary. One would be adequate providing that they attend the meetings and contribute.
- E.F the ferry committee has a reputation of being a business based committee and not necessarily one that represents independent users. This is perhaps an opportunity to try and move away from that stigma.
- E.F suggested that Health should be represented.
- J.R stated that representatives can be changed at any point.
- D.W suggested advertising for independent representatives as in the past when people have been approached, it has fallen through. Advertising may attract the right kind of person who is happy to volunteer their time.
- F.M suggested having representatives from Kilchoan and Lochaline.
- E.F stated that when she chaired the committee, representatives were co-opted on and they would attend occasionally. This approach seemed to work.
- C.M suggested that representation is thin from the Ross.
- J.R stated that he would like to invite SWMD to join and perhaps seeking out representatives from the Ross.
- F.M suggested that virtual meetings may encourage new members from the Ross as they do not need to factor in travel time.
- E.F suggested that the individual who represents Calmac Community Board should be non-voting, as they may not necessarily be from Mull and that the local authority representative should not have a vote as there may be conflict of interest on certain items.
- J.R suggested that although he agrees that CCB representative does not get a vote, but it is essential to have local authority body that has the ability to vote if they are able to do so.
- F.M suggested that a proviso be written in whereby on conflicting issues the chair can remove vote from local authority member.
- J.R to make changes and then circulate. It can be signed off at AGM.
- F.M stated that it is important to encourage new independent users to join.