

# Ferry Committee Meeting 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020

(Via Zoom)

**Present:** Joe Reade, Ben Wilson, Morven Gibson, Finlay MacDonald, Colin Morrison, Moray Finch, Sue Hawkes, Adrian Fitness, Elizabeth Ferguson, Heather Hill, Stuart MacDougal, David Galbraith, Don McKillop (CalMac Area Ops Manager), Robert Morrison (CalMac Operations Director)

**Apologies:** Simon Thomasson, Chris James, Neal Goldsmith, Helen MacDonald

## 1. Operational Report – Don McKillop

- Throughout lockdown there was 98% reduction in carryings.
- This has recently picked up to 75% of normal carriage.
- After introduction of tier system and accompanying travel guidance, there is a reduction occurring again.
- Craignure timetable has been agreed for summer 2021 which is similar to 2019 timetable.
- 10 round trips planned. 5 Coruisk, 5 Isle of Mull
- 2019 Summer timetables have been applied to Iona- Fionnphort, Fishnish- Lochaline, Tobermory-Kilchoan for 2021.
- Well into Calmac Dry-Dock programme maintaining large and small vessels.
- MV Isle of Mull going to Birkenhead for 3 weeks for maintenance and will be replaced by MV Isle of Arran.
- MV Isle of Arran has comparatively reduced passenger capacity.
- Ferry committee and Calmac have made efforts to contact customers to advise that pre-booking is essential and peak sailings should be avoided if possible.
- Some sailings may have to be ring-fenced for students travelling to Oban.
- Clansman is operating 15:55 sailing Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from Oban to open up more capacity.
- There will be an additional sailing on Sunday afternoons as well.
- Slight modification applied to timetable for Craignure afternoon sailings Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday, sailing at 14:35 not 15:40 to improve post service.
- This has so far been successful.
- With regards Covid-19, current travel advice is now enforceable by law.
- Port and ferry staff are being encouraged to signpost customers to website to obtain relevant guidance.
- Facemask compliance from customers is generally excellent.
- Calmac will be introducing loose freight charges. Looking to engage with MIFC and Mary-Jean Devon to glean community feedback on matter.
- FM offered thanks to Don for support when initial change to timetable was introduced.
- This change of timetable as initially proposed was going to have a very negative impact on all public transport links to and from Iona.
- Delayed return from Craignure for benefit of post was good – but delayed outward journey from Oban prior to that disrupted public transport links. FM and JR asked that in future, the committee should be better consulted before changes were introduced.

- FM stated that any timetable changes which link with buses should be discussed with West Coast Motors and ferry committee.
- AF had written with regards Summer 2018 when 120 passengers left stranded in Craignure. West Coast Motors provided Calmac with 3 coaches to get passengers from Mull back to Oban via Lochaline-Fishnish. There had been a promise of meeting to discuss matter at the time, but it has not been arranged.
- DM reported that this was a technical breakdown which has since been resolved.
- DM requested that further e-mails surrounding such matters should be sent directly to Calmac
- MG requested re-assurance that school children will get priority on Monday morning and Friday afternoon sailings whilst MV Isle of Arran on service. Also, consideration should be given to the fact that sometimes the children have to travel home on Thursday or Wednesday depending on weather.
- DM stated that allowance has been made for students travel needs throughout the period.
- HH enquired if MV Isle of Arran is open vessel and if so could passengers remain in cars to increase capacity.
- DM unfortunately the MV Isle of Arran is not classed as open deck and so passengers cannot remain in cars.

## **2. Robert Morrison – Operations Director Calmac**

### **a. 801/802 and Vessel Redeployment Plans – Mull & Iona impact**

- Calmac have introduced multiple systems to protect passengers and reduce travel, though they have no jurisdiction to prevent people travelling.
- Steps taken in last week that Calmac will provide passengers with government information and QR codes to access relevant guidance.
- This has so far been successful.
- Calmac put themselves forward for an independent health and safety audit surrounding Covid-19 and have since found out that they are the first ferry transport company to have passed this audit.
- Introduction of 801 should allow the movement of vessels within the network.
- One of objectives would be for Coruisk to return to Armadale.
- This would mean another vessel would need to be deployed for Craignure route.
- There have been no suggestions that the MV Isle of Arran being scrapped and this vessel would be redeployed into the fleet.
- According to Transport Scotland the timescale is looking like mid 2022 for 801 to be introduced to the fleet.
- When vessel is complete there will be a lengthy period of sea trials before it comes into regular operation.
- JR asked if it was likely that perhaps MV Isle of Arran or MV Hebridean Isles, both of which can berth overnight a Craignure would be redeployed to Mull route.
- RM replied that although there has been nothing discussed, on an infrastructure level, it would need to be a vessel of similar size.
- This has not been discussed yet but there will be solutions put in place.
- The MV Hebrides was quoted as an option when 802 was introduced but this has in no way been confirmed.
- JR stated that the MV Hebrides it too long to berth at Craignure Pier in its current state.

- RM stated that the cascade from the introduction of 801 will benefit the Mull route far more than the introduction of 802.
- FM asked if there was any clarity on Argyll & Bute's progress with the Craignure Pier development.
- RM has not had any recent updates on that front.

### **b. Island Focussed Service – are there other unexplored options?**

- Over the years the Ferry Committee have been working hard towards achieving an island focussed timetable which would allow islanders to have a full day in Oban, arriving in Oban prior to 9am
- It has ultimately been unaffordable as the net cost would be approximately £500K
- The ferry committee worked hard to identify mitigating cost savings but it is currently still unaffordable.
- JR enquired as to where the ferry committee can look to find further mitigating savings.
- Calmac are currently carrying out a manning level review.
- In order to achieve an island focussed timetable, a vessel which can berth overnight at Craignure will need to be sourced.
- JR if the opportunity for a new vessel does not arise, an interim solution will need to be found.
- RM A complete review of overall deployment of feet will need to be carried out before decisions can be made.

### **c. Catamaran opportunity – Calmac view?**

- JR there is a current opportunity to obtain a catamaran which would fulfil the needs stated.
- JR asked RM for Calmac's view on matter.
- RM much of the decision and discussions would need to be had by Transport Scotland and CMAL.
- From operators' point of view, anything which would provide the service required would be viewed with great interest
- If additional tonnage was made available, it would be welcomed.

### **d. Social distancing 2021 – scope for refining vessel capacities?**

- Concern raised that if social distancing rules are still in place in Summer 2021, tourist dependant businesses will be negatively impacted.
- One aspect which is within Calmac control and that is the average group size by which capacity of ferry is calculated and whether there is opportunity to review average group size assumption of 1.3. For example does it bear out throughout the week on all sailings?
- RM agreed that this is a sensible and fair question.
- The timetable in place for next year was created under the assumption that social distancing will still be in place.
- RM will take this back to discuss.

- AF stated that during the summer, West Coast Motors fluctuated their carrying limits according to family size etc.
- AF to look out records of sales to demonstrate.
- CM agreed that other tour companies manage the group sizes on an individual basis.

### 3. Calmac Communities Board Report – Elizabeth Ferguson

- CBB having regular meetings with CMAL, Transport Scotland, Calmac, DML etc.
- Transport Scotland are trying to move forward to 'business as usual' basis
- Taken on 20 new staff but these have now been deployed on no-deal Brexit activities for now.
- Main TS focus is 801/802, Uig triangle dispute, Islay vessel procurement and community engagement for that.
- Awaiting RECC committee findings regarding future procurement requirements.
- These will be applied immediately into live programs.
- JR would this be applied to Islay vessel?
- EF they would hope to yes.
- TS and Calmac have been working on Summer timetables for 2021.
- It is hoped that if guidance permits, there will be an easing up of restrictions which would allow more passenger capacity/ sailings.
- Demand and ticketing management are being looked at again by TS but an agreement can't be made without full community engagement.
- TS looking to remove option for multiple bookings.
- VRDP is still in draft and this is hoped to be put out to consultation in first half of next year. This will be published alongside a project plan.
- Freight Fare review. Ministers have decided not to apply recommendations and this will be looked at again at the overall fares review.
- Within climate challenge, they are hoping that 30% of Calmac fleet will meet green agenda standards. This will be done first via small vessel program.
- CCB have been given assurance that regardless what happens with Covid, timetables will not change from what they currently are.
- Concerns raised with regards crew changing on vessels as many of crew reside in central belt. This is being looked at by Calmac currently.
- There is risk that campervans will fill car deck space with advanced bookings and this can be restrictive for all tourism industry,
- TS view is that because the contract is non-discriminatory, it is the local authority's responsibility to manage this through by-laws.
- Some islands had no booking, no travel policy.
- This was raised to Mull Community Council last year.
- Unfortunately, it takes between 12-14 months to get by-law in place and so will not be implemented this summer.
- DW raised point that 8-meter campervans can travel fairly cheaply, but an 8-meter lorry is charged commercial rates. This in itself is discriminatory behaviour.
- EF reported that this is discussed at every CCB meeting.

- CCB have been campaigning since 2018 to get school buses on ferries without paying commercial rates. A calculated cost neutral change has been requested.
- Unfortunately, ministers have deemed this unaffordable.
- Calmac runs a risk register and now has formal corporate risk logged for port infrastructure right across the network.
- Ardrossan and Craignure were deemed as particularly high risk.
- Calmac and TS are working together to think about having recommendations for FC TOR's across the network.
- Regular 6-month meeting with DML board.
- VRDP is broadly discussed and the realities the network could face as result.
- Working hard on environmental priorities both with fuel efficiency and onboard strategies.
- New plans surrounding customer service, local recruitment service and apprentice scheme where majority of recruits are from islands.
- There is also now a call centre in Stornoway.
- CMAL current projects within ports and infrastructure are Gourock, Tarbert, Tiree, to be finished by end of year.
- Lochmaddy tender has failed and will need to retender for new contractor.
- Huge amount of work to be done in Uig and much of which is fault of local authority.
- Unfortunately, Craignure Pier was not mentioned as it is owned by Argyll & Bute Council.
- Some waters are currently being reclassified.
- EF asked FM if Iona is being reclassified.
- FM replied yes and it means that next vessel for Iona will be larger and based on size of current hybrids but will need to be different design.
- Currently looking into on-board charging facilities for electric cars.
- FM enquired as to what the next step will be for commercial costing review.
- EF replied that there have so far been 3 reviews and the finding have been formally rejected as it must be a cost-neutral solution. It will now be put to over-arching review which will be carried out at some point in future.
- DW suggested working out cost per meter for individual services. Mull and Arran are at top of list.

## **4. Any Other Business**

### **a. Catamaran update – Joe Reade**

- Seller and CMAL are still in discussions to try and resolve MCA technical issues.
- JR to discuss with Iona and Mull Community Council to try and assess community view on catamaran purchase and compile community proposition.
- Site is currently getting a lot of interest from individuals both on and off the island.

### **b. Ferry Timetable Change**

- There was sudden change to timetable last week and the assumption was that the buses can change their timetable fairly quickly to accommodate other service timetables.

- This is not the case.
- It will take another 10 days in this instance before the timetable is officially changed, but in normal circumstances it takes 70 days.
- Bus company need notice further in advance.
- JR stated that this issue has been raised with Calmac as the process used was sub-optimal.

### **c. Craignure and Iona Pier Development**

- EF ( as Mull resident ) requested update on Craignure pier and A&BC and what position is with Oban development.
- JR replied that there are so far no updates with regards pier development. Business plan is to be released on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. This is the report that was initially hoped to have been published in March.
- JR stated that Ferry Committee have not been involved directly with Iona development. This has been driven mainly by Sound of Iona Harbour Committee and Iona Community Council.
- FM stated that engagement of committee with the council has been good overall.
- Committee have had significant impact with design and plans.
- Unfortunately, recently there has been a disconnect between the committee, design team and A&BC and this has been exacerbated by offices being closed due to Covid-19.
- Designs have been produced which are over specified and are not in line with expectations.
- These plans have been published prematurely by the planning department which sparked concern within the community.
- The public consultation is now taking place. Plans have been published on which public can make comments which will be fed back to designers.
- Plans will not be passed until design meets needs of pier users and community.