

# Ferry Committee Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

(Via Zoom)

**Present:** Joe Reade, Billy McClymont, Colin Morrison, Ben Wilson, Adrian Fitness, Simon Thomasson, Finlay MacDonald, Elizabeth Ferguson, Andy Knight, Chris James, Morven Gibson, Heather Hill, Moray Finch, Helen MacDonald, Stuart MacDougal.

## 1. Apologies

- David Galbraith, Neal Goldsmith, Jim Lynch, Douglas Wilson

## 2. a) Recent Iona 'episode', reaction of CalMac Management and our relationship with them

- JR circulated notes of phone call he had with Robbie Drummond and Robert Morrison, and an email thread connected to it.
- Events surrounding proposed reduction in timetable and reliability for Iona timetable prompted phone call.
- JR felt that the phone call was quite combative and not representative of 2 organisations working together for the greater good.
- MF stated that JR has taken great steps to be civil and always have evidential basis to any lines of enquiry or criticism.
- MF would like to not have decisions imposed upon them which significantly impact island.
- Civil communication needs to be maintained throughout in order to influence significant decisions.
- JR Mull Ferry Committee is progressive and pro-active and challenges on all aspects of service in order to improve for the good of the users.
- BW stated that regardless of whether we are challenging Calmac to a point where they are not comfortable, we should continue and commended JR on his handling of the situation.
- JR asked EF to advise on how other ferry committees operate.
- EF stated that the relationships tend not to be as combative.
- EF stated that in any situation, if either party is not getting what they need out of the relationship then the only thing one can do is change your own approach/behaviour as that is all you can control. .
- JR stated that ethical behaviour is paramount and it appears that the source of aggravation is not how the questions have been asked, but the questions themselves.
- MG stated that the Ferry Committee are not being combative in asking difficult questions and should not be made to feel uncomfortable for asking them. This needs to be made clear.
- DW seconded MG's point and has felt over the years that Calmac do not want interference or examinations with regard the service e they provide.
- As Calmac is heavily subsidised by the government, they have a duty to ensure that they are maintaining the best service possible to fulfil user needs.
- FM stated that the initial aggravation began as The Sound of Iona Harbour Committee began pushing Calmac to act after recent timetable changes.
- FM stated that Calmacs interaction with SIHC was very poor. They were very upset that SIHC held their ground with regards their complaints. In time they admitted that they could have handled the situation much better.
- FM felt the SIHC were asking reasonable questions and also providing solutions, but they were still badly received.

## **b) Suggestion for how we can take up the offer of co-operation and ‘reset’**

- That being said, it is vital that the relationship is reset and both parties can move forward.
- JR has extended an invitation to attend next meeting.
- There are 2 subjects on which it is essential that we move forward with positive co-operation.
- One being the procurement of the catamaran and the other being the island focused timetable.
- FM the reason MFC are pushing for the purchase of the catamaran is because it ties in with achieving an island focused timetable.
- JR presented graphs to MFC which demonstrated high passenger certification levels which do not correspond with actual need.
- It is very easy to find waste of resources within the ferry system.
- Though TS have reported that the island-based time-table is unaffordable even though there is a demonstrable need. This should be challenged.
- FM suggested it would be worth exploring the use of alternative vessels berthed in Oban if possible, to fulfil an early morning sailing and later sailing at night.
- BM stated that Calmac has failed in terms of looking for solutions. BM stated that it might be worth presenting solutions that replicate systems that Calmac already have in place for example, MV Argyle and MV Bute as the introduction of these vessels have proved a huge success.
- JR stated that Calmac have shown no interest in improving the productivity of the current service.
- AK stated that it should be a priority of the Scottish Government to improve the efficiency but they appear not to have ever challenged Calmac on their operations. No government ministers have scrutinised or analysed finance or efficiency within the network.
- It is therefore very hard to bring about change.
- EF pointed out that when the MFC fought for an improved timetable for Lochaline/ Fishnish route, Calmac did successfully utilise other vessels to accommodate the changes. The solution may already be there.
- AF suggested that it is not Calmac but the Scottish Government that MFC are challenging.
- EF in agreement as they are simply a contractual company. The issues we face seem to be Scottish Government policy issues.
- JR stated that moving forward, Calmac's offer of co-operation should be taken at face value and open a dialogue surrounding the timetable and the purchase of the catamaran.

## **3. Catamaran opportunity – update and next step**

- JR has had positive, open conversation with Frances Pacitti and Chris Willcock (Transport Scotland) surrounding potential purchase of catamaran.
- Key hurdle to climb is MCA approval.
- STS, who are selling the vessel, have to pay for the approval.
- They are currently waiting for an approval fee from MCA.
- Their commercial representative is going to address issue with Scottish Government.
- If MCA are happy with the vessel, it then has to satisfy CMAL and Calmac's operational requirements.
- The MCA is currently a bigger hurdle.
- It is essential to inform and consult with community on matter.
- JR would like to give an online presentation with Alf Baird.
- JR would do presentation which covers the local benefits and practical local issues.
- JR has suggested October 22<sup>nd</sup> as date for this.
- This would be recorded and put on Website to allow community to view at leisure.
- All in agreement.

#### **4. RECC Inquiry evidence refused – further steps?**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of evidence for RECC Inquiry has been refused and deemed too late.
- MF suggested taking matter to Michael Russell.
- FM in agreement.
- JR agreed that it is essential to get the evidence put on record.
- JR also suggested sending to all committee members.
- AK stated that the evidence highlights shortcomings in the vessel procurement strategy and adds some weight to the argument that it is a flawed process.
- This process has recently been criticised in the press.
- JR to persist in getting evidence put on record.
- He has also sent evidence to TS.
- [post meeting note – Supplementary evidence was accepted by RECC committee]

#### **5. Summer '21 timetable**

- There is brief opportunity to make minor changes to next year's timetable.
- It is difficult to make case to request any significant change unless there is a particularly l=poor connection which needs fixed.
- Members happy with proposed time table.
- JR stated that FM had suggested a minor change to Sunday sailings.
- FM declared interest as it would be beneficial to his company to have Sunday morning sailings.
- This was available summer 2020.
- JR as there is no time to consult with community, it would not be possible to request change unless it was obviously beneficial to entire island and uncontentious.
- [post meeting note – subsequently TS decided to assume social distancing will still be in force through summer '21, and therefore the timetables have largely been built around the extended turnaround times and enhanced cleaning required]

#### **6. Craignure Pier update**

- Still waiting for interim business case.
- There has been a longer-term business case commissioned. This has not been published yet.
- They plan to issue information on both business cases very soon.
- JR to pass on contacts of Craignure Bay Community Group and will suggest further discussion with MCC and MIFC.
- Final business cases will not be published before community consultation has been carried out.

#### **7. Hospital appointment arrangements**

- New arrangement for passengers who need to travel by car to mainland for hospital appointments.
- If patient cannot get booking on ferry, Calmac will pay for taxi to get them to appointment on mainland.
- JR asked Transport Scotland if this arrangement can be used for hospital discharges.
- They replied no. This is strictly for hospital appointments.
- JR asked members for opinion as to whether this should be pushed further.

- HH agreed that this should be pushed further.
- FM enquired if this arrangement is only for Covid-19 period.
- JR replied that it is a permanent arrangement.
- All in agreement that JR should write to TS stating that though this is an excellent arrangement, it should apply to discharges as well.
- JR to copy in Mike Russell.

## **8. Symptomatic Covid passenger transfer**

- This is an on-going issue surrounding allowing knowingly Covid-19 symptomatic people to use the ferry to get home either from the island or to the island.
- This is also relevant to those people who are being directed to Covid testing centres.
- There needs to be a policy in place to ensure that Calmac knows if passengers with symptoms are travelling.
- FM agrees that this undermines track and trace policy.
- JR has stated that there has been representation from multiple local bodies to Calmac to change policy that symptomatic passengers are only allowed to travel in an ambulance.
- As a result, Calmac drew up a protocol which would allow Covid passengers to travel on open deck vessel using own vehicle.
- TS have rejected this.
- JR to write to TS to push them to reconsider decision.
- All in agreement.