

Mull & Iona Ferry Committee

27th January 2021, 7pm

(Via Zoom)

Present: Joe Reade, Billy McClymont, Douglas Wilson, Ben Wilson, Heather Hill, Colin Morrison, Sue Hawkes, Morven Gibson, Chris James, David Galbraith, Stuart MacDougal, Finlay MacDonald

In attendance: Stewart Clarke, Jim Lynch

Apologies: Claire Simonetta, Helen MacDonald

Matters Arising from November meeting

- Island Focused Timetable - Request has been sent in with all cost/ time saving and catamaran suggestions included.
- Letter has been sent to Scottish Government outlining concern for social distancing on ferry as discussed at last meeting. No reply yet.

Calmac Communities Board Report – Rob Ware

- Rob Ware unable to attend

Craignure Pier, OBC Consultation

- Keith Robbie, Billy McClymont and Chris James declared interest as Craignure residents.
- S.C stated that there are 2 outline business cases for long term up to a maximum of 15 years and an interim business plan.
- Turner and Townsend are the consultants looking at long term business case.
- They have outlined 4 options - 2 options to south of existing pier, 2 options to north of existing pier.
- Mott MacDonald are consultants looking at interim business plan which looks at extending the existing pier.
- Public opinion is gleaned via consultation and the period for the consultation ends on 7th February.
- After which a detailed business plan will be drawn up, taking into consideration findings from the consultation.

Interim OBC Q&A

- J.R enquired about the structural strength of the pier and why the Clansman and the Hebrides have been asked not to berth too harshly.
- A physical structural analysis has been carried out and indicated that there are limitations in the fendering.
- As part of the interim option, if it is decided to extend the pier, work would need to be carried out on structure.

- Timbers are in fair to good condition and are solid. Maintenance work will be carried out and North West Marine are currently looking into this work.
- The problem lies with the size of the vessels and the design of the pier. Vessels have been getting larger over the years and pier is not designed to cope with this.
- J.R requested copy of reports for ferry committee viewing.
- J.R enquired as to what happened to the £3.7million round dolphin option.
- One of the risks stated for the round dolphin was that it may disrupt the service.
- When the £12million pier extension was suggested there was no risk mentioned. Can this be explained?
- S.C stated that Dolphin seemed like a good path forward and because it was a small unit, Mott MacDonald identified that it might not cope with the loading capacity. Raking Piles would have to be added which would interrupt where the vessel at point of berthing throughout the construction stage.
- The distance between the Dolphin and the main berth has to be no greater than $0.15 \times$ the length of the smallest vessel and this came out at under 10m. This would mean that the Dolphin would be too close to the existing pier.
- The larger vessels would not be able to berth safely.
- As a result, small circular dolphin would not be a feasible option.
- B.M stated concern with the interim plan, if we are issued with the Hebrides, the service provided will not be improved or reliable due to stated berthing problems. If we get an extra vessel we may not be able to use it.
- J.R stated that the council are at the OBC stage of work to enable the deployment of the Hebrides as outlined in the VRDP. This should have happened 3 years ago.
- If a pier extension were to happen, it would not happen for another 2 years.
- There is extreme frustration surrounding the process.
- J.R enquired that if the Hebrides was deployed to Mull would the £12million option take into account the upgrading fendering to ensure larger vessels could berth efficiently.
- S.C stated yes. The £12million option covers all maintenance and upgrade needs. Mott MacDonald did survey on reliability of the service. Suggestion was that larger vessels have problems coming in. The figures do not back this up. It is in fact the crossing conditions that affect the service.
- J.R stated that the ferry committee would like to see the detail in this report to back up this statement.
- J.R enquired if the passenger access system is going to be replaced this year.
- S.C stated that it is not being replaced this year. Specialists are currently looking into parameters that new system will have to work around but works will not be carried out this year and the current passenger access system will be in place for the foreseeable future. However, it will need to be replaced before works on the pier are carried out. It will not last until then.
- J.R stated that in the interim report, one of the risks and disbenefits of pier extension that was outlined was the prospect of larger vessels using pier. Even though the objective of VRDP and long-term plan was to give access to bigger ferries.
- S.C stated that the Outline business cases look at all aspect of traffic using pier environmental impact though it does appear to be contradictory.

- The business case looks at both pros and cons. It is desirable to have larger ferries berthing, but there are also problems surrounding this as well. This stands equally for long-term option too.
- F.M stated that when talking about disadvantage of larger vessels using the pier, it is in reference to Hebrides and Clansman. Calmac have stated that 801 and 802 which have aprox 100 extra car capacity, will never be deployed to our route unless in emergency. The difference between Clansman and Isle of Mull is 10 cars and so the issue of increased capacity is not as serious as the report suggests.
- J.R and S.C in agreement.
- S.C stated that this is an aspect of the report that needs to be written up in more detail.
- J.R stated that it needs to be realigned.
- D.W stated that it feels like there is no appetite for an affordable short-term solution. The reports are geared towards a very costly long-term solution.

Long-term OBC Q&A

- J.R enquired if all options are equal in terms of their functionality. Will the same service be delivered by all?
- S.C stated that Calmac Skippers have stated that there is more sea room to the north and so they would prefer an option to the north of the existing pier. Though other options are also viable.
- These have been drawn up as options but there is a lot of work to be carried out surrounding it.
- Work such as wave monitoring, sedimentation, ground monitoring etc.
- B.W stated that the problem is that the best location for the pier is where the current pier is.
- All in agreement.
- J.R stated that option D has been scored higher on integration and enquired why.
- S.C stated that this referencing is surrounding the marshalling areas as marshalling area is directly next to linkspan and passengers are kept completely separate.
- J.R enquired as to why in options A & B (particularly A) are designed so that marshalling area goes around the entire building.
- S stated that these were drawn up to use the existing land and keep costs down.
- Pros and cons have been highlighted for each option.
- M.F scoring has been carried out in a subjective way. Individuals from the island itself may have come up with a better solution.
- J.R in agreement. It appears to be a crude, tick-box assessment thus steering opinion in a direction without clear rationale.
- B.M stated that integration should be how it integrated into current community.
- Some of the current suggestions destroy local businesses, have moved out of industrial area into the residential are, the nearest carpark is half a mile away. This is not a thorough investigation into what community needs.
- S.C reassured that this is why the community is being consulted and plans are not yet at feasibility and ground investigation stage.
- B.M reiterated that the best place for a pier at Craignure is where the existing pier is.
- J.R stated that local impact needs to be given more attention.
- S.C stated that the next stage is to arrange a meeting with local hauliers, bus companies etc to gauge opinion and glean input.

- Turner and Townsend are keen to meet various business to get more input in terms of how the project can work with them.
- J.R stated that it seems to be the assumption that the marshalling area needs to be 1.5x the size of the largest vessels likely to dock here which are 801 and 802.
- The STAG meeting suggested that the marshalling area needs only to be the size of the vessels which are actually using the port.
- S.C stated that they are looking at all viable options.
- J.R stated concern that the fact that the 1.5x option is still at play may mean that the route might end up with a vessel that size.
- B.M stated concern that these plans do not demonstrate good value for money.
- If the Catamaran option was considered the current pier size would be ample.
- J.R stated that although the pier belongs to the Council, the funding comes from Transport Scotland and therefore the decision about the size comes from TS.
- Do Argyll and Bute Council make any decisions on size?
- S.C stated that the pier will be designed around the potential vessels that may be deployed to Craignure.
- J.R stated that the design is the same as what has just been built in Brodick and what is planned for Mallaig.
- B.M enquired as to why the linkspan needs to be on the North side of berth?
- S.C stated that this is preferred by Calmac Skippers.
- B.M stated that the wind comes from the west and so a linkspan on the north side would be problematic.
- S.C to feedback to Calmac.
- J.R stated that the committee will need to draw up response to plans and requested that all members begin to send in any thoughts they have on matter.
- F.M asked S.C to confirm what the EIA had revealed with regards the Fionnphort project.
- S.C stated that they are carrying out an EIA on both sides of the crossing from Fionnphort to Iona
- Going to a consultant and taking all findings to them.
- Strong comments regarding the crest height and these will be fed back.
- Looking to reduce the crest level in Fionnphort.
- Looking into wave and sedimentation modelling.
- As part of the feedback, photo montages are being produced to give community better understanding of what they are likely to see in both Fionnphort and Iona.
- There are still concerns surrounding sedimentation issues particularly on the Iona side.
- There is still a lot of work still to be carried out.
- J.R enquired about the timescale.
- S.C has asked team to revisit this and feedback.
- Works are still moving along in accordance with timescales already discussed.
- J.R asked about timescales for Craignure.
- S.C stated that what would normally happen is that drop –in sessions would be carried out but this is not possible and so the inline consultation is being carried out.
- A meeting will be arranged with a CMILG.
- This should be in February.

- Overall timescale is looking at having all plans completed and decision made on long-term and interim business plans by Summer 2021.
- Construction should be completed by 2027.
- Land has been purchased and extended marshalling area should be completed by Summer 2021.
- B.M enquired as to whether planning has been granted for extended marshalling area.
- S.C stated that there have been a number of objections and discussions will need to be had with planners. Planning is not straight forward.
- S.C is hopeful that planning will be granted if concerns are addressed.
- M.G advised S.C to look into online ways of carrying out drop-in/ presentation sessions with the community.
- S.C will look into this.

Catamaran Update

- Since Christmas press release, lots of interest has been generated.
- Press release accompanied letter to Paul Wheelhouse.
- No response as of yet.
- J.R has also sent in outline business case which highlights the potential savings made by catamaran purchase.
- CMAL are still maintaining position that the seller must get MCA approval for design changes before CMAL will look at possibility of purchasing catamaran.
- J.R is currently trying to demonstrate to Transport Scotland that this is not good commercial practice.
- To support this J,R has spoken to 5 individuals who have experience in buying and selling vessels on the international market.
- B.M suggested that Mull & Iona Ferry Committee purchases the ferry, Transport Scotland could charter it.
- J.R agreed that there is definitely scope for that discussion.
- J.R knows of another island group that is working on a model like that.
- B.W enquired as to how telephone discussions have been with Frances Pacciti.
- J.R stated that there is concern that seller is not genuinely interested in selling the vessel and know they have no chance of passing MCA.
- B.W enquired as to whether Mike Russell is doing enough to back the ferry committee on the matter.
- J.R stated that there is a limit to what he can do, but he is doing his best.
- He replies to all e-mails and keeps in regular contact via phone.
- He can only act on this matter as a constituency MSP.
- Most recently he wrote an e-mail to Paul Wheelhouse strongly advising him to purchase the ferry.
- There has been no response from Paul Wheelhouse.
- B.M enquired as to whether Jim Lynch could be asked to intervene with the matter.
- J.L happy to support Mike Russell.
- J.L to contact J.R on matter.
- J.R will follow up conversation with Francis Pacciti having gleaned more professional advice on purchasing vessel internationally.
- F.M enquired as to deadline for purchase.
- J.R stated that the seller was looking for confirmation by January 2021.
- They have other potential buyers who are very interested in purchase.

- A decision will have to be made within the next month or the opportunity will be lost.
- M.F suggested inviting Frances Pacciti to a zoom meeting with a few members of the ferry committee.
- J.R in agreement.
- B.M enquired if Transport Scotland have given a time-scale for procurement process.
- J.R stated that Richard Hadfield was hoping to get in touch early 2021 to discuss.
- There is £580million capital spend to update fleet.
- It takes CMAL approximately 10 years to secure a vessel.
- B.M enquired if they don't go ahead with the catamaran plan, what will be the outcome.
- J.R stated that the decision will need to be made about the catamaran before a contingency is offered.
- B.M stated that a 2-vessel service is needed which provides a longer working day.
- B.M has spoken to Oban Community Council and they are also concerned about larger 120 car vessels being deployed on the route. The infrastructure is not in place to support the amount of extra traffic.
- B.W stated that there are a number of options to look at out with the catamaran if it is not taken forward.
- F.M would like input from CMAL on how they would build a catamaran from scratch and what spec it would need for Craignure route.
- This might be the way to open the conversation with them in the future if they do not go for the current proposition.