

## **Mull Ferry Committee AGM**

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**7pm, An Roth**

### **Present:**

Joe Reade, Billy McClymont, Finlay MacDonald, Colin Morrison, Morven Gibson, David Galbraith, Ben Wilson, Stuart MacDougal, Heather Hill, Pete Pinnington, Chris Baker, Geoff Adams

### **Apologies:**

Moray Finch, Sam Jones, Jim Lynch, Sue Hawkes, Adrian Fitness, Keith Robbie, Claire Simonetta, Douglas Wilson

### **Chairs Report**

- Unfortunately, the ferry committee failed in most of our stated objectives for the year.
- Namely the Island focused timetable and catamaran.
- But we have succeeded in getting the subject of our failing network into limelight.
- Latest post on Ferry Committee website is being published in Herald.
- JR has been speaking at length with journalist who is writing a lengthy piece on ferries for The Times.
- A photographer has also visited the biscuit factory to get photos for a large article which will be published in The Guardian.
- Progress is being made in getting better coverage.
- JR has been informed from a reliable source, that Mull will be issued with a new ferry.
- There is a Norwegian, mono-hull, double-ended ferry which is intended for the Oban to Craignure route.
- Had we not been so vocal this year, perhaps this would not have happened.
- It is not the ferry we have been arguing for, but it is a new ferry.
- It is called 'Utne'.
- It is a small vessel, around 50m in length and was built in 2015.
- It's length allows it to easily berth overnight in Craignure, which may allow for the island-focused timetable all year round.
- But as it is so small, it would need to be supplemented by another vessel during the winter months.
- It has smaller passenger capacity than the 'Coruisk'.
- It does not have crew accommodation and the crew would have to be shore based.
- It is run by a crew of 4 in Norway.
- As it has such a small crew, it may be an option of run the service for 18 hours per day. It is a slower vessel with an average speed of 11 knots and so would have to run a longer service each day in order to be a feasible replacement for the 'Coruisk'.
- JR has suggested this to Transport Scotland

- Calmac are keen to get 'Coruisk' back to Mallaig run.
- BM asked why 'Utne' can't be deployed to Mallaig.
- JR stated that 'Utne' has better specification and would be able to run at night time, so is better suited to Oban-Craignure route.
- BM suggested that Transport Scotland should be lobbied to maintain small crew and run for longer shifts.
- JR in agreement.
- Potentially very good news for our network. But it will be Spring at earliest before it is available.
- Details of this vessel can be found online.
- BM would ideally like to see a 3-vessel service in operation between Craignure and Oban. 2 vessels during the day and smaller vessel in service at night time. This is perhaps something that could be looked at when the Ilse of Mull is due to be replaced.
- FM in agreement. It may reduce pinch points within the service, where boats are at passenger capacity.
- It has always been a concern within the Iona community, that non-bookable services can't guarantee that they will get off the island in time for essential appointments etc.
- JR will keep members informed of any further updates.

#### **Election of Members**

- Pete Pinnington, Chris Baker and Geoff Adams have requested to join the committee.
- All existing members would like to stay on.
- With 3 new members it takes numbers over constitutional 20.
- JR has suggested co-opting the new members on.
- JR formally proposed 3 new members.
- All in agreement

#### **Election of Office Bearers**

- FM proposed to remain as vice chair
- All in agreement
- JR proposed to remain as Chair
- All in agreement
- JR invited members to volunteer as FC secretary.
- No volunteers

#### **MV Isle of Mull replacement**

- Specification of user requirements has been completed.
- This has gone online.
- Thus far there have been no e-mails in response to it, which hopefully means that the community is happy with what has been published.
- Deadline for comments has been set for 15<sup>th</sup> October.
- JR has sent to Iona and Mull Community Council.

- Shiona from Iona has responded with a suggested text to make the reference to islands act more robust.
- Not heard back from Mull Community Council as yet.
- JR asked it that if any members have any suggestions to please make them known.
- JR has sent it to Richard Hadfield at TS.
- JR stated that the ferry committee can be confident that he is listening to us and understands everything that we are saying.
- FM and JR had online meeting with him to discuss, and since then he is very happy with what the report is saying.
- He discussed what the process will be over the coming years and a document surrounding process has been distributed to members.
- At present we are still in what they call the 'initiation phase'.
- At this point, it is still in Transport Scotland's hands and they are getting operator requirements and constructing a strategic business case.
- Next year, it is likely we will be in the 'development phase', where options can be discussed.
- FM stated that the final page of the document has a provisional timeline to view.
- It is proposed that Summer 2026 will be when the new vessel will be delivered.
- BM stated that these plans do not join up with Argyll and Bute Councils plan for Craignure pier.
- JR it is unlikely that an estimated timeline will be accurate.
- Richard Hadfield is aware of the challenges faced by the pier, but at present it is unsure as to what size of vessels will be given to the Mull route.
- JR stated that there is no reason why the service can't operate for 18 hour per day.
- FM stated that this would be dependent on what type of boat was given. A smaller vessel if a smaller, shore-based crew could operate on shifts and provide that service.
- Richard Hadfield sent JR an e-mail stating that while no commitment could be given that a 3-vessel service would be given, the desire for smaller vessels has been acknowledged and that they are no longer looking at 100+ car capacity vessels. A number of 60-80 car capacity vessels have been considered for the route and that both 2 and 3 vessel options will be looked at.
- JR stated that it is probably that the minimum capacity for our route will be dictated by the vessels ability to go out to Coll and Tiree when required. This will be expected by Calmac.
- JR stated that though he is confident in Richard Hadfield, he is concerned about what decisions will be made when elements of control are handed over to CMAL.
- All options will need to be discussed before a decision is made.
- BW stated that although there is a long way to go, a very good start has been made.
- FM stated that our relationship with Transport Scotland is very positive and he feels that they listen to what is said.
- If we are looking o push ahead with a community owned ferry, we would have to be very careful about how this was presented to Calmac as we run the risk of breaking down any relationship we do have with them
- Roy Pederson has written a report which demonstrates that it would be cost effective for the tax payer to run a community run ferry.

- JR stated that the report has been written by a consultant and it is his recommendation, not ours at this stage.
- FM stated that there is further debate about which type of service to run. The community owned option is not the only one to consider.
- Any commercial competition would be good for Mull routes.
- JR stated that whether we go ahead with the community option or not, the basic principle is that it should no longer be a single contract network.
- Calmac will oppose this as they maintain that all island routes should be network operated.
- BM stated concern about these proposals will cause a rift with Calmac.
- BW reiterated that and suggested that before we put the idea out there, we need to be serious about taking it forward.
- JR stated that the Calmac contract runs out in 2024, so if this is something we want to take forward, negotiations are going to have to start soon.

### **Community Ferry Company**

- Discussion about report by Roy Pederson and how best to take it forward.
- BM enquired as to how the services running to Orkney and Shetland compare to the service operated by Calmac.
- BW stated that her frequently uses the ferries to Orkney and Shetland and that Serco are very easy to work with. There is a slightly different dynamic to Calmac operations, with a focus on commercial traffic.
- JR stated that it is important the content of this proposal is backed up, and it is important that we come to a decision on how we take present it to the relevant bodies.
- BM asked what the direct benefits would be for the community by running their own ferry.
- JR stated that it would be an improved service due to the type of boats we would operate, and that income would be generated for the community and profits could be put to community use.
- BM asked if there was a plan in place in case the community company collapses.
- It is essential that there is a company in place to pick up the service if the community option fails.
- MG stated concern that the proposal uses very strong language which commits the ferry to what is said. It would be worth re-wording.
- JR agreed that the ferry committee need to decide on how they want to present this and how close they want to get to the process.
- FM stated that it might be worth waiting to see what happens with the proposed new ferry. If the new successful we may not need to take the proposal forward. There is no rush.
- FM further stated that he doesn't believe it is realistic to get to the stage of bidding for the contract by 2024. We don't have enough time.
- BM stated that it would be worth looking across the network to find other archetypes.
- JR stated that there is likely to be archetypes on Barra and possibly Arran.

- BM state that these routes may also want to get on board with our discussions etc.
- JR suggested that members read through and consider Roy's findings for further discussion at next meeting.
- It may also be worth having a discussion with similar groups on Barra and Arran.
- JR would like to publicise report for community consultation.
- All in agreement.

### **Allocation of car deck space**

- Angus Brendan MacNeil has been discussing the prospect of releasing further spaces in the car deck as you get closer to sailing dates. 70%-20%-10%. This would allow the entire deck space to be booked but at different stages closer to the sailings.
- Community feedback suggested that we are happy with the current 80% booked spaces 20% unreserved though there are some who would prefer more certainty.
- JR enquired as to what the best service would be for users.
- Calmac would not like to commit to having 20% of each sailing un-booked.
- BM and MG stated that each sailing is full due to the amount of reserve traffic.
- PP enquired as to how Calmac establish that their sailings are fully booked.
- JR stated they allocate per lane meter. Each type of vehicle takes up lane meters until the deck space is full.
- FM stated that the booking system is antiquated and does not take into consideration different car sizes. A smart car will technically take up as much space as a pick-up.
- It is hoped that this system will be improved next year.
- PP expressed concern that there is no guarantee for people who need to go off-island at short notice for medical appointments.
- JR stated that this is a separate issue. The text on the website surrounding it has changed and so JR has sent an e-mail for clarification.
- JR asked members if leaving 20% unreserved ( with potential extra spaces for emergency medical appointments ) is the best model.
- FM suggested that Angus Brendan MacNeil's proposal is potentially better as it allows different types of people to book at different stages closer to sailings.
- JR stated that neither of the options discriminate any type of traveller.
- PP stated that there is a 'wait list' for traffic that has not managed to book.
- BM stated that this should give you priority in the reserved queue particularly those with medical appointments.
- BM suggested that a hybrid of the 2 ideas would work.
- JR stated that Calmac's new ticketing system is coming into play in February but we are unsure at this stage what this will entail for travellers.
- HH stated that there have been suggestions that no-show bookings will be charged.
- JR suggested that Calmac should come and discuss what is best for our service.
- BM suggested that a discussion with Angus Brendan may be beneficial. He may be in a good position to take our proposal forward.
- JR to write to Calmac to ask them for discussion before a proposal is written.

### **Calmac Communities Board Representation**

- Mull and Iona currently have no representatives on CCB.
- This is detrimental in the fact that Graeme Dey, Minister for Transport, uses CCB as a platform for consultation.
- We are a significant part of the Calmac network.
- Kirsty MacFarlane who represents Coll and Tiree was invited to represent Mull and Iona but has declined.
- JR has spoken to the chair of CCB about this concern.
- JR suggested that MFC write to the CBB stating that Mull and Iona cannot be represented fairly until there is a locally based representative in place.
- FM in agreement. The chair of CCB is a paid position and therefore the chair has influence on who is represented and who isn't. It is essential that it is highlighted that a major route is not represented.
- All in agreement that JR to write to CCB stating that until we have a local representative, they are not in a position to report on our behalf. The objective of this letter will to gain a local representative.

#### **Priorities for 2021-22**

- Commercial Fares – This is something that has been promised in the Island Connectivity Plan.
- Improved booking systems. This is all due for change in the coming year.
- Training for staff is essential. FM stated that a representative from Calmac visited MFC before to discuss training for staff. We are looking for a follow-up on that.
- JR suggested that this is discussed with Calmac at the booking system meeting.
- Concern raised about MV Isle of Mull being taken off route in the winter.
- JR would like to get conversation going between Mull, Coll and Tiree to explore options for passenger vessel to run between the 3 islands, improving connectivity.
- JR to write to Calmac to get clarity commercial fares review and current plan in place surrounding that.

#### **Any Other Business**

- FM offered thanks to Nikki Hickford and Davie MacLean who have just retired from the Iona route. Their service throughout the years have been greatly appreciated.
- JR asked if there were any further updates on the Sound of Iona development.
- MG stated that they have started the scoping consultation for the environmental impact assessment.
- In spite being in consultation with Argyll and Bute council for 4 years, the Harbour Committee was not a statutory consultee and therefore was not consulted as this process went ahead.
- Argyll and Bute Council were not consulted either which was very odd.

- However, A&BC, the Harbour Committee and Mull Community Council have responded to the assessment.
- There is potential for other projects which could tie in with the pier developments. Such as parking at Fionnphort, pontoons etc.
- There was not consultation on Iona either which was considered odd. However it turned out that they had sent the consultation to the wrong e-mail address. Because of this Iona Community Council have been given an extension on the deadline and are submitting a response.
- Meeting dates; All still in favour of holding the meetings on the last Wednesday, every second month.