

Mull & Iona Ferry Committee

Wednesday 25th May 2022, 7 pm, An Roth

Present: Joe Reade, Adrian Stephens, Billy McClymont, Finlay MacDonald, Ben Wilson, Adrian Fitness, Douglas Wilson, Moray Finch, David Galbraith, Claire Simonetta, Sue Hawkes, Colin Morrison, Don MacKillop (CalMac), Alan Hood (CalMac), Blair Moglia (CalMac)

Apologies: Chris James, Geoff Adams

Loch Frisa Update and Winter Timetable

- The Isle of Mull is now back in service after repairs to an oil leak
- Loch Frisa is currently in Leith, now nearing the end of works
- All being well, it will travel to Mull next week, and several trials will be carried out
- The vessel will be gradually dropped into live services to test different traffic mixes and loading sequencing.
- This will increase until the vessel is conducting a complete service.
- The Coruisk will remain until this time before going back to Mallaig/Armadale.
- Keen to understand the capacity of the vessel.
- JR asked if the vessel would be able to run to timetable
- DM stated yes. CMAL has confirmed this
- JR asked if there was any further news on the winter timetable.
- DM stated that network moving parts, including time on dry dock, affect this. The timetable will be confirmed within the next few weeks.
- JR enquired if there will be a net increase in sailings or fewer
- DM stated that several options are being discussed.
- The transport planning team is closely looking at this.
- JR enquired as to what the passenger capacity is.
- DM stated in the region of 200
- JR asked if it was still correct that the vessel will not be able to berth at the south side of the pier, and if so, is that affecting the timetable
- DM stated that this wouldn't be known until the vessel is in full service
- DM stated that this is the chief impacting factor on the timetable.
- JR enquired about accommodation for crew
- DM stated that the crew would be staying at the Isle of Mull Hotel in the interim, but long-term plans are being made.
- DM asked JR to send him a list of questions to which he can find answers.
- DM invited Alan Hood and Blair Moglia to join the discussion to discuss changes to T&C's
- Blair and Alan have been briefing ferry committees around the network about changes to terms and conditions as part of a consultation process.
- AH shared screen to present proposal as part of the consultation process

- Since the intro of RET, there has been a 37% increase in traffic
- There have also been more than 190K no-show bookings
- No additional tonnage on network
- To offset this, Calmac is looking to move away from a 1-tire cancelling system to a 4-tier cancelling structure.
- Customers will still be able to amend booking 48 hours before booking.
- What has been noticed since Covid is that the NHS cancels appointments at very short notice.
- If customers have appointments that are cancelled in this way, there will be no levy fee.
- Looking at T&C's and commercial protocol to ensure that deck space is optimised on all sailings.
- JR has shared consultation paperwork on the website, and local feedback has been very negative.
- JR stated that the ticket is still valid for future sailings if someone does not show up for sailing.
- JR enquired if that will change in the new system
- AH replied that currently, the policy states that if customers don't show up to their booked crossing, the ticket will become void.
- However, the front-line team will always try to accommodate late showings and allow them to travel with that ticket on another sailing if there is room.
- BM stated that if there are no-shows for sailings, cars from the un-booked queue take that place, so on our route, there are very few sailings that do not sail at capacity.
- BW stated that if someone is late and another car in the un-booked queue takes that space, the booked customer should be given a full refund. Otherwise, the vendor is paid twice for one booking.
- FM asked what justifies the £10 administration fee for amending a booking.
- AH stated that an amendment takes longer than a sale.
- FM stated that charging customers £10 for change is unacceptable.
- AH stated that it is in line with other ferry services.
- MF stated that it is unfair to have a system like this on a route that is as heavily congested and unreliable as Oban-Craignure.
- It makes it difficult for locals to travel freely as travel circumstances often change.
- AH stated that Calmac does not want to disadvantage communities; we are in the consultation process at this stage.
- BM stated that congestion in Oban is a problem, and it is essential to flag this up in the consultation process.
- BM asked for suggestions on how this can be improved on the route, which can be shared with other communities with the same issues.
- AK stated that his business constantly has traffic to and from Mull.
- Plans frequently change at the last minute and it feels like Calmac does not understand how essential it is for businesses to remove flexibility and be financially penalised in the process.
- AK stated that his business uses a wide variety of vehicles and employs sub-contractors who may choose to work elsewhere if they are charged if they miss bookings.

- AK stated that introducing RET was to remove barriers for local people to travel to and from the mainland. The new system puts these barriers back in place.
- AH asked for feedback on this and stated that exemption for islanders which is something that could be considered.
- MF stated that MFC has been running a consultation on local media, and an alternative proposal has been drawn up.
- This proposal has been mentioned in parliament a few times.
- It has a two-channel system for visitors and locals, whereby there could potentially be several spaces reserved for turn-up-and-go locals.
- BM asked for the proposal to be sent over when complete.
- AH stated that this is a similar proposal to one which another route on the network has drawn up.
- JR stated that the consultation has been running for five weeks, and 25% of the adult population of Mull & Iona have responded.
- CS stated that while she appreciates that an amendment takes longer than a sale, it is not the customer's fault that the admin system works that way, so issuing a £10 charge is unfair.
- Often, trying to get a hold of Calmac to make a booking or amendment is very difficult.
- Perhaps an online system would be worth considering.
- CS also stated that amendment fees for livestock farmers would not work.
- It is difficult to tell how much space you will require on that booking, depending on the number of animals required to be taken to market, etc. Amendments often need to be made on the day and installing a charge or voiding that ticket would be ignorant and disrespectful to one of the leading industries on the island.
- CS stated that a solution might be to allow frequent commercial travellers to set up an account with Calmac, where they would only be charged if they continually missed bookings.
- AH stated that on average, the waiting time on the phone booking system is 1 minute 30 seconds.
- All in disbelief.
- AH stated that it is likely that an online booking/ amendment option will be available in the new system.
- AF requested a no-show traffic breakdown to see where these customers are starting their journeys.
- AH is happy to look at figures and feedback.
- JR asked if 190K no-show bookings travelled on other sailings or if they simply didn't travel at all.
- AH replied that all they know is that they didn't travel on the sailings they were booked on.
- DW stated that the figures are misleading and that the tickets have been sold regardless, so Calmac has not lost money.
- Most of the time, the Oban-Craignure ferry is full, especially at this time of year, so there is no issue with this route.
- DW stated that the proposal is outrageous and a punitive tax on people forced to use these ferries.
- Calmac should not underestimate the strength of bad feeling.

- BW stated that the proposal demonstrates how out of touch Calmac is with the communities it serves.
- AH stated that the consultation is not meant to be disrespectful and is an opportunity for islanders to communicate their points and solutions.
- JR stated that it is common practice for islanders to make a last-minute decision to use the Lochaline ferry if the Oban ferry is cancelled, on amber, or they know they will miss their check-in. The Oban ticket is honoured on the Lochaline ferry.
- JR stated that this is probably something that is not recorded.
- BM stated that an islands impact assessment should be required.
- AH stated that legally an islands impact assessment is not required as CalMac Ferries Ltd is not subject to the Islands Act, but David MacBrayne is.
- BM stated that it is good practice to carry out an ICIA out of respect for the communities affected by these decisions.
- JR that it is disgusting that Calmac is using a technicality in this process to get out of basic, decent community consultation, avoiding the Islands Act.
- JR would like this to be fed back.
- JM stated that it would be very difficult for haulage companies to operate without the flexibility of transferring tickets to earlier or later sailings.
- JM stated that it is likely that no-show bookings have a more severe effect on services that are not as congested as Coll & Tiree as they would on the Oban-Craignure route. Mull also has frequent sailings each day.
- The effects of no-show bookings would be more severe on islands with one sailing per day.
- The model that is being presented is 'one size fits all, but it won't work. It would be interesting to know the various effects of no-shows on each route.
- AH stated that if he doesn't have that information at present, it would be possible to collate those statistics. This will be fed back to Calmac.
- AH stated that 46% of no-show bookings on the network are from the Oban-Craignure route.
- FM stated that it would be helpful if all the numbers presented at this meeting were specific to the Craignure-Oban route.
- It would also be helpful if that percentage could have been broken down into the number of no-shows per sailing year.
- FM further stated that while these passengers have not turned up, the booking has still been made, so Calmac still has the money from these sales and has not lost out financially.
- It is also highly possible that these tickets were used on earlier or later sailings with capacity.
- AH replied that he does not have the resale ratio to hand.
- FM stated that hopefully, the new booking system, which shows the deck space divided by the size of the car, would give a more accurate picture of how many passengers are missing from each sailing and how much this is costing the service.
- At present, the deck is never 100% full because of the current booking system. The size of the car is not taken into consideration.
- AH in agreement. The new booking system will measure each car's length, width, height, and weight.
- HH stated that the phone lines for booking have been shutting earlier than usual.

- AH replied that they were operating at reduced hours through Covid but are now back to regular hours.
- JM stated that a car to miss their check-in time and loses its ticket would cost £19. If a lorry were in the same situation, it would cost more than £300. For commercial traffic, this would make the route unusable.
- BM stated that there had been no financial loss to Calmac with no-show bookings, so he cannot understand the driver for introducing this system.
- AH replied that it removes the opportunity for other passengers to book and have certainty of travel.
- BM stated that tourists are not informed of an alternative route to Mull if the ferry is fully booked. That is a fault on Calmac's part and penalises local businesses.
- AH stated that he could feed this back, and it would be straightforward to change that.
- AH will also issue a breakdown of no-show traffic for clarity.
- JR stated that this consultation process has been inappropriate. The published proposal is contentious and puts AH and BM in a very uncomfortable position, to then have to go out and speak to communities who are unsurprisingly unhappy with the proposal.
- AH clarified that this is simply a proposal, and all community feedback is welcomed and will be taken back to Calmac.
- BM added that the information about the proposal that was given to the MFC by a journalist was confidential and should not have been leaked. The process was jeopardised.
- Consultation/ presentation complete.
- AH and BM left the meeting.
- BM stated that the nature of the proposal should be used as leverage for an alternative proposal.
- MFC wants to engage with the process.

Samsø System Survey

- JR shared information before the meeting.
- 95% of individuals think it is super.
- Main comments for change stated that a green card should get travellers priority in un-booked queues and how the system would be vetted to ensure it was not being abused.
- MF stated that the Scottish Government is concerned about introducing a system like this because it may disadvantage the tourist sector.
- BM stated that the system would continually develop, and the longer it is in operation, the more reliable it will become.
- JR stated that MFC combined the survey results with Arran.
- A similar survey was conducted on Coll, and 96% of individuals were in favour.
- Coll would like to be included in the combined work of AFAG and MIFC on this topic
- It is unclear at present whether Tiree wishes to be involved.

Mull-Coll-Tiree – Connectivity Plan

- JR and FM had zoom meeting with Coll and Tiree representatives

- Both islands are keen, in principle, to re-establish the ferry link between them so long as it does not interfere with their Oban link.
- This is the most prominent example in the whole of the Hebrides of neighbouring islands without direct links.
- There are multiple ways to do this, at varying costs.
- Calmac should be challenged to fix the hole in the network that vessel choices have caused, made 20 years ago.
- BM stated that he would support it if it were transformational to the lives of local people on Mull and that the road would be upgraded to Tobermory.
- JR stated that the advantage to Mull would not be as great as the advantage to Coll and Tiree, but our community would have social and economic benefits.
- JR stated that the only cost to Mull would be a compromise to the Kilchoan ferry timetable.
- BM and DW stated concern for the Kilchoan residents who rely on that ferry to come to Mull.
- BM and JM stated that the congestion in Tobermory would be unworkable/
- BM stated that he does not believe there would be enough gain.
- DW stated that while the idea is good in principle, it does have commercial viability
- MF enquired as to why this has arisen.
- JR stated that the island's connectivity plan had presented an opportunity to reinstate a service lost 20 years ago.
- FM stated that there seemed to be interest in it from other islands during the meeting.
- It would be difficult to pull off without a dedicated vessel.
- The current Kilchoan boat could not handle the crossing, and the current timetable would not allow for that crossing to be viably added in.
- BM enquired if it would be viable if the Oban boat called in at Tobermory.
- FM stated that this happened several times last year when the Isle of Mull was away. The Clansman was dropping off passengers at Craignure on its outward journey and picking them up on the way back. It was accidentally proven to be possible.
- BM stated that he is concerned about the administration it would take to pull together the finer details.
- JR stated that Transport Scotland would be responsible for feasibility, etc.
- Richard Hadfield will meet with representatives from the three islands to see if the plan can be moved forward.

Community Ferry Company

- JR stated that HIE appears happy to fund a consultant to scope out the benefits of the community ferry company and what service would operate, legal structure, etc.
- The First stage would be broad scoping; it would not involve community consultation yet.
- JR stated that the entire plan is hinged on the whole network being de-bundled or the Community Ferry Company becoming a sub-contractor.

Calmac Communities Board

- Mull and Iona now have a representative on the Calmac Communities board, Mary Jean Devon.
- There is a position on MFC for the Calmac Communities board to attend and represent.
- MF suggested extending an invitation to future meetings and having it as an item on the agenda. This would allow MJD to report on any updates.
- FM stated that it would be worth giving MJD the option to provide a written report if she cannot attend.

Local Councillors

- There is a position on the committee for local councillors.
- Andrew Kane is chair of the Harbour Board and is policy lead for transport
- He has already contacted JR.
- JR suggested inviting all three new councillors to future meetings.
- All in agreement.

Cancellation Stats

- JR is compiling winter weather cancellation stats but has not completed it.
- JR reported a mild winter relative to the past 20 years, but it was the 2nd worst year for cancellations.

Catamaran presentation: May 12th "Catamarans for the Scottish Isles" and Coll / Tiree

- Jr reported that the presentation did not go well due to technical failure, though the content was exciting.
- Robbie Drummond was present, but no one from CMAL or Transport Scotland was present.
- STS held several encouraging meetings with important figures whilst they were in Scotland.
- BW stated that the presentation was commercially and practically focused, which would appeal to Calmac and other service providers.

CMAL

- JR copied members into their responses.
- Responses were batched together and missed out answers to several questions.
- Members unhappy with effort to respond.
- JR asked how members felt about publishing the response, showing they had failed to answer 27 of 30 questions.
- All happy for him to do this.
- FM stated that it should be published on the website, simply stating that MFC is disappointed with it.

- JR to give them a time limit to answer questions before he published online.
- All in agreement.

Meeting with Jenny Gilruth, June 1st

- JR stated that he, MF, and FM have a 20-minute meeting on 1st June.
- MF reported that he couldn't come.
- JR asked for a substitute.
- Colin Morrison volunteered to substitute.
- JR would like to try and set up a series of meetings to cover several topics.

Meeting with CalMac June 9th and 10th

- Meeting with Robbie Drummond and Robert Morrison is open to all members.
- Jenny Minto will also be present.
- JR stated MFC would need to draw up a plan beforehand.
- MF stated that the ticketing system should be a priority.
- JR stated there is another smaller meeting the following day for further discussion.

AOB

- No other business.