

Mull & Iona Ferry Committee

Wednesday November 24th 2021,
7pm, An Roth

Apologies: Geoff Adams, Morvern Gibson, Sam Jones, Stewart MacDougall.

Present: Joe Reade, Moray Finch, David Galbraith, Douglas Wilson, Billy McClymont, Adrian Fitness, Chris James, Heather Hill, Pete Pinnington.

Zoom: Finlay MacDonald, Ben Wilson, Andrew Knight, Colin Morrison, Keith Robbie, Susan Hawkes, Chris Baker

Scotland on Sunday

- JR asked room for feedback on article published in Scotland on Sunday.
- All in agreement with what JR had said.
- FM suggested that JR's essay in its entirety should be published on the Ferry Committee website.
- AF in agreement as it may encourage the community to ask more questions and take more interest in what the Ferry Committee are doing.
- All in agreement.
- JR stated the importance of fully informing the community of all bidding options for ferry tender, including the option of the community tendering for separate routes.
- JR enquired as to what the Ferry Committee feel about having a community owned ferry company, on principal.
- This would involve persuading the government to allow routes to be tendered for separately by different companies, which would allow more control of how ferries operate, and there would be profit for the community.
- FM asked if the subsidies would be reviewed if the community company ran with a smaller crew.
- JR stated that there would be a transitional period whereby the community would inherit the boat and the service with a view to change the vessel and the crew in the future, and a proposal/ business model would be presented to the government, stating the amount of subsidy required to run that service while still making a community profit.
- MF stated that the ferry committee have nothing to lose by trying this model.
- BW stated that the ferry committee need to be careful how this is put to the community as there might be considerable community opposition otherwise if the ferry committee are seen to be seriously going ahead with the proposal.

- JR stated that the FC would need to state that they can see the merits in it and would like the opportunity to explore the options.
- FM enquired if it would be possible to have a public meeting with Roy Pederson and Transport Scotland?
- JR replied yes that's a possibility.
- JR has been working on an informative piece which illustrates how the Norwegian ferry service – where our new ferry came from – operates.
- All in favour.

UTNE

- JR has not published anything about it not being able to dock on the south side of the pier as of yet.
- JR has enquired as to where else on the network it can't berth. He is waiting for answers.
- When these questions are answered, JR will write a piece for the website, informing the community about the vessel's shortcomings.
- JR is still waiting for summer 2021 carriage figures to come in, which will demonstrate that Mull is the most congested route on the network.
- BM enquired if they are still doing to operate to the increased timetable.
- JR stated that they are obligated to provide that time table.
- It is likely that the Utne will operate an extra sailing in the morning and one in the evening.
- DW predicted that it will be very restricted by weather as it has a 3rd of the horsepower of the Coruisk. There will likely be many cancelations.
- BW enquired if Mull would be getting the larger Lochaline Ferry back as it has been up in Mallaig.
- JR to ask if it can be returned to Mull when the Utne replaces the Coruisk.
- It could possibly be run as a 3rd boat.
- CMAL have put a naming competition out to rename Utne.

MV Ise of Mull replacement

- Specification of User Requirements has gone in
- Richard Hadfield has received it and is thus far quite happy with it.
- Open to looking at using 3 boats.
- There were external consultants who have carried out a gateway review. They have confidentially interviewed stakeholders to get view on how vessel purchase process was working and could it be improved.
- These consultants were independent of Transport Scotland.
- Finlay Macdonald and Joe Reade have been interviewed.
- FM felt engaged with and listened to.

- The consultants are going to send a report to Chris Wilcock (TS).
- FM stated that having seen the mistakes made in the procurement process for Islay, it was important to make sure that these were highlighted to avoid the same mistakes being made on Mull.
- The appeal which has been made to the information commissioner for the substance behind the Islay presentation has now made it to the top of the list and information might be given before Christmas.

Equal ferry access for islanders, update and actions

- JR has still not had a response from Chris Wilcock on sorting priority for islanders by summer 2022.
- Organised by Jenny Minto, JR and FM had a meeting arranged with Robbie Drummond and Robert Morrison, and they asked whether any work was being undertaken about local access to ferries.
- They were not aware of any work on going and advised JR and FM to speak to Transport Scotland.
- JR e-mailed Chris again and has not had a response from him yet.
- JR advised that the ferry committee need to be more vocal about this.
- FM stated that the Ferry Committee need to consult with the community before anything can be done.
- JR would like to have a meeting with community representatives.
- Transport Scotland have previously stated that they will not discriminate against any passengers.
- FM stated that a forum with the community and various representatives will help.
- BM suggested that the discussions should be network wide. A user's forum should be formed.
- MF enquired if all routes had the same problem.
- JR stated that it is the same for all routes but that a slightly different system may have to be used for each route.
- JR to get in touch with Jenny Minto to see if she can facilitate more collaboration with representatives from other islands. Getting MSP's involved is essential.

Livestock Trailer Charges

- CS stated that the issue has been going on for years.
- Concession tickets are given to trailers. This is very helpful and important.
- This does not apply to livestock trailers pulled by tractors.

- This issue has been raised in previous years and Calmac issued a statement which said that they would change the charges if they are pulled for personal business use as opposed to commercial gain.
- Any tractor would be charged the same as the smallest tonnage tractor and tractor trailers would be charged as regular trailer, up to 8 metres.
- Local farmer recently wanted to purchase a tractor pulled livestock trailer, but asked Calmac for advice before hand as it measured just above 8 meters.
- Calmac have advised against the purchase.
- Some local farmers are pulling trailers over 8m and getting the concession.
- This is not fair and the issue will need to be raised with Calmac again and with the national farmers union.
- JR has asked CS to send as much information as possible and the Ferry Committee will take up the issue.

Iona Issues

- FM has circulated the response to the e-mail from the community council
- The blame has been placed on Argyll & Bute Council for not solving the issue of the breakwater quicker. Unsurprisingly. No responsibility has been taken.
- The breakwater process has been slow.
- FM has had a disturbing conversation with someone from Nature Scotland who has suggested that the entire breakwater project is shelved due to specific sea grass growing there.
- This will not stop the project but has provided a hurdle to cross.
- The late-night service on Iona ground to a halt when the Lochbuidhe went to dry dock. The replacement which is usually provided was not available.
- The skipper was also sent with the Lochbuidhe to dry dock which doesn't usually happen.
- Replacement skippers were unable and unwilling to do the job. They are not able to use the dinghy to access vessel.
- Health and safety have been looking at the dinghy's that are being used to access the vessel.
- Calmac have proved unwilling to help in the matter.
- JR asked if construction was still due to start this year.
- FM stated that it is unlikely given the stage they are at in the process.
- JR asked if there was anything that the ferry committee can do to help.
- FM stated that if asked, the FC should state that they are 100% behind the project and encourage progress as it is severely affecting the service.
- Iona school children are missing 10-15% of their school week, every week.
- Buses are being sent down to minimise disruption and this is costing Argyll & Bute Council £350 per week.

Ferry electrification – recent contact

- JR has had positive contact from a man from Strathclyde University who is being paid by Transport Scotland to investigate the commercial and practical benefits for putting electrical power trains in smaller vessel.
- He approached JR as a result of content put on the MFC website.
- He will produce a report telling transport Scotland what their best options are.
- He agreed that Oban-Craignure route was well within the bounds of the battery electric envelope.

Meeting with Jenny Minto

- JR stated that Jenny Minto has been facilitating meetings between Committee and Robbie Drummond.
- It is an opportunity to have conversations with Robbie Drummond directly.
- Nothing overly productive has come out of it but it is important to keep having these meetings, especially given that Mull & Iona do not have a representative on the Calmac Communities Board.
- FM stated that when this was brought up, Robbie Drummond was very defensive.
- Jenny Minto was surprised that Mull & Iona had no representation.
- Jenny Minto asked Robbie Drummond if the CCB could co-opt another member.
- Robbie Drummond stated that he would bring it up.
- Nothing has been done since then.
- JR stated that Robbie Drummond mentioned that it probably wouldn't be possible to run the Utne for longer days during the summer due to berthing issues.
- This is something to consider and solutions can be found as there are other options.

Inviting guest speaker – Gordon Ross Western Ferries?

- Managing director of Western Ferries has been in frequent contact with JR over the last year and has been very helpful with technical knowledge etc.
- He got in touch with JR to ask why Mull Ferry Committee are not demanding that the second Islay ferry is given to the Mull route.

- JR explained that even if it was a political possibility, the Islay vessels were likely too long for Craignure Pier.
- JR keen to have him come along as a guest speaker
- All in agreement.
- JR asked for further suggestions for guest speaker.
- MF suggested Kevin Hobbs.
- CS suggested involving Mairi Gougeon, Island Minister , in some way.
- JR in agreement.
- MF suggested inviting the Islands Minister to the meeting with Jenny Minto.
- JR to invite.

Mull to Coll/Tiree ferry

- CMAL has the small vessel replacement started.
- Lochbuie to Iona is being replaced and 2 other vessels in the Western Isles where the route that they run is being re classified from Class C to Class B. The landing craft design is now unsuitable.
- It had previously been discussed, that the Ferry Committee would get in touch with representatives on Coll and Tiree and discuss the prospect of reconnecting the 3 islands again.
- It was suggested that this service would operate 2-3 days per week.
- If there was a boat available which could cope with rougher seas, an inter-island service would be feasible.
- JR contacted Richard Hadfield and suggested that a catamaran would cope with the route very well.
- The island-connectivity plan coincides with the small vessel replacement.
- JR has been asked if MFC have any suggestions for a suitable vessel for the route.
- FM suggested that a service from Iona-Tiree would be feasible with a smaller vessel.
- All in agreement.
- JR stated that the most obvious choice of vessel for the route would be a catamaran.
- It would be able to stern load to any slip.

- Most of the catamarans that STS build work to slips, it can cope with rough seas and are faster vessels.

Winter and Summer timetables

- Summer time table has been delayed due to problems with the Uig Timetable
- We have requested the summer 2022 timetable to be the same as the 2019 summer time table but with the last sailing of the day to be put back as late as possible.
- It is unclear whether this is happening or not.
- Calmac have announced that they will soon be requesting feedback from the winter 2021 timetable.
- FM stated that the service on a Sunday is very poor and asked whether this could be looked at for improvement.
- JR replied yes.
- JR asked for feedback on the Isle of Arran.
- It was fed back that there have been numerous complaints made by the community about the service operated by the Isle of Arran.
- The lifts and access are not fit for purpose.
- AK stated that it is very restrictive for commercial bookings.
- JR to write to Calmac advising them of the community dissatisfaction in the Isle of Arran.
- KR enquired if there would be any return to the 15-minute turn around as opposed to the current 30-minute turn around.
- FM stated that the 30-minute turn around allows the service to keep to time-table.

Craignure Pier

- BM stated that during a meeting with Argyll & Bute Council about the design of the pier, the entire spec of the new pier seems to be being designed around MV The Hebrides.
- JR stated that this was the vessel that was planned for Mull.

- FM stated that this is an improvement to them designing it around 801 and 802 which is what was originally suggested.
- It is being designed at 150% of the Hebrides.
- The terminal is being designed to cope with 750 passengers.
- Most passengers who arrive in Craignure do not go anywhere near the terminal.
- FM asked if there were updated drawings.
- BM stated that the drawings presented were generic and undetailed.
- FM enquired about the proposed position of the new terminal.
- BM stated that it is still planned for North of the pier.
- It is nothing like the community proposal that was drawn up.
- FM enquired about the 2 link spans which had been suggested previously.
- BM states that this is no longer happening.
- JR stated that the advantage of having a larger pier would be that there would be room to tie up 3 vessels if we ran a 3-vessel service.