

## Mull and Iona Ferry Committee

25/03/24

Impact and options assessment of proposed partial or total removal of MV Isle of Mull from Craignure – Oban service, April 17<sup>th</sup> – May 8<sup>th</sup> 2024



*All carryings data provided by CalMac. Comparisons use 2019 data, as the last ‘stable’ period (ie no operational or Covid disruption) for which data is available.*

### **Vehicle demand on the Craignure-Oban service**

Over the 17<sup>th</sup> April – May 8<sup>th</sup> period in 2019, the average daily vehicle carryings (By PCU, encompassing all vehicle types) on the Craignure service was 671.

Under Option 1 (CalMac’s ‘preferred’ option), the route would be operated only by the Loch Frisa (35 PCU) and Coruisk (40 PCU) pairing. If each vessel operates 10 return sailings per day on average, the total daily vehicle capacity will be 750.

On an averaged basis therefore, the service will be at **89% utilisation of its nominal, theoretical capacity**. The service will be **very significantly** capacity-constrained.

This averaged assessment is exactly that however – just an average. Demand patterns vary by day and hour. It also compares demand with the nominal, theoretical capacity of the vessel. In practice, vehicle decks are often full when around 80 % of their nominal PCU capacity has been reached, due to varying vehicle dimensions and loading techniques. This is the real, **Practical Capacity**. Throughout this paper therefore, we are using the Practical Capacity of all vessels, not their theoretical published capacities. The inaccuracy of nominal capacities is widely acknowledged by CalMac and CMAL.

By this more realistic measure, the daily **Practical Capacity** of the service using a Frisa/Coruisk pairing is 600 PCU. On this basis the route will be at **112% utilisation**. In other words, if all traffic in the entire three weeks is spread evenly across all sailings that operate, there will be 12% more vehicles than there are spaces available. **On average, 71 vehicles will be denied travel each day.**

However, demand is not spread evenly.

In 2019, the highest daily carrying was 856 PCUs; and the lowest 478. Below is a table showing each day of 2019 demand versus the proposed capacity for 2024.

As can be seen, when comparing demand with **real, Practical Capacity**:

- There are only four days in the three week period where vehicle demand could be accommodated by the Frisa/Coruisk pairing.
- As many as 256 vehicles would be denied carriage in a single day. (This peak was Easter weekend in 2019, which falls earlier this year. So peak may not be quite as high)
- Just under 1,800 vehicle movements (or 900 vehicles) would be denied travel over the whole period.

<b>Frisa + Coruisk Nominal daily capacity</b>	<b>750</b>
<b>Frisa + Coruisk Practical daily capacity</b>	<b>600</b>

Day	Date	PCU carried	Utilisation versus	
			Practical Capacity	Vehicles denied travel
Wed	17/04/2019	643	107%	43
Thur	18/04/2019	724	121%	124
Fri	19/04/2019	772	129%	172
Sat	20/04/2019	856	143%	256
Sun	21/04/2019	524	87%	0
Mon	22/04/2019	603	101%	3
Tue	23/04/2019	652	109%	52
Wed	24/04/2019	666	111%	66
Thu	25/04/2019	595	99%	0
Fri	26/04/2019	793	132%	193
Sat	27/04/2019	674	112%	74
Sun	28/04/2019	478	80%	0
Mon	29/04/2019	703	117%	103
Tue	30/04/2019	633	106%	33
Wed	01/05/2019	647	108%	47
Thu	02/05/2019	626	104%	26
Fri	03/05/2019	829	138%	229
Sat	04/05/2019	742	124%	142
Sun	05/05/2019	575	96%	0
Mon	06/05/2019	701	117%	101
Tue	07/05/2019	659	110%	59
Wed	08/05/2019	673	112%	73
Average		671	112%	82
Total		14,768		1,796

### Foot passenger demand on the Craignure – Oban service.

Much of Mull and Iona’s tourism economy relies on day-trip traffic, most of it on foot. Visitor attractions (Duart Castle, Iona Abbey etc); tourist trips (boat trips to the Treshnish Isles and Staffa; whale watching etc); retail and food service outlets are all highly dependent on these passengers. These day-trippers shape passenger demand, and create two peaks each day – the first on the ~10am ferry from Oban; and the second on the ~5 pm ferry from Craignure.

Due to the nature of their visit, these day-trip passengers **must** be accommodated at these peak times. They **cannot** transfer to alternative sailings, since their trip most likely becomes unviable. Whilst with vehicle carryings we have made a simplistic and generous assumption that demand can be spread evenly across the day, we cannot make that assumption with foot passengers.

2019 peak sailing demand versus Coruisk passenger capacity

Leg	Date	Day	Time	Passengers carried 2019	Passengers denied travel, 2024
Craignure - Oban	21/04/2019	Sunday	17:05	274	25
Oban - Craignure	21/04/2019	Sunday	09:50	327	78
Craignure - Oban	28/04/2019	Sunday	17:05	253	4
Oban - Craignure	28/04/2019	Sunday	09:50	356	107
Craignure - Oban	05/05/2019	Sunday	17:05	260	11
Oban - Craignure	05/05/2019	Sunday	09:50	285	36
Oban - Craignure	22/04/2019	Monday	09:50	378	129
Oban - Craignure	29/04/2019	Monday	09:50	265	16
Craignure - Oban	29/04/2019	Monday	17:05	291	42
Craignure - Oban	06/05/2019	Monday	17:05	302	53
Oban - Craignure	06/05/2019	Monday	09:50	384	135
Oban - Craignure	07/05/2019	Tuesday	09:50	259	10
Craignure - Oban	07/05/2019	Tuesday	17:05	342	93
Oban - Craignure	17/04/2019	Wednesda	09:50	310	61
Craignure - Oban	17/04/2019	Wednesda	17:05	327	78
Craignure - Oban	24/04/2019	Wednesda	17:05	273	24
Oban - Craignure	01/05/2019	Wednesda	09:50	304	55
Craignure - Oban	01/05/2019	Wednesda	17:05	317	68
Oban - Craignure	08/05/2019	Wednesda	09:50	391	142
Craignure - Oban	08/05/2019	Wednesda	17:05	405	156
Oban - Craignure	18/04/2019	Thursday	09:50	257	8
Oban - Craignure	18/04/2019	Thursday	12:20	294	45
Craignure - Oban	25/04/2019	Thursday	17:05	251	2
Oban - Craignure	25/04/2019	Thursday	09:50	281	32
Oban - Craignure	02/05/2019	Thursday	09:50	265	16
Oban - Craignure	19/04/2019	Friday	12:20	262	13
Oban - Craignure	26/04/2019	Friday	12:20	258	9
Craignure - Oban	03/05/2019	Friday	17:05	317	68
Craignure - Oban	20/04/2019	Saturday	17:05	398	149
Oban - Craignure	20/04/2019	Saturday	09:50	414	165
Oban - Craignure	27/04/2019	Saturday	09:50	270	21
Craignure - Oban	04/05/2019	Saturday	17:05	542	293
Oban - Craignure	04/05/2019	Saturday	09:50	613	364
				<b>Total</b>	<b>2,508</b>
				Sailing average	76

The Loch Frisa and Coruisk both have passenger capacities that are a fraction of the MV Isle of Mull. At 199 and 249 respectively, they are just 20 – 25% of the Isle of Mull's 962. That said, it is very rare that passenger carryings on any one sailing approach IOM's limit. However, they **routinely** exceed the limits of Coruisk and Frisa. For that reason, it is the MV Isle of Mull that always operates the peak 10am and 5pm sailings.

Of the circa 430 sailings that are scheduled for the period, (again using 2019 data as the reference), **33** exceed the Coruisk's capacity, and **57** exceed that of the Frisa. Almost all of these higher-demand sailings are the ~10am ex Oban and ~5pm ex Craignure.

If we assume that the Coruisk would take over the IOM's role (due to its marginally higher capacity), we can see from the table above that:

- On only 2 days out of the three week period would all foot passenger traffic be accommodated.
- On average, 76 foot passengers would be denied travel on each peak sailing.
- In total, more than 2,500 passenger journeys (ie 1,250 passengers) would be denied travel over the period.
- Due to the nature of their travel, very few of these passengers could realistically be expected to transfer to alternative sailings or routes. These 1,250 visitors would almost certainly be a total loss to the Mull visitor economy.

It is clear from the above that removal of the MV Isle of Mull from the Craignure service would be highly damaging to the Mull economy, by entirely denying travel to around 1250 foot passengers, and forcing around 900 vehicles to either find an alternative route, or prevent them from travelling at all.

**With all vessels running at capacity, travel opportunities for island residents will be severely constrained.** It will effectively become impossible to travel via Oban, except for those who have booked their travel weeks ahead of time; and then only if their booking is honoured, or not moved to an unviable time.

**The cost of removing the MV Isle of Mull is quantifiable and very significant.**

## **What is the benefit to the Lochboisdale service of re-deploying the MV Isle of Mull?**

We have identified above the cost to Mull and Iona of re-deploying the MV Isle of Mull. We cannot view our islands in isolation however, and accept that it is a necessary feature of CalMac strategy that vessels may need to be re-deployed so that resources are used to the best common benefit of the network as a whole.

In order to make a **fair and equitable** judgement on how to allocate scarce resources, we need to identify the potential benefit to the Uists, and weigh that against the cost to Mull and Iona.

Firstly, due to the removal of the Lord of the Isles in both scenarios, it is not possible to maintain services to Mallaig (where only the LOTI fits). So the proposed services by the IOM from Oban are **not a direct replacement** – they arrive at a point on the mainland 85 miles to the South.

In addition, **there is already a daily ferry service to Oban** from Barra, which is accessible to the Uists via the internal Sound of Barra ferry. (Though for full co-ordination, the service would need to start earlier in the day). Therefore:

- Much traffic to / from Uist already has access to Oban via the Sound of Barra ferry. A proposed Lochboisdale – Oban service operated by the IOM would only **duplicate** this provision, albeit in a more convenient manner.
- It is questionable how much of the Mallaig traffic would realistically transfer to Oban, given the very different direction it goes in. If heading from South Uist to Inverness for example (or vice versa), then a more convenient and cheaper alternative is to travel via Uig and Skye instead.
- It is reasonable to assume therefore, that re-deploying the Isle of Mull would only ameliorate the disruption to a **proportion** of traffic, and that proportion is unknown. Of the proportion for which Oban is a viable alternative, **that option already exists to them**, by travelling via Barra. The IOM re-deployment does not therefore add an alternative that is currently unavailable, but only makes that existing alternative more convenient, by avoiding the need to transfer using the Sound of Barra ferry.

To put this a different way, it is proposed to run two parallel services between Oban and Barra / South Uist, islands which are already connected to one-another by an internal ferry service. To effectively duplicate a service is not a very good use of scarce resources. The benefit of avoiding the transfer sailing to Barra will have been bought at the cost of much pain for Mull and Iona. Is that an appropriate and fair substitution, when there is already access to the same mainland port via a parallel service?

It is this rationale that resulted in the unfortunate cessation of Lochboisdale services last year in similar circumstances. It was a high-profile outage that understandably generated a great deal of attention. But it did follow sound logic and in the circumstances, was a balanced outcome. Replacing a service to Mallaig with one to Oban avoids the **admission** of service cessation caused by an idle port, but it does not achieve a great deal on a practical level. Certainly not enough to justify the damage caused elsewhere in the network.

### **Capacity to the Uists**

The above 'network logic' argument is only part of the picture however. We also have to assess whether there is sufficient **capacity** on the two alternative routes to and from The Uists that could absorb the displaced traffic. If there is not enough spare capacity on the alternative routes, then the re-deployment could be justified.

The table overleaf answers that question, again by using 2019 data as the reference. As can be seen, there is significant unused vehicle capacity on both the Lochmaddy-Uig and Castlebay-Oban routes. If we make the reasonable assumption that half the traffic would be displaced to Uig and half to Oban, we can see there is ample capacity to take up the displaced traffic. The Castlebay-Oban service could actually accommodate the **entire** demand on its own with ease; the Uig route could also, albeit a little less comfortably.

On the reasonable assumption that the traffic splits 50/50 however, there is only 1 day on one route (Lochmaddy-Uig) where demand may exceed Practical Capacity (by 5%, or 10 cars. Remember also that we are not using CalMac's measure of utilisation, but a stricter one that assumes only 80% of the ship's published theoretical capacity is available. Worth also noting that the day in question was Easter weekend in 2019, whereas this year Easter falls outside of the period).

We do not have detailed sailing-by-sailing data for the Sound of Barra ferry to assess how much spare capacity is available there. On average however, the 20 PCU Loch Alainn (16 Practical Capacity) carries 8 vehicles per crossing at this time of year, so is on average 50% utilised. An additional sailing would be needed in the early morning to align with the Castlebay departure at 07:00. Capacity and frequency could be increased by deploying the Loch Bhrusda as a second vessel on the route (now that she is relieved from Sound of Harris service by the return of Loch Portain).

MV Hebrides practical capacity - 72 (80% of nominal 90)

MV Isle of Lewis practical capacity - 76 (80% of nominal 95)

Sailings Lochmaddy - Uig		Sailings Castlebay - Oban		Date	Traffic displaced from Lochboisdale - Mallaig	PCU carried, Castlebay - Oban	Unused spaces, Castlebay - Oban	PCU carried, Lochmaddy - Uig	Unused spaces, Lochmaddy - Uig	Impact on Lochmaddy - Uig		Impact on Castlebay - Oban	
3	2	Day	Oban							Utilisation if 100% of traffic displaced to Uig	Utilisation if 50% of traffic displaced to Uig	Utilisation if 100% of traffic displaced to Oban	Utilisation if 50% of traffic displaced to Oban
3	2	Wed	17/04/2019	64	23	129	153	63	100%	86%	57%	36%	
3	2	Thur	18/04/2019	52	57	95	158	58	97%	85%	72%	55%	
3	2	Fri	19/04/2019	55	69	83	200	16	118%	105%	82%	63%	
3	2	Sat	20/04/2019	46	52	100	159	57	95%	84%	64%	49%	
2	2	Sun	21/04/2019	43	43	109	89	55	92%	77%	57%	42%	
3	2	Mon	22/04/2019	56	68	84	146	70	94%	81%	82%	63%	
3	2	Tue	23/04/2019	63	52	100	133	83	91%	76%	76%	55%	
3	2	Wed	24/04/2019	63	67	85	118	98	84%	69%	86%	65%	
3	2	Thu	25/04/2019	21	58	94	124	92	67%	62%	52%	45%	
3	2	Fri	26/04/2019	50	57	95	136	80	86%	75%	70%	54%	
3	2	Sat	27/04/2019	43	51	101	151	65	90%	80%	62%	48%	
2	2	Sun	28/04/2019	50	60	92	115	29	115%	97%	72%	56%	
3	2	Mon	29/04/2019	33	67	85	135	81	78%	70%	66%	55%	
3	2	Tue	30/04/2019	46	49	103	130	86	81%	71%	63%	47%	
3	2	Wed	01/05/2019	44	69	83	114	102	73%	63%	74%	60%	
3	2	Thu	02/05/2019	53	68	84	148	68	93%	81%	80%	62%	
3	2	Fri	03/05/2019	55	76	76	162	54	100%	88%	86%	68%	
3	2	Sat	04/05/2019	53	74	78	146	70	92%	80%	84%	66%	
2	2	Sun	05/05/2019	49	64	88	81	63	90%	73%	74%	58%	
3	2	Mon	06/05/2019	49	70	82	137	79	86%	75%	78%	62%	
3	2	Tue	07/05/2019	48	64	88	150	66	92%	81%	74%	58%	
3	2	Wed	08/05/2019	38	86	66	147	69	86%	77%	82%	69%	
<b>Average</b>					<b>49</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>Total</b>					<b>1,074</b>	<b>1,344</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>3,032</b>	<b>1,504</b>				

## In conclusion

- Redeployment of the MV Isle of Mull would cause significant and quantifiable damage to the Mull and Iona economy and community by leaving the islands with significantly less capacity than required, both in terms of vehicle capacity and foot passenger capacity.
- Mull's visitor profile is unlike most other islands – as a near-mainland island with the off-shore attractions of Staffa and the Treshnish Isles; and the honey-pot destinations of Iona and Tobermory, a big part of our tourist economy is dependent on day-trippers from Oban. Neither the Loch Frisa nor Coruisk can accommodate these day-trippers, and therefore these 1250 visitors will be a total loss to the Mull and Iona economy.
- Some of the vehicles denied travel to Mull via Craignure may be expected to travel via Lochaline instead, so they may not be a total loss. Similarly, Lochaline is an alternative for island residents with a car, who's destination is not Oban. However, as an un-booked route involving a longer drive, visitor traffic is often reticent to use Lochaline (not just because of the extra distance, but because the perception is that as an un-bookable route, travel is not guaranteed).
- In any case, the 'alternative route' argument also applies to The Uists, and should logically be applied there first, since the loss of the LOTI is the earlier step in this proposed cascade. There are two alternative routes to the mainland from The Uists, and the primary question should first be whether they can adequately ameliorate the service outage.
- Re-deployment of the IOM would logically require a contradictory application of the 'alternative route' rule – it would need the company to **ignore** the presence of alternatives in the case of the Uists (presence of viable alternatives negates the need for re-deployment); but to **rely** on it in the case of Mull and Iona (The only argument to counter the economic and social damage caused, is that **all** traffic will divert to the alternative instead).
- A Lochboisdale – Oban service in place of a Lochboisdale – Mallaig service is not an equivalent replacement. It satisfies a **presentational** need to avoid the absence of ferries in Lochboisdale, but it only partially addresses the **actual** loss of service. Furthermore, it does not lessen the alternative route argument – all it does is **duplicate** one of the alternatives; it does not replace the lost service itself.
- In any case, the option of Oban **already exists** for travellers to/from the Uists, via the neighbouring island of Barra. This option could be made more convenient during the disruption, by a) adding a sailing earlier in the day (to align with the Castlebay departure), b) Not making any charge for use of the Sound of Barra service to Oban-destined traffic, c) charging the lower Lochboisdale-Mallaig fare to traffic displaced to Castlebay-Oban. d) deploying the Loch Bhrusda as a

second vessel for added capacity and frequency. (All of these costs, we would suggest, will be less than the reduction in revenue resulting from removing the IOM from Craignure).

- We understand completely the impact that withdrawal of the Mallaig service will have on the Uists, and we do not wish any other island community to suffer as a result of CalMac's operational difficulties. As good neighbours, we are always willing for 'our' vessels to be borrowed, where the fair balance of need requires it. In this instance however, we cannot see a rational and equitable argument in favour of removing the Isle of Mull from its home route for such a long period. It is clear from the carryings and route logic analysis above, that **the pain caused to Mull and Iona will far outweigh the benefit to the Uists.**
- **We request therefore, that the Isle of Mull is not re-deployed, either partially or totally.**
- If despite our reasoning, if the Isle of Mull is re-deployed, we insist on the following:
  - A full and detailed explanation of the rationale and cost/benefit analysis supported by empirical evidence – just as we have done here.
  - Even if the re-deployment is partial (not every day), then the Coruisk **must** be re-deployed from Mallaig and be present to cover **all** missed IOM sailings. This is in line with the principles of the Route Prioritisation Matrix, where routes that duplicate a fixed link (ie the Skye bridge) should be lowest priority. It will be totally unacceptable for **any** reduction in capacity to Mull's lifeline link, when a re-deployment from Mallaig – Armadale that could ameliorate it is not taken advantage of. On these grounds therefore, we maintain that Option 2 does not comply with the Route Prioritisation principles.
  - A second vessel must be added to the Lochaline-Fishnish service, and vehicles displaced from Craignure-Oban should be supported in transferring by a) contacting all booked vehicles and suggesting that they may wish to swap their ticket for Lochaline, with the accompanying assurances that i) they will be guaranteed a space after attending no more than two successive departures, maximum. ii) issuing them with dated tickets for Lochaline-Fishnish, to reinforce the message that passage is guaranteed.
  - Make every effort to secure provision of a passenger-only service between Craignure and Oban by private charter. This should be sufficient to meet all anticipated demand for the ~10am ex Oban and ~5pm ex Craignure that cannot be satisfied by the Coruisk / Frisa.
  - The MV Loch Frisa should provide additional early and late sailings, to the limit of her crews' working hours.