

## Report to Partnership Meeting 24 June 2022

### Research and Strategy

#### Sound of Barra / Harris Socio-Economic Case for Timetable Enhancements

##### Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with an update on a commission considering the socio-economic case for improving ferry services across the Sounds of Barra and Harris.

##### Background

During biannual consultations on the ferry timetables for the following summer and winter season, communities in the Western Isles have made requests for additional sailings across the Sounds of Barra (between Barra and Eriskay) and Harris between (Berneray and Leverburgh on Harris). The inter-island ferry services operated by Cal Mac through the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services (CHFS) contract play a vital role in the economy of each island on the Western Isles inhabited island on the Western Isles archipelago, providing lifeline links that enable the movement of people north and south to services and amenities on neighbouring islands. They also provide an essential connectivity for the distribution of freight and visitors around the islands that operate within the constraints of the mainland ferry connections.

Transport Scotland have indicated that any changes to the current timetables which are not cost-neutral would require in the first instance a strong business case to support any increase in the frequency of services and/or the operating day that would come at additional cost to the contract.

In response to this, HITRANS in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have commissioned work to identify the socio-economic case for supporting the requests for improved connectivity across the Sounds of Barra and Harris.

##### Sound of Barra / Harris Socio-Economic Case for Change

Reference Economic Consultants were appointed by HITRANS, CNeS and HIE to undertake the commission with the overall objective of producing an assessment of the socio-economic impacts of timetable enhancements. **A copy of the two draft reports for each Sound are attached within the papers for this meeting.**

The work has involved detailed consultation with both Transport Scotland and Cal Mac to help fully understand the operational constraints and opportunities for the timetable including crewing, and any knock on impacts of potential changes. It has also involved detailed analysis of existing carryings and the types of trip being made.

In addition the work undertook both a review of previous work and consultations with key organisations and individuals to help our understanding of;

- The nature of traffic, including use of the services to connect with mainland flights or ferries.
- The services and activities that users are looking to access at the other end of the route.
- Reasons for demand for additional sailings (e.g. how far are they simply to provide additional capacity?).
- Current and future social and economic issues facing the communities.

Further desk based research has also supported the development of a socio-economic profile of the different islands and traffic forecasts for each service.

In addition to detailed consultations with key business and organisations, an online survey was developed proposed for each service. This will consider pre Covid use of each service and understand;

- Future usage/needs.
- Extent to which the current timetable meets their own needs and those of their community.
- Demand for an enhanced timetable-including the number and timing of additional sailings.
- Benefits for self/household and wider community from enhancements.

The findings have been brought together in two separate reports setting out the socio-economic case for timetable enhancements ahead of Transport Scotland undertaking the Islands Connectivity Plan which will replace the current Ferries Plan.

Copies of the full draft reports for the Sounds of Barra and Harris are attached within the papers for this meeting. A summary of the key conclusions from the reports are outlined below.

### **Key Conclusions from the Sounds of Barra & Harris Socio Economic Reports**

The case for the timetable enhancements is evident in, first, the traffic forecasts indicating **potential for significant increase in demand** for use of the Sound of Barra service. In addition, some existing trips could now be made at more suitable times, saving both time and costs.

Second, the **strategic case is strong**. The options collectively address the main issues for improving the economy and quality of life for residents. That is by more fully meeting household, business and visitor travel needs. That would be though providing sufficient capacity, greater day trip opportunities, ability to travel at short notice, and access to a number of mainland and inter-island transport services.

Third, we have **quantified a range of impacts in monetary terms**. The results reflect not only potential generated demand on the ferry. They also reflect the assumptions that underpin the calculations. For example, how far the generated visitor trips on the Sound of Barra service would lead to new spend in the Outer Hebrides rather than simply distributing existing expenditures more widely across the islands.

**It is recognised that some of the business benefits of enhanced timetables cannot be quantified.** In particular, the business survey and our consultations highlighted the significance of improved timetables in providing better access to customers (potentially leading to new sales); and also more opportunities to collaborate with other Outer Hebrides businesses' which would help to increase productivity.

An issue raised by consultees and in our surveys was greater integration of the timings of the two Sounds services. However, each route has its own dynamic requiring sailings at certain times. Co-ordinating timings on the two routes could have significant negative impacts on some households and businesses. **However, an increased number of sailings-and ones at new times of the day-will still offer greater opportunities for more efficient journeys between Barra and Lewis/Harris.**

### RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Improving inter-island connectivity is a key priority within the RTS Delivery Plan

### Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – Transport Scotland are about to undertake an Island Connectivity Plan to replace the current Ferries Plan. This work will help provide a robust methodology for better understanding the socio-economic case that ferry services provide.

### Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – Budget for undertaking the study was identified within the 2021/22 Business Plan with match funding contributions from CNeS and HIE.

### Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Enhancing inter-island connectivity is essential not just for developing the economic potential of our islands but also for ensuring that fragile communities continue to have access to different services and amenities that might not be available on their own island.

Members are invited to:

1. Note the report
2. Provide comment on the report prior to the final version being developed and submitted to Transport Scotland for their consideration.

**Report by:** Neil MacRae  
**Designation:** Partnership Manager  
**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022