

**HEBRIDES FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP  
(Barra, the Uists, Lewis and Harris)**

Minute of Meeting held at the Council Offices, Stornoway and virtually through Microsoft Teams, on Thursday 29 June 2023 at 10.00am.

<p>IN ATTENDANCE</p>	<p><b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</b>  Cllr. Uisdean Robertson (Chair)  Cllr. Iain A Macneil  Cllr. Duncan Macinnes MBE  Mr Kenneth Morrison  Ms Shona Hadwen (Clerk)  Mrs Fiona Maciver  Mrs Linda Cunningham  Mr Jim Morrison</p> <p><b>TRANSPORT SCOTLAND</b>  Mr Brian Gordon  Ms Liz Jack  Mr Ewan Swaffield  Mr Laurence Kenney  Mr Gordon Macleod  Mr William Millar</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LTD (CALMAC)</b>  Mr Finlay Macrae  Ms Fiona Galbraith</p> <p><b>FERRIES COMMUNITIES BOARD</b>  Mr Angus Campbell  Mr Bill Calderwood</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD. (CMAL)</b>  Mr Brian Fulton  Mr Chris Fisher</p> <p><b>HITRANS</b>  Mr Ranald Robertson</p> <p><b>THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL</b>  No attendees</p> <p><b>HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE)</b>  Ms Joanna Peteranna  Mr Nicky Sobey</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES COMMERCE GROUP</b>  Ms Gail Robertson</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM</b>  Mr Alan Graham  Ms Sarah Maclean</p> <p><b>ULLAPOOL HARBOUR TRUST</b>  No attendees</p>
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	<p><b>STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY</b> Mr Alex Macleod</p> <p><b>CPT</b> Ker Corbett</p>
APOLOGIES	<p>Cllr. Susan Thomson, Vice Chair (CNES); Cllr. Mustapha Hocine (CNES); Cllr Grant Fulton; Cllr Iain M Macleod; Cllr Kenneth Maclean (CNES); Mr Kevin Hobbs (CMAL); Cllr Calum Munro (Highland Council); Mr Andrew McIvor (Highland Council); Mr David Summers (Highland Council); Mr Kevin Peach (Harbour Master, Ullapool Harbour Trust);</p>

1	Minute of Meeting held on 10 January 2023	The Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023 was <b>approved</b> .
2	Matters Arising – Action Tracker	<p>With reference to item 2 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023, HITRANs submitted the Action Tracker detailing updates on the action points for all the Ferry Stakeholder Groups. The previous tracker had inadvertently been provided so Finlay Macrae of CalMac gave a verbal update on the actions raised at the last meeting in January 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ICIA for Uig Ferry Terminal was progressed and completed by the Highland Council;</li> <li>• Communication – several issues had been raised regarding communication. This is currently under review with the Customer Steering and Engagement Group;</li> <li>• Resilience – Transport Scotland are looking at several options to improve resilience and consistency across the service. Purchase of MV Loch Frisa and the charter of MV Alfred will assist but Transport Scotland continue to search for any opportunities to purchase additional tonnage;</li> <li>• MV Loch Seaforth – continued marine growth on the hull. Vessel continues to have regular below waterline hull cleaning; and</li> <li>• Passenger only service at Uig – this will be reviewed in the programme of the second closure for Uig pier.</li> </ul> <p><b>It was agreed:</b></p> <p><b>(1) to note the verbal update; and</b></p> <p><b>(2) that Ranald Robertson would issue members with the updated version of the Action Tracker.</b></p>
		<b>It was agreed to bring agenda item 7 forward for discussion.</b>
7	Project Neptune Update	<p>With reference to item 4 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023 Angus Campbell of the Communities Ferry Board provided an update on Project Neptune. The purpose of Project Neptune was to reflect on the governance arrangements between ferry organisations, having regard to the overarching objective of effective, efficient, and economic delivery of lifeline ferry services to enhance passenger experience and support the local island economies. Although focussed on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services, (CHFS), there are potential implications for the Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS) and these are to be considered in the options.</p> <p>The final report was submitted to the Scottish Government on 10 June 2023, and it was hoped that the findings and recommendations should be published within a month. Mr Campbell would monitor progress and keep in contact with the Scottish Government to ensure that date would be met.</p>

		<p>Whilst Mr Campbell could not divulge the recommendations as the report was with the Scottish Government, he reported that the findings were broadly based around the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structures: there should be more islander presence on the various boards;</li> <li>• Governance: more scrutiny;</li> <li>• Future Contracts: what can be done to improve on the current contract terms;</li> <li>• Culture: islanders feel they are not being listened to;</li> <li>• Appoint a Ferries Commissioner: this suggestion had strong support amongst the communities;</li> <li>• Accessibility to services: lack of capacity, priority matrix;</li> <li>• Connectivity and Onward Travel;</li> <li>• Freight Ferries;</li> <li>• Northern Isles.</li> </ul> <p>Mr Campbell reported that over the course of the last three months he had attended approximately 60 meetings in the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Group areas. Some meetings were very well attended, with an average overall of about 15 people in attendance at each meeting. Community engagement was very good, and many individuals had also submitted responses separately to the consultation.</p> <p>Mr Campbell would feedback the recommendations from the Scottish Government once known.</p> <p>With reference to the recent announcement that the Scottish Government were to extend CalMac’s contract for a further 10 years, Mr Campbell reported that it would have been more preferable to have gone through a tender process, and with that, given the communities for opportunity to influence change.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Campbell for his update.</b></p>
3	Caledonian MacBrayne Operational, Commercial and Performance Update covering (CFL)	<p>With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023, CalMac, submitted an operational and performance report which addressed the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marketing</li> <li>2. Timetable Integration and Consultation Update</li> <li>3. Ar Turas Update</li> <li>4. Route updates</li> </ol> <p>The update on the marketing and commercial side of the business stated that CalMac were continuing their Digital Refresh project and were working through areas of integration with the new e-booking system, development of content, new functionality, and working through Digital Scotland assessments to create a much-improved online experience for all their customers. CalMac were working with an external research agency to measure and track customer experience with their Commercial customers plus they were also conducting in-depth interviews to attitudes to their service and to gain an understanding of requirements in light of changing Commercial markets.</p> <p>They would shortly be commencing work on the second phase of the end user testing for a new website and booking platform which included accessible user testing.</p> <p>In reference to timetabling the Report intimated that the last week of the summer timetable 2023 remained to be published, but they anticipated this being published and available to customers in early July. The winter overhaul and deployment plan was being reviewed due to 2022 – 2023 issues, and it was anticipated that when this was complete, winter 2023-2024 reservations would open in August 2023. Consultation for Summer 2024 timetables were to begin shortly.</p> <p>The report also provided an updated on the Ar Turas Reservations System Project which was launched on 17 May 2023. This was later than intended due to disruption and deployment issues.</p>

		<p>Over 200,000 customer accounts and 145,000 bookings from the previous Compass system were migrated to the new Ar Turas System.</p> <p>There had been some specific user issues during the introduction of the new operating platform, including: - website issues, only displaying first 5 sailings per day; some locations were having payment issues; some ticket confirmation emails, and password reset emails were not being sent. There is a controlled system in place to log and allocate all issues to ensure these continue to be resolved as soon as possible. However, for anyone continuing to have issues, CalMac will respond to all customer enquires and will continue to update using their usual channels.</p> <p>In discussion it was reported that some activities that it had been hoped would be done this year have been delayed due to a number of issues. CalMac had had one of their most difficult winters and on behalf of CalMac, Finlay Macrae gave his sincerest apologies to members of the group. Hopefully with some stability, the issues experienced in the last few months would be less frequent.</p> <p>Finlay Macrae reported that with effect from 1 July 2023, the Hebrides Ferry Group network should be operating as it should be with the LOTI back in service from 30 June 2023.</p> <p>The report also provided members with a current update on each of the Hebrides Ferry Group routes along with information on the performance on all routes in the Hebrides Ferry Group area for the period from 22 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.</p> <p>Discussions were held about different issues currently affecting different ports and ferry services around the area with responses provided.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Macrae and it was agreed to note the Hebrides Area Update.</b></p>
4	CMAL Update	<p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023 Brian Fulton of CMAL submitted a report updating members regarding the overall activities and projects underway for both Vessels and Port Infrastructure.</p> <p>A verbal update was provided on the Islay vessels 1 and 2 being built in Cemre, Turkey. Both are progressing well with all normal practices and milestones achieved. Vessel 1 (1092) is due for delivery in Turkey in October 2024 and Vessel 2 – (1093) is due in February 2025.</p> <p>The Little Minch vessels 3 and 4 also being built in Turkey were signed in January 2023 and good progress in line with milestones is being achieved.</p> <p>The next vessels due to be replaced would be the LOTI followed by a replacement for the Mull Route.</p> <p>Mr Fulton highlighted that the three-year corporate plan for CMAL is available on the CMAL website. It is likely that there will be no further commitment from the Scottish Government on capital funding until 2026, but CMAL are working hard to secure further funding.</p> <p>A question was asked in relation to the linkspan at Lochmaddy Pier which will need to be replaced to accommodate new vessels and if this project was included in the £115 million funding already secured? The answer given at the meeting was “yes”, this project was included within the £115 million.</p> <p>Following the meeting, an amendment was made to the above original comment.</p> <p>Mr Fulton clarified that <i>“the £115 million is for the two Little Minch vessels and associated vessel costs only. Mr Fulton had originally said that some of the money would be for port infrastructure upgrade, but this has been previously covered and the vessels will fit the</i></p>

		<p><i>ports. More specifically the £115m does not cover costs for a new linkspan arrangement at Lochmaddy”.</i></p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Fulton and it was agreed to note the CMAL update.</b></p>
5	Ar Turas	<p><b>Presentation</b>  In the absence of the official presentation, Finlay Macrae of CalMac gave an update on the new booking system – Ar Turas.</p> <p>The new system went live on 17 May 2023 and replaced a system which had been in operation for 27 years. CalMac are very aware of the technical difficulties being experienced by users and are working hard to resolve these issues. Meetings were taking place each week with the supplier and constant development is being done to make the experience easier. Members shared their frustration at some aspects of the new booking system.</p> <p>Mr Macrae reported that there were still issues with the number plate look-up functionality of the booking system, which on the previous system meant that the measurements of the car were taken into consideration when booking. Work is ongoing to resolve this matter.</p> <p>Due to the level of issues being experienced by users, they are having to go directly to the ports to make bookings which can be inconvenient. Users are also experiencing issues when calling the ports direct – no-one answers the phones as they are all dealing with face-to-face users. More resources are required to deal with the increase in face-to-face users and telephone users as the booking system is proving unreliable.</p> <p>Mr Macrae informed members that CalMac are aware of the resource issues and, like many other organisations in the area, are struggling to recruit staff.</p> <p>Mr Macrae apologised for the ongoing frustrations felt by many but assured members that CalMac were working hard to resolve all issues quickly. The onset of the winter timetable would hopefully mean a clean slate and a much better user experience when making bookings.</p> <p>Members thanked Mr Macrae for the information provided and for all the work he and his team were doing in the local area.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the update.</b></p>

6	Transport Scotland Update	<p>With reference to item 5 of the Minute of 10 January 2023 Brian Gordon submitted a report updating members on Transport Scotland. Since 2007, the Scottish Government’s commitment to our island and remote communities has seen an investment of more than £2bn in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service, the North Isles Ferry Service and supporting vessel and harbour infrastructure.</p> <p>The Scottish Government announced investment of £580m and more recently £115m in services, including ports and vessels, to support and improve Scotland’s ferry routes as part of the wider five-year Infrastructure Investment Plan, in February 2021.</p> <p>Updates were provided on the following initiatives:</p> <p><b>Island Connectivity Plan:</b> The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) has replaced the Ferries Plan which was initially published in 2012 and is broader in scope, taking account of aviation, ferries and fixed links and onward and connecting travel. Most of the work on the various elements of ICP is expected to be undertaken during 2023.</p> <p><b>Fare Fares Review:</b> Transport Scotland are progressing the Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares. The review is considering both the cost and availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available to ensure the public transport system is more accessible, available, and affordable for all, with the costs of transport more fairly shared across government, business, and society. The outcome is due to report by the end of the year.</p> <p>A question was asked in relation to free travel on ferries for the Under 22s. Mr Gordon informed members that this was also being considered within the Fair fares Review.</p> <p><b>Update since writing of report:</b> A fares freeze for the rest of this year was announced on 28 June 2023.</p> <p><b>Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service 3 (CHFS3):</b> Transport Scotland intends to continue to provide a lifeline ferry service in order to connect island and remote peninsula communities off the West Coast of Scotland with the mainland when the current Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS2) ends at midnight on 30 September 2024. Preparatory work by TS for the next CHFS contract (CHFS3) had begun but remained in the early stages.</p> <p><b>Update since writing of report:</b> Scottish Government have extended the current contract for a further 10 years with CMAL.</p> <p>Mr Gordon informed members that the new Minister for Transport was meeting with the Uist Ferry Group later today (29 June). Members expressed their concern that moving forward, it was important for all three agencies (TS, CMAL and CalMac) engage with the local communities on all issues affecting the islands. Communities should have the opportunity to input into the timetabling in particular and there needs to be a consultation around this.</p> <p>Kenneth Morrison reported that the Infrastructure Steering Group had a date set for a meeting with all three stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Gordon for his update, and it was agreed to note the report.</b></p>
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8	Other Ports and Infrastructure Updates	<p>With reference to item 7 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023, verbal updates were provided as follows:</p> <p><b>Ullapool Harbour Trust:</b> An update was provided by Ranald Robertson on behalf of Kevin Peach, Harbour Master who was unable to attend the meeting. The report updated members on the road widening and inner harbour works which were currently running about four weeks behind schedule due to outside influences.</p> <p>The Report stated that completion was scheduled for mid-July and would improve traffic flow along the harbour approach road especially at peak ferry times. The project of widening the road challenged the contractor but Mr Peach reported that there had been excellent co-operation between all parties involved.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the Ullapool Harbour Trust Update.</b></p> <p><b>Stornoway Harbour:</b> Mr Alex Macleod (Harbour Master) reported that there had been ongoing issues with the Passenger Access System – it had been shutdown for a few months. All ports seemed to be having the same issues and an alternative solution was needed.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the Stornoway Port Authority Update.</b></p> <p><b>CNES Harbours:</b> Mr Kenny Morrison (Harbour Master) gave an update on the harbours under CNES control. Lochmaddy Pier: hopefully late August for completion; Sounds Route: liaising with Transport Scotland regarding the small vessel replacement scheme (SVRS) as infrastructure upgrades would be required and he is working with the Engineering Dept to ensure everything is ready.</p> <p>The new heating system for Lochmaddy ferry terminal and waiting room was going out to tender and works would be completed before the winter months.</p> <p>In discussion a question was asked about channel dredging for Lochmaddy Pier in regard to the Isle of Lewis being able to access the pier.</p> <p><b>Action – Kenny Morrison to seek clarification on any restrictions on the Isle of Lewis using Lochmaddy Pier and to circulate findings to the group.</b></p> <p>In discussion a question was asked about disruptions at Lochmaddy Pier caused by both the weather and pier works, and when would this likely be resolved. Kenny Morrison informed the group that the project at Lochmaddy was due for completion in August so this would not be an issue beyond that date.</p> <p><b>Action – Kenny Morrison to seek further clarification from the project team and circulate response to the group</b></p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Update.</b></p> <p><b>Highland Council:</b> A Progress Update Report on the Uig Harbour Redevelopment was provided by Ranald Robertson on behalf of Highland Council who were unable to attend the meeting. The report provided information on the infrastructure improvements at Uig Harbour which included: an extended marshalling area, berthing structure strengthening and widening, linkspan replacement, approach way repair and widening, relocated new waiting shelter, new terminal building (to be retendered separately and constructed during the main works), dredging and utility provision.</p> <p>The infrastructure improvements had been presented to the community through a number of public consultation and community engagement events which included resilience meetings in advance and during the outage works with key stakeholders and community representatives.</p> <p>The report also included photos of the current works completed.</p>
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9	Communities Board Update	<p>With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 10 January 2023 Bill Calderwood of the Ferries Communities Board submitted a Report updating members on the current activities of the Board.</p> <p>The report stated that the Board continue to have regular quarterly meetings with TS, CMAL and CalMac. A new member from Gigha had been recruited to the Board and adverts were out to recruit a young person to the Board.</p> <p>The Board was recently represented at the Cross-Party parliamentary committee on Ferries and also had a joint meeting with CML and CMal. The Board had offered to test the new Ticketing system but had not been included in the process, they continue to remain concerned about added pressures on frontline staff whilst the new ticketing system beds in. The Board also noted that it was disappointing that with the level of public investment in the new booking system, there was not an option included for the integrated booking of onward travel.</p> <p>The Board had two online meetings with Kevin Stewart (former Transport Minister) and last week had met with the Cabinet Secretary. A meeting with the new Transport Minister had been requested.</p> <p>The Board have been heavily involved in the Project Neptune Consultations and look forward to the imminent publication of the finalised report.</p> <p>Board members continue to engage with their local communities with consultation methods a priority and they continue to make the case for free U22 travel on ferries.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Calderwood for his report and noted the update.</b></p>
10	Confirm Pre-agreed Date of Next Meeting	<p>It was agreed that the next meeting of the Hebrides Ferry Stakeholder Group would take place on Thursday 7 December 2023 at 10:00am via MS Teams.</p>
11	AOCB	<p>Engagement with Transport Scotland on Freight Services for Stornoway and the Sound of Harris to support getting resilience options in place was welcomed.</p>