



**Minute of Hebrides Ferry Users Group Meeting
(Barra, South and North Uist, Harris, Lewis)**

**Held in the Council Chambers, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Stornoway
11:00 on 14 March 2012**

IN ATTENDANCE

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR (CnES)

Councillor Donald Manford (Chairperson)
Councillor John Mackay (JMack)
Councillor Norman MacDonald (NMacD)
Councillor Gerry MacLeod (GMacL)
Councillor Angus McCormack (AMcC)
Councillor Catherine MacDonald (CMacD)
Mr Iain Mackinnon (IM)
Mr David Smart (DS)

HITRANS

Mr Randal Robertson (RR)
Mrs Katy Cunningham (KC)

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Mr Sam MacNaughton (SMacN)

CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LIMITED (CaIMac)

Mr Gary Robertson (GR)
Mr David Cannon (DC)
Ms Mary-Ann Campbell (M-AC)

CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD (CMAL)

Mr Andrew Flockhart (AF)

STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY

Mr Torquil MacLeod (TMacL)

OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM ASSOCIATION (OHTA)

Mr Donald McArthur (DMcA)

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Archie Campbell
Mr Mike Dean

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Manford welcomed all to the meeting explaining that this would be a single item agenda focussing on the Scottish Government Consultation on the Draft Ferries Plan. This is to enable the User Group to feed a response into the draft Ferries Plan.

ITEM 1: Minute of Previous Meeting

The minute of the 16 November 2011 meeting was approved as a true reflection of meeting

ITEM 2: Scottish Government Consultation on the Draft Ferries Plan

RR introduced and presented a PowerPoint presentation providing background on the draft ferries plan.

AF - CMAL have tendered and have a preferred bidder for the financing of the replacement vessel for the Stornoway – Ullapool route. A decision on how this will proceed is due imminently.

AMcC - queried the internal fit and suitability for passengers comfort, and hopes customers will be able contribute to the design of the interior of the vessel.

AF - confirmed that the vessel will be fitted out to the best specification. If anyone has any concerns these can be fed back to CMAL via website. There will be consultation with the community ahead of this.

IM - added a request from a meeting held the previous week that rest rooms was a specific issue and that it was important communities involved are consulted.

NMacD - asked that the Muirneag also be considered at this time

AF - responded the MV Muirneag is due to be taken out of service in October 2013. CMAL are constantly looking at the market to establish if a suitable vessel can be sourced to replace the Muirneag on the freight service in the period before the new ferry is introduced.

NMacD - responded this is serious for those who travel with vehicles as the MV Isle of Lewis cannot meet the capacity requirements of the route on her own.

Funding

SMacN – The original intention was that the Ferries Review would establish a long term plan but in the 5 years since the process began this has evolved. Initially we expected a document that set out where we would like to be in 20/30 years time but we are now

moving to much shorter forecasts.

AF highlighted that the plan will still be setting out a strategic vision of the long term as the new vessel needs identified will cover a period of operation of 30-40 years.

The Chair supported Sam's comments on the need to retain the long term focus within the final document.

RR - outlined the need to look at all revenue raising sources including local government prudential borrowing as an alternative method of funding vessels and infrastructure.

AF - suggested it may be possible for CMAL to become a form of public company, to allow borrowing and plan ahead strategically, which they cannot do at the moment.

Fares

RR reported the latest RET announcements have caused discussions on some of the Islands. RET has been retained for coach traffic, with a suggestion to use off peak to make savings. The doors are still open for change.

SMacN - should look at wider benefits to communities rather than just area ferries are serving.

Chair – RET is a vehicle to deliver fair fares for some routes, not all routes, and will not suit all purposes and wasn't set up that way.

The Chair expressed concern about the RET evaluation from feedback questionnaires and telephone interviews being carried out by 3rd party providers.

RR advised the group that 6m vehicle change requested a last meeting has now been implemented.

Ferries Regulator

SMacN suggested it was very difficult to discuss the Ferries Regulator proposal with no information on what the role and responsibilities of such a body would be.

DMcA - asked if anyone has asked about what is the demand for a regulator but couldn't find anywhere if this question has been asked.

The Group agreed that they could not see any case for a Ferries Regulator instead existing arrangements should be reviewed.

Accessibility

RR highlighted that the Draft Plan placed more emphasis on accessibility and that CMAL are leading on this work package.

AF highlighted that rail has a fund designed to improve accessibility at stations and it might be beneficial to have a similar facility for ferry terminals and vessels.

AMcC highlighted that the coach baggage service operated from Stornoway for passenger travelling between Ullapool and Inverness was a great service, especially beneficial to the elderly and young families. It should be universal that baggage is handled on all routes for passengers travelling on connecting bus services. It would be a welcome improvement to see the service re-instated. The Chair recorded his full agreement. The reduced quality of service without this facility has resulted in higher car use because of difficulties with luggage.

NMacD added it is important a solution is found and community transport groups could offer this solution.

TMacL – New proposed ferry will be one deck higher and require longer passageways. Clarification is needed on who will be responsible for passenger access in the future.

Environmental

RR highlighted that the consultation to the Scottish Ferries Plan document indicated strong resistance to any slowing down of vessels under environmental justifications. Instead consultants suggested deployment of green technology as a way of reducing carbon footprint.

NMacD – suggested we should seek some reassurance on what fuel will be used in future ferries as heavy oil has resulted in a dark plume of smoke over Stornoway which is harming the local environment.

Ferry Services to Hebrides FUG area

RR outlined implications to Hebrides FUG area, highlighting the designation of primary and secondary routes.

TMacL – principle for Stornoway, being island based should have a secondary linkspan. Island side of the route should have a back up to provide greater resilience.

AMcC – doesn't know how they have come to conclusions as no service meets the community needs.

NMacD – there is real cause for concern at the designation of primary and secondary routes. In the event of extreme budget constraints there is a natural fear that this designation will help inform where service cuts could be made.

IM – Important each individual group submit responses, the Council response will be available for viewing on the council website

AMcC – community councils are keen to support the council, and will submit their own responses.

ITEM 3: Date of Next Meeting

No date set for next meeting

