



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

**Held at the Bridge Community centre, Bayhead, Stornoway
11:00 on 16 November 2011**

IN ATTENDANCE

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR (CnES)

Councillor Donald Manford (Chairperson)
Councillor John Mackay
Councillor Norman MacDonald
Mr Iain Mackinnon
Mr David Smart

HITRANS

Mr Ranald Robertson
Mrs Katy Cunningham

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND (FERRIES DIVISION)

Mr Douglas Ellis

CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LIMITED (CalMac)

Ms Mary-Ann Campbell
Mr David Taylor

CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD (CMAL)

Mr Andrew Flockhart

ULLAPOOL HARBOUR

Mr Kenny Mackenzie

STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY

Mr Torquil MacLeod

CONFEDERATION OF TRANSPORT (CPT)

Mr Mike Dean

ROAD HAULAGE ASSOCIATION (RHA)

Mr DR MacLeod

OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM ASSOCIATION (OHTA)

Mr Donald McArthur
Ms Anne Ryan

APOLOGIES:	Councillor Morag Munro Councillor Archie Campbell Mr Archie MacDonald Mr Ian Fordham Mr Kevin Peach Mr Ian Fox
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WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Manford welcomed members to the meeting.

ITEM 1: Minute of Previous Meeting

The minute of the 11 May 2011 meeting was approved with a single amendment to item 6: paragraph 4, to show Sunday a.m. sailing across the summer period

ITEM 2: Matters Arising

No items raised under Matters Arising.

ITEM 3: Scottish Government Ferries Review Update

Douglas Ellis provided a short update on the Scottish Government Ferries Review advising that the draft plan should be published by Christmas. A 12 week consultation period will follow publications.

Councillor Norman MacDonald responded that these are tight deadlines for a consultation, with hugely challenging timescales and a difficult time of year for the draft plan to be

Councillor MacDonald added that he fears a lot of these decisions are "fait accompli".

The Chair supported Councillor MacDonald's comments, adding timescales are not sufficient for a great deal of consultation with the communities served by our ferries particularly when set against the normal scheduling of community council meetings. Time must be allowed for engagement with the communities.

General discussion on ferries review followed

ITEM 4: OHTA

Donald McArthur reported that OHTA have raised concerns with CalMac on the availability of sufficient ferry capacity to the Outer Hebrides and that ferry capacity is constraining the development of the tourism industry to the Outer Hebrides.

Donald went onto report on the detailed research undertaken by

OHTIA throughout the 2011 summer timetable on the availability of online bookings for the Stornoway to Ullapool route. Donald presented and displayed the findings as an excel spreadsheet, summarising the key findings as:

- 237 (45.9%) sailings out of a total of 516 sailings between May 1st and Aug 31st 2011 were fully booked online at some point prior to departure
- weekends book up earlier, and often a full 2 months in advance.
- online system showing sailings fully booked when space is available
- visitors use the online booking system to plan their trip, and if they cannot make a booking on their preferred dates they may go elsewhere.

The Chair thanked Donald and OHTIA for highlighting this issue and bringing it to this group. The Chair suggested that CNES may consider setting up a short term working group to look into the issue.

Councillor MacDonald added that it is important that cancellations are kept up to date on website and that the website must be accurate.

Action – The Chair thanked OHTIA formally for the hard work and excellent information they prepared for the meeting.

ITEM 5:

Caledonian MacBrayne Operational Update

Regional Managers David Taylor, Mary-Ann Campbell reported on routes within their area and provided the group with performance reports providing information on reliability and punctuality of routes covered within the group area for the period April to September 2011. Performance reports and statistics were issued prior to meeting.

Mary-Ann Campbell thanked OHTIA on the work they have produced and would look forward to being part of any working group.

DR MacLeod raised the issue of the current vessel replacing the Muirneag suggesting the MV Isle of Arran might not be able to support the traffic on this route. DR agreed that not much can be done for this year but in the future it is imperative that a larger vessel is in place.

Torquil MacLeod suggested the Isle of Lewis could do extra night sailing to help clear backlog?

Mary –Ann agreed that this option was worth exploring further.

Chair raised question on Lochmaddy sailings to accommodate market days.

David Taylor responded saying he would like dates, there might be a clash with commercial return sailing from Uig but happy to discuss and to accommodate if possible.

Chair asked if David Taylor and Ian Fox could attend transport meeting to discuss Barra / Lochboisdale in the foreseeable future

David confirmed he is happy to attend and is sure Ian would also be happy to attend.

David Smart reported that Angus McNeil is writing to CalMac over fares for vehicles over 5 meters being charged commercial rates, as this is affecting mini buses from sports clubs etc

David Taylor is aware of this, but fare rates ultimately rest with Scottish Government

Douglas Ellis added he believes this is under discussion within the ferries review and will take a note back to Judith Ainsley who is heading the review team

Ann Ryan asked if it would be possible to have Wi-Fi on ferries to allow passengers to plan ahead while on their journey?

Ranald advised HITRANS have part funded Wi-Fi on some bus services recently and have discussed this with CalMac, Northlink provide this on service from Aberdeen. HITRANS will investigate opportunities again with CalMac.

ITEM 6:

Stornoway to Ullapool Vessel Replacement Options

Andrew Flockhart provided the group with an update on the Stornoway to Ullapool replacement vessel options reporting that consultation events have been held and information gathered. A recommendation has been made to the Minister for Transport and his decision is awaited. Finance is in place to deliver this vessel.

The Chair suggested if finance is a problem RTPs can use Prudential Borrowing which may offer a cost effective solution to the procurement.

Andrew confirmed this hasn't been discussed

Chair responded this could be taken to the HITRANS board

Ranald Robertson agreed adding they wouldn't delay the process as if this is something that was required a special meeting of the board could be called. HITRANS Director Dave Duthie would be correct person to discuss this with.

Ian Mackinnon asked as the Murneag would no longer be available

after 2013, when decision could be made and feasibility of vessel being ready if behind in decision

Andrew Flockhart responded to say it will take 18 months to build the large vessel with 6 months for tendering

ITEM 7:

Public Transport Update

Mike Dean provided the public transport update reporting:

Extension of the summer timetables or in the event of additional Sunday sailings Citylink would connect with all sailings at Ullapool. Due to a spate of complaints received regarding capacity on this service the need for pre-scheduled duplication on almost every coach service is being looked at.

The luggage service on Ullapool to Inverness will cease in December, after taking all elements into consideration particularly the cost in excess of £43k to operate this service it has been decided that this is not sustainable.

The Chair commented that this was a disappointment as the service is extremely valuable for passengers and really encourages people to travel by coach.

Torquil MacLeod asked if CalMac could take responsibility for luggage as happens with airlines.

Mary-Ann Campbell agreed to look at this but there would be cost implications that would have to be covered.

Mike Dean raised an issue for coach services connecting at Kyle with trains from Inverness. Currently it is difficult to make a connection from the evening ferry service departure from Uig. Mike asked if the 1800 departure could be delayed by 10 minutes to allow coach to make the connection with the train arriving at Kyle.

David Taylor advised that this could not be looked at until summer 2012 timetable but will give it due consideration at this time.

Mike Dean suggested the coach driver could, in winter, call ahead to ferry staff to let them know when passengers were collected at Kyle.

David Taylor thinks this would be a good compromise, but perhaps call from Portree to ferry for winter time and possible summer time without timetable changes

ITEM 8:

TransTourism ERDF Project

Ranald Robertson gave a short verbal report on the TransTourism ERDF Project.

TRANSTOURISM-Sustainable Transport in Rural Tourism Areas is a Northern Periphery Programme (NPP) project with partners in Sweden, Iceland, Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland and has a total value of €1.356M. EU funding is €808k. The project runs from 01 September 2010 until 31 August 2013. HITRANS is to contribute

£60000 over 3 years, with HIE funding up to £21360 over the same period. The project delivers two key priorities:

- a) Promoting innovation and competitiveness in remote and peripheral areas.
- b) Sustainable development of natural and community resources.

The project consists of web-based timetables and itineraries to enable the visitor to browse at home and then commit to a public transport based trip in the Highlands and Islands, as part of a multi-national bid. This project is consistent with the recommendations of the Regional Access Scoping Study and helps relieve the constraints of current Highlands and Islands tourism/travel sites being either mode specific or simply very patchy in the information given on the opportunity to travel by public transport for a full multi-modal trip. Comprehensive single mode timetables do not facilitate the creation of individually tailored itineraries taking in attractions/locations of choice, and are often too detailed for the visitors needs. The portal provided as an output from the project would build and exploit existing data resources and introduce the opportunity for user feedback on trips to be generated within the content.

ITEM 8:

AOCB

Roddy Jardine has been asked to for the Ferry User Group to support the case for the Sound of Harris service operating day to be extended by one hour in the winter as navigational aids have been improved. The case is to be made to the MCA.

Iain MacKinnon would be happy to push for this as much as he can and welcomes this Group's support

Action – The Group unanimously supported the proposal to extend the winter operating day on the Sound of Harris by one hour.

ITEM 9:

Date of Next Meeting

No date set for next meeting.