



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

**Held in the Meeting Room, Lochmaddy Hall, Lochmaddy
11:00 on 7 May 2013**

IN ATTENDANCE

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR (CnES)

Councillor John Mackay (Chairperson)
Councillor Uisdean Robertson
Councillor Ronald Mackinnon
Councillor Kenneth MacLeod
Mr Iain Mackinnon

HITRANS

Mr Ranald Robertson
Mr Neil MacRae
Mrs Katy Cunningham

TRANSPORT SCOTLAND (Ferries Division)

Ms Cheryl Murrie
Mr Paul Linhart- MacAskill

CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LIMITED (CalMac)

Ms Mary Ann Campbell
Mr Donald Beaton
Ms Mary Morrison

STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY

Ms Jane MacIver

OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM ASSOCIATION (OHTA)

Mr Graham MacLennan
Ms Anne Ryan

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Donald Manford
Councillor George Farlow
Mr Andrew Flockhart
Mr David Cannon
Mr David Taylor
Mr Kevin Peach

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Mackay welcomed all to the meeting and advised Transport Scotland representatives flight had been delayed. The meeting proceeded but with Item 4 held until Cheryl Murrie and Paul Linhart-MacAskill arrived.

ITEM 1: Minute of Previous Meeting

The minute of the 14 March 2012 meeting was approved as a true reflection of meeting

ITEM 2: Note of Meeting on 1 October 2012

Cllr Mackinnon highlighted that normal protocol wasn't followed at this meeting. HITRANS didn't Chair meeting which was out of line with the terms of reference of this group.

ITEM 3: Matters Arising

No items raised

ITEM 4: Scottish Government Ferries Plan

Cheryl Murrie provided an update on the Ferries Plan advising this is the strategy for the next 10 years but Ministers are still prepared to listen and to meet communities if there are any concerns. Any questions that could not be answered on the day would be taken back and answers provided to the meeting secretariat to circulate.

Cheryl presented to the Group providing background to the review and detailing the plan.

- Final plan published 19 December 2012
- Commitment to Ferries
- Essential for access to vital services
- Encourage sustainable and growing communities
- Inform long term Ferries Strategy to 2022
- Investment programme for vessels/ports/harbours
- All public funded ferries included both Scottish Government and Local Authority
- Continued engagement with communities
- As contracts expire consultation will take place, not just presume that current level of service is the correct service
- Seek longer contract periods

Cheryl added that work will begin next year to consider the case for a Mallaig –Lochboisdale service

Cllr Robertson – raised the issue of shorter period to notifying of seasonal timetables and that these are increasingly being set with no consultation

with communities. Adding, changes that will impact on communities should not be made without consultation.

Cheryl - agreed and understands that what looks like a small change (to them) on paper can have a huge impact on communities.

Mary Ann Campbell - confirmed this was a fault on the operator's part, but changes are being made in their processes and shouldn't happen again.

Iain Mackinnon – raised the issue of these Ferry Consultation groups (FUGs). Ferry User Groups were supposed to be the main point of contact between Communities/CalMac/Scottish Government. The remit of these groups needs to be made stronger. These groups need a stronger commitment from the Government, and should be included in any discussions regarding Ferries, changes to timetables etc.

Ranald Robertson – agreed, adding it's important representation of these groups are not lost or watered down.

The Chair supported the comments on consultation arrangements stressing the important role these groups play in representing the communities.

Gordon Maclennan – added his support, adding these groups are the correct forum with the range of membership that make up these groups offering a proper cross section of business and community representation. Iain MacKinnon added this would be the correct first point of contact, bearing in mind communicating with the group membership will allow awareness within a wide spectrum that includes RHA, FTA, farming, Council, business, tourism, this would enforce the role of this group.

Chery Murrie – confirmed this needs to be looked at, and will take this back. Adding, it's important they know who to contact when looking for quick decision making.

Iain Mackinnon – raised CHFS retendering longer contract lengths as the current 6 year contract length not enough. Adding, HITRANS did a bit of research on Rail Franchise contract length, and asked what involvement will RTP's have in determining contract specifications, and will they have the facility to feed into specification.

Paul Linhart-MacAskill – confirmed there will be on going communications with HITRANS and communities throughout the extension.

Iain Mackinnon - discontinuation of RET on commercial vehicles (CV) fares, when will revision of CV fares take place.

Cheryl Murrie advised that a working group will undertake this and Transport Scotland are very much aware this needs to be progressed ahead of implementing any changes.

ITEM 5: Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) – MVA Report

Ranald Robertson provided background to RET, and the recent announcement that Commercial Vehicles are to be excluded from RET fares.

During the initial RET pilot fares have been fixed with most routes and freight users benefitting from a significant reduction. Ranald reported the Scottish Government have agreed to look at roll out of the removal of RET from commercial vehicles and that a working group has been set up. The decision to remove commercial vehicles from RET seems to rest with the findings by Halcrow in their review of the pilot scheme that the benefits of the RET discount were not passed on to yours. This view is not shared by many and the MVA report seems to bear this out and has identified that RET allowed hauliers to freeze charges in the face of a difficult trading situation with significant increases in costs such as fuel and in against the backdrop of the worst recession in recent memory.

Iain Mackinnon supported Ranald's comments. The Government must look at impact this will have on the whole of the Western Isles and needs to be looked at again at a governmental level.

ITEM 6: Ferry Availability Study

Graham MacLennan presented on the findings from the OHTIA survey of availability of booking space online conducted throughout summer 2012 with a daily interrogation of the CalMac website booking facility.

Graham provided background to the study and outlined the results which captured journeys not available to book throughout the summer season including the valuable and welcome extra journeys operated for Hebfest, and to carry seafood off the islands during the Olympics.

The full report is available from OHTIA and on the HITRANS website.

The Chair thanked Graham for his useful presentation and asked if there were any questions.

Iain Mackinnon – concerned about M.V. Muirneag replacement. Loch Seaforth not due until next June/July, and bearing in mind increased demand, when demand ramps up asked "is provision going to be made?".

Mary Ann Campbell responded - still looking for tonnage at the moment. Timetables are with CalMac and Transport Scotland, but there is still scope for changes to be made.

Gordon MacLennan – added not only Stornoway that would impact with capacity issues on this route, but would impact on those with hopscotch tickets who would be unable to continue on their journeys down the arterial routes

Iain – asked if this would be a single bundle or broken down. From HITRANS perspective they should be continuing with line of work (study)

Cheryl – confirmed would remain as a single bundle.

Ranald – will discuss further with Iain after this meeting and possibly bring in Coll and Tìree at the same time.

Graham highlighted situation with Northlink with vessel breakdown with no support back up with this route. CalMac can move vessels and cover breakdowns, therefore important routes are not broken down as there will be less provision for cover when breakdowns.

Graham – recommends continue analysing in order to monitor trends. CalMac system lends itself to monitoring, but Northlink or Serco systems do not. Adding that CalMac stats are important to OHTA, this allows them to see what their market is and pass on this information to Visit Scotland.

RET increased demand, but dropped off last year, this maybe a blip due to market conditions and Olympics, will have to wait and see.

Mary Ann Campbell asked Graham if he could forward his presentation. Graham confirmed he is happy to share presentation.

- ITEM 7: Caledonian MacBrayne Operational Update**
Regional Manager Mary-Ann Campbell reported on routes within the area and provided the group with performance reports providing information on reliability and punctuality of routes covered within the group area for the period October 2012 to March 2013. Performance reports and statistics were issued prior to meeting.
- ITEM 8: Winter Timetable Vessel Deployment**
Item not taken
- ITEM 9: Passenger Rights Legislation – UK Application**
Item not taken RR to circulate the final information on how EU Passenger Rights are likely to impact on CHFS ferries when it is published.
- ITEM 10: AOCB**
Iain Mackinnon – should reinforce the importance of this group and set the date of next meeting. Must remember this is a statutory role and this is being evaporated and must retain a multi-agency group.
Ranald Robertson – agreed adding that HITRANS would really like to see more meeting content generated by members with for example

the operator setting out their thinking on future plans. This could apply equally well to other group members.

Iain suggested meetings should be held when CalMac producing timetables to allow feedback and input.

Mary Ann Campbell agreed to take this back and suggest the most suitable time of year for meetings to be held at a key time to allow useful consultation on timetables.