

## **Report to Partnership Meeting 13 April 2012**

### **RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY**

#### **Ferry Reservation System Monitoring Report**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To report to Members on the findings of the Ferry Service Reservation System Monitoring Report undertaken on behalf of HITRANS by Reference Economic Consultants which is available to download from the HITRANS website at <http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Corporate/Research/Sea>.

##### **Background**

Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association (OHTIA) and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar monitored CalMac's online reservation system. They recorded which sailings were shown as fully booked for cars, and how far in advance of the day of sailing. The OHTIA presented the findings of their analysis to the Hebrides Ferry User Group in November 2011. After a very interesting presentation and discussion at the Ferry User Group it was recommended that HITRANS engage consultants to analyse the OHTIA findings further. It was also recommended that this work should consider the findings of earlier surveys conducted by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar.

##### **Data**

The OHTIA supplied data for 2011 bookings on the Ullapool to Stornoway service. The reservation system was queried daily between April 19th and August 31<sup>st</sup> to capture the daily availability throughout the summer 2011 season.

The Comhairle nan Eilean Siar data was for both 2009 and 2010. This covered the services from each of the five Outer Hebrides ports which serve the mainland. The data encompassed mainly sailings in July and August. The system was queried less than daily and not always on a regular basis. Therefore, the CnES data *understate the number of fully booked sailings*.

Reference decided that the data for 2009 Ullapool-Stornoway data and the 2010 information for Lochboisdale and Castlebay should not be analysed further in this review of the evidence available. This is because the timetable and vessel deployment were not representative of the current services on these routes. The issues that affected each of these datasets are detailed below:

- 2009 – The Stornoway to Ullapool timetable changed in July 2009 with the introduction of Sunday sailings. An analysis of booking availability in 2009 would not therefore provide a representative picture of the position going forward into 2010 as it would not take into account the additional capacity created by the Sunday sailings particularly as these would have bedded in by 2010.
- 2010 - MV Clansman was out of operation for around six weeks from June 17 and broke down again when back in service. The result was a revised timetable and the

use of smaller capacity vessels instead of MV Clansman. This will overstate the usual capacity constraints on the route during July, while the August data will have been affected by the vessel breaking down a second time.

## Findings

### Ullapool-Stornoway (2011)

- Between April 19th and August 31st 44% of all sailings were fully booked.
- Over 60% of all sailings in July and August were fully booked.
- 2010 carryings data show that only 56 sailings on the route actually sailed “full”-that is, with over 90% of deckspace utilised. If there was a similar number in 2011, then a large amount of sailings shown as fully booked in fact had car spaces available.
- Two thirds of sailings became fully booked less than one week before the day of departure.
- Sailings between Friday and Monday were the busiest. Commercial traffic will have contributed to capacity constraints on the Friday and Monday.

### Uig-Tarbert (2009 and 2010)

- In 2010, 32% of the sailings between July 5th and August 31st were fully booked. Some 36% of all sailings in July were fully booked.
- The proportion of sailings that were fully booked appears to have increased between 2009 and 2010.
- Fully booked sailings were heavily concentrated in Saturdays.
- It is very unlikely that commercial traffic will have contributed to the capacity constraints on this route.

### Uig-Lochmaddy (2009 and 2010)

- In 2010, 49% of sailings between July 5th and August 31st were fully booked. Some 62% of all sailings in July were fully booked.
- The proportion of sailings that were fully booked appears to have increased significantly between 2009 and 2010.
- The number of fully booked sailings was significant on Thursdays, as well as Fridays and Saturdays.
- Commercial traffic will have contributed to capacity constraints, particularly on sailings like the 0730 ex Lochmaddy.

### Oban-Lochboisdale (2009)

- Between May 29th and August 31st 2009, 30% of all sailings were fully booked. Around half of all July sailings were fully booked.
- Two thirds of all fully booked sailings were on either Friday or Saturday.
- It is very unlikely that commercial traffic will have contributed to the capacity constraints on this route.

### Oban-Castlebay (2009)

- Between May 29th and August 31st 2009 16% of all sailings were fully booked. The figure for July was 27%.
- Around three quarters of all fully booked sailings were on either Thursday or Friday.
- 80% of fully booked sailings were ones where a call at one or more other port was included.

- Commercial traffic may contribute to capacity constraints if it is concentrated on particular sailings.

## Next Steps

Reference recommend that the study findings should be discussed with CalMac. A copy of the report has been forwarded to Caledonian MacBrayne with a request that a meeting be held between CalMac management and officers of HITRANS. The aim of this will be to help understand:

- Why the online system shows many sailings as fully booked when-at least on Ullapool-Stornoway-very few actually sail with more than 90% of the deckspace utilised.
- Management of the block booking system for commercial vehicles, and how far this contributes to “full” sailings which actually have car spaces available.
- The amount of car capacity made available through the online booking system and how this is determined.
- How far capacity constraints are due to commercial traffic.

To help address capacity constraints Reference have identified the following options whose feasibility should be considered within summer timetable planning:

- *Ullapool to Stornoway* - three return sailings on peak Saturdays, and an additional Sunday rotation.
- *Uig to Tarbert* - Sunday sailings.
- *Oban to Castlebay* - some earlier arrivals at Oban to spread traffic more evenly between sailings.
- The feasibility of introducing variable pricing for car traffic should also be considered.
- HITRANS should consider monitoring online bookings, on a daily basis, during summer 2012.

These options will require further investigation to better understand their feasibility. They will require the agreement of the communities involved, operator and local authorities before any measures are promoted for implementation.

## Recommendation

1. Members are asked to note the report.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This project will support RTS objectives for improving passenger information.
Policy	√	This project will support HITRANS transport information policy objectives.
Financial	√	This project can be accommodated within the Research and Development programme budget. It is also expected that this project will receive partner funding from local authorities.
Equality	-	

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**Date:** 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012