

## Report to Partnership Meeting 6 February 2015

### RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

#### Online Ferry Booking Availability Study

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

To introduce the executive summary of the 2014 Online Ferry Booking Availability Study and to seek approval for the undertaking of similar study in 2015.

##### **Background**

In 2011 and 2012 the Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association (OHTIA) carried out research on the availability to book car spaces on the CalMac website on selected routes to and from the Western Isles.

In 2013 and 2014 similar research was carried out, and included routes to Coll / Tiree and Islay. This research was financially supported by HITRANS, CnES and Argyll and Bute Council.

A copy of the full 2014 report is included for information with the Board papers and is also available on the HITRANS website at the following link,  
[http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Ferry\\_Online\\_Booking\\_Availability\\_Review\\_-\\_Summer\\_2014.pdf](http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Ferry_Online_Booking_Availability_Review_-_Summer_2014.pdf).

#### **Online Ferry Availability Study - Executive Summary 2014**

##### **1.1 Summary**

- 1.1.1 A review of ferry availability across 8 Hebridean islands between April and October 2014 found 1286 out of 3417 sailings were **Unavailable To Book Online (UTBO) for car reservations by the day of sailing or in many cases up to several weeks in advance**. This unavailability has an economic impact on island business particularly the tourism sector that is heavily reliant on high occupancy in the summer months.

##### **1.2 Introduction**

- 1.2.1 Following the welcome introduction of RET and the subsequent rise in demand on the CalMac network, it was noted that more and more sailings were unavailable to book online due to the increase in traffic. A project was setup in 2011 to monitor the availability of sailings on the CalMac online booking system for the Stornoway to Ullapool route.

- 1.2.2 The project reported high levels of unavailable sailings so it was continued and expanded in the following years to assess and review availability on other islands.
- 1.2.3 Sailings serving the islands of Lewis, Harris, North Uist, South Uist, Barra, Coll, Tiree & Islay were monitored during the months of April through to October 2014. This was achieved by checking the relevant online booking system every day to ascertain if sailings in the coming days and months were available or not.
- 1.2.3 The results have since been shared with Calmac and a dialogue has begun to help understand the demand/capacity issues on the network.

### 1.3 Results

Table 1.3.1 Summary of Ferry Availability 2014

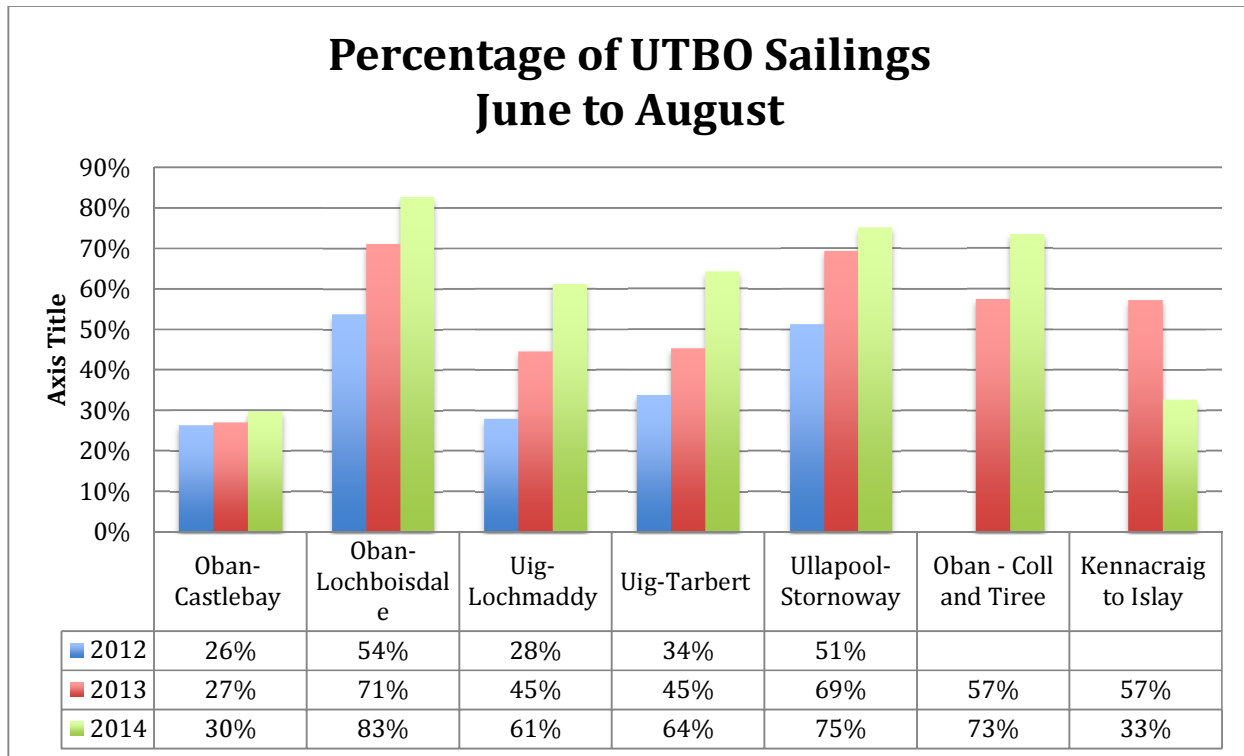
Island	Lewis	Harris	N Uist	S Uist	Barra	Coll/Tiree	Islay	Overall
No of Sailings	853	693	361	123	245	214	928	3417
Unavailable	400	236	124	65	61	100	300	1286
% UTBO	47%	34%	34%	53%	25%	47%	32%	38%

- 1.3.2 The results show that all the routes studied suffer from significant levels of sailings becoming unavailable to book online. The issue is not confined to the routes with smaller vessels or lower frequencies as evidenced by the very high numbers of UTBO on the route served by the largest vessel in the fleet, the MV Isle of Lewis.
- 1.3.3 Numbers of UTBO sailings have broken the 400 mark for the Stornoway to Ullapool route with significant impact during shoulder months as well as the peak summer season.
- 1.3.4 Weekends are still the most likely to suffer a high percentage of UTBO sailings. April saw over 60% of all sailing to Lewis UTBO.
- 1.3.5 The largest increases in UTBO sailings have been recorded outside of the July/August break. June in particular has seen very high UTBO numbers right across the islands.
- 1.3.6 Sailings out of Tarbert on Saturday were UTBO for up to 4 months before departure and overall UTBO sailings have doubled to 236 since 2012.
- 1.3.7 North Uist has seen the largest rise in UTBO sailings from 2012. They have risen 258% from 48 to 124 sailings.
- 1.3.8 Less frequent services saw similar constraints with South Uist reaching nearly 100% UTBO sailings during July & August. Year on year South Uist UTBO sailings has increased by 59%.

1.3.9 Coll & Tiree have seen the availability issue extend into June but still the peak summer weeks are affected the most, with only 1 sailing not being UTBO by sailing date during July.

1.3.10 Barra has increased from 47 to 61 UTBO sailings.

1.3.11 A significant positive development has been seen in Islay where additional capacity helped achieve a reduction in UTBO sailings. This highlights the type of intervention that can help alleviate the pressure on a route with high UTBO levels.



**Proposal for 2015 Study**

The work undertaken by the OHTIA on behalf of HITRANS, CnES and A&BC in 2014 and in previous years has helped to highlight the significant issue of the lack of online booking availability for vehicles on several routes operated by CalMac and also identified a concerning trend that the number and the percentage of affected sailings on has increased year on year on the majority of services with the exception being the Kennacraig to Islay route where additional capacity has helped achieve a reduction in 2015.

The ongoing work which CalMac is undertaking to overhaul its website and also recent work by Transport Scotland and CalMac into analysing demand and capacity across its network is welcomed and will help to inform strategic decision making in the future. However, HITRANS and its member local authorities recognise the important role this research has had in highlighting these capacity issues and it is proposed that work of a similar scope is undertaken during 2015.

**Recommendation**

Members are invited to support a proposal to fund a study of a similar scale in 2015 to that undertaken in 2014 and request that officers work with the Comhairle, Argyll and Bute Council and the OHTIA to develop a proposal for 2015.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>RTS delivery</b>	√	This work supports several strategic objectives of the RTS.
<b>Policy</b>	√	This work supports the development of the RTS Delivery Plan
<b>Financial</b>	-	Funding is identified in the 2014/15 Business Plan.
<b>Equality</b>	-	Improvement of public transport services helps reduce social exclusion by improving access to employment and services for those living in our most remote areas.

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**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015