

Item:
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Report to Partnership Meeting 5 February 2016

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Online Ferry Availability Report April – October 2016

Purpose of Report

To introduce the draft Online Ferry Availability Report (April – October 2015) and invite Members to consider a proposal to continue the work undertaken in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Argyll & Bute Council and the Outer Hebrides Tourism Industry Association in 2016.

Background

Since 2011, Outer Hebrides Tourism (OHT) has carried out research on the availability to book car spaces on the CalMac website on selected routes to and from the Western Isles.

Between 2013 and 2015 this research has been financially supported by HITRANS and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll & Bute Council. Each year the work has been extended to include additional routes with the 2015 work including the services between Oban and Craignure and the Sounds of Harris and Barra for the first time. In total, the 2015 study gathered data on 10 routes and 20 separate services.

A copy of the full 2015 report will be circulated for information and is also available on the HITRANS website at the following link,

http://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Ferry_Online_Booking_Availability_Review_-_Summer_2015.pdf.

The work undertaken by the OHT (on behalf of HITRANS, CnES and A&BC) in 2015 and previous years has helped to highlight significant issues relating to the lack of online booking availability for vehicles on several routes operated by CalMac during the peak summer months. It has helped inform key stakeholders of both the current capacity constraints and likely future demands on the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services (CHFS) network. This work is now complimented by Transport Scotland's Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan.

In October 2013 Transport Scotland sponsored a project which had the objective of advising Transport Scotland (TS), Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) and CalMac Ferries Limited (CFL) what a programme of major vessel retentions, cascades, acquisitions and disposals may look like in order that the delivery of the Scottish Ferry Services: Ferries Plan (2013-2022), as it relates to the CHFS Contract, could be fulfilled in the timescales indicated by the Scottish Government. An annual report is now published which considers the latest data and modelling of future demand on the network to help inform decisions on vessel deployment and the vessel replacement strategy for the network.

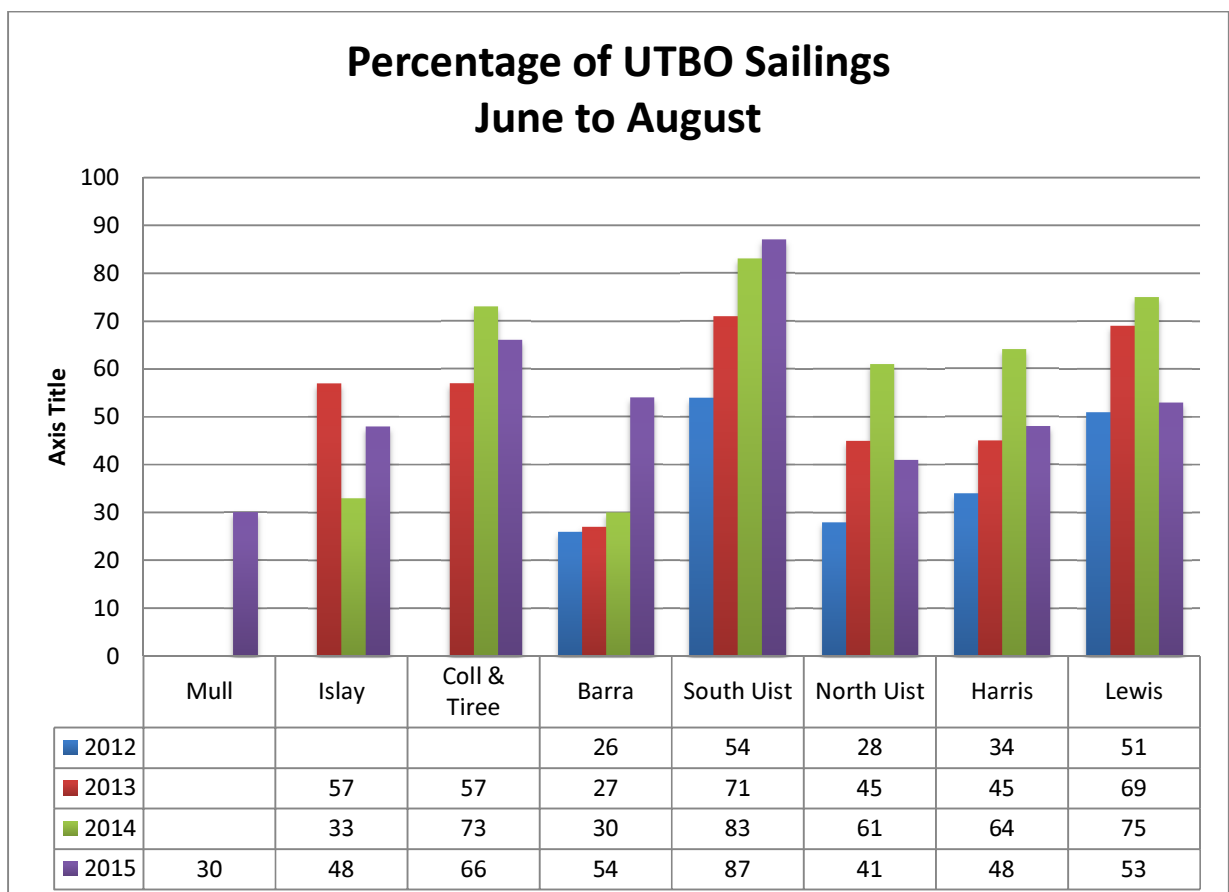
This work is all set in the context of the Scottish Governments welcome roll out of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) scheme across those routes on the Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services Contract which were not previously entitled to the discount. The roll out was introduced at the start of the winter 2015/16 timetable so its full impact will only be understood this summer. The wider impacts of RET have only been considered in a limited context to date and it is proposed that HITRANS engage with Transport Scotland, CMAL and operator of the CHFS contract to undertake a more comprehensive review of RET on different islands infrastructure and services.

April – October 2015 Summary

As the full report indicates, all the routes studied suffer from significant levels of sailings becoming unavailable to book online with a minimum of 30% of sailings on each route where data was gathered becoming Unavailable to Book Online (UTBO) by the day of sailing.

Although numbers of UTBO sailings have reduced significantly for the Stornoway/Ullapool route after the introduction of the Loch Seaforth and extra weekend sailings from the Isle of Lewis, there were still 261 UTBO sailings recorded.

An overall decrease in capacity constraints for northern Outer Hebridean routes was noted including Lewis, Harris & North Uist. At the same time an increase in capacity constraints was observed on the southern routes, particularly the Isle of Barra.

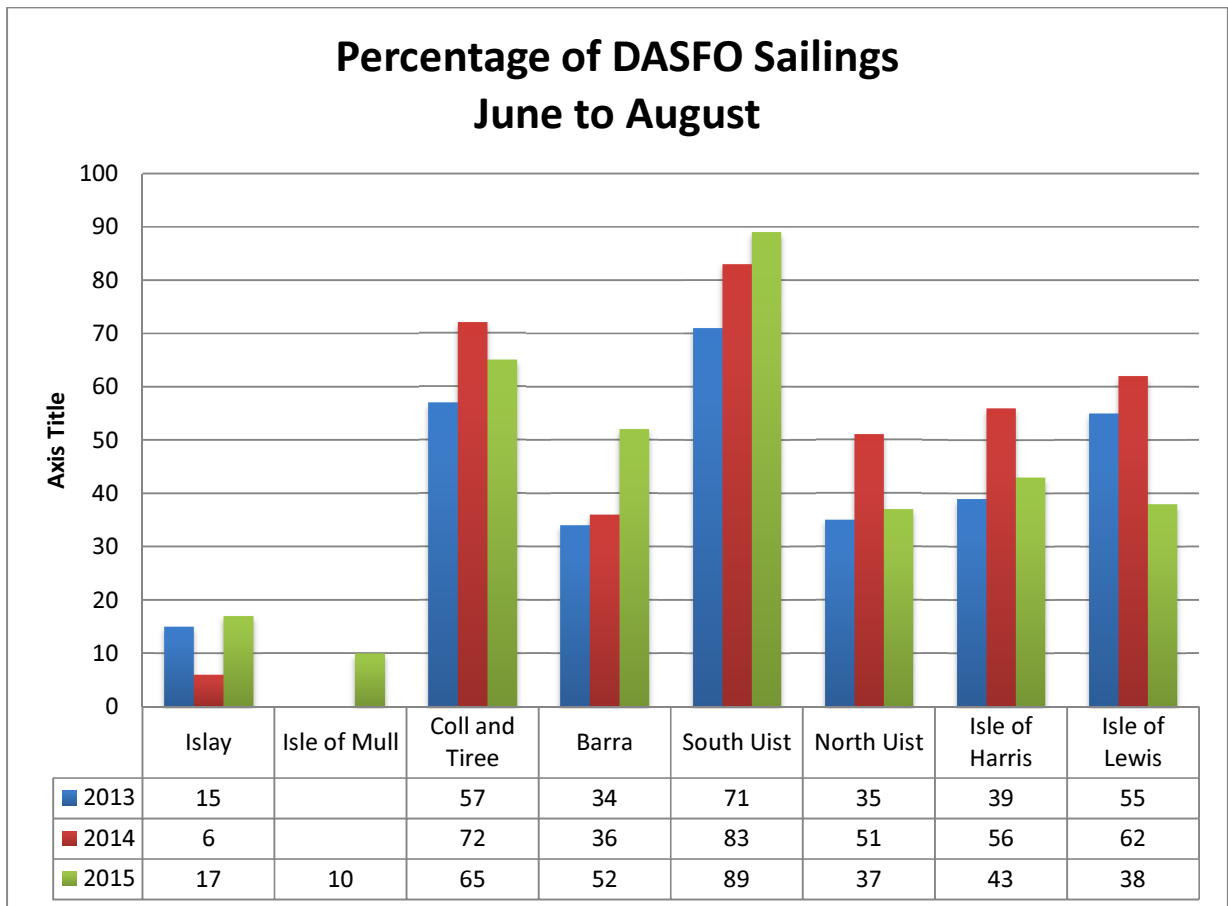


Islay results highlight the severe capacity problems created by the impact that technical issues posed to services at the start of the season. Figures for the peak months of July and August also showed a significant increase in demand with levels of UTBO returning to those seen in 2013, prior to the additional sailings that were added for the 2014 season.

Services to South Uist, Coll & Tiree again experienced close to 100% of all sailings being full online prior to departure during peak season.

Levels of sailings being UTBO on the routes to the Isle of Mull and between the Sounds of Barra & Harris which were monitored for the first time were low. It is expected that the introduction of RET will increase demand significantly and the 2015 figures will provide a good baseline to measure this impact in 2016.

A more significant reduction can be noted in the NDSFO (number of days sailings full online prior to departure) measure which saw a welcome reduction in the number of days across the network from 3364 in 2014 to 1140 in 2015.



Proposal for 2016 Study

The reporting of online ferry availability on the CHFS network has been invaluable in identifying a number of demand/capacity issues on the network and also the inadequacies of the existing online booking system. This coupled with the Scottish Governments welcome roll out of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) scheme across all routes on the CHFS Contract highlights a need to extend the work into 2016 so that its impacts can be properly understood.

It is proposed that HITRANS and its partner Local authorities enter into dialogue with OHT on both the period of study and the routes to be covered. It is proposed that the Armadale to Mallaig route be added given recent concerns from the local community over available capacity following the introduction of RET and changes to vessel deployment on the route this summer.

Recommendation

Members are invited to support;

1. A proposal to fund a study of a similar scope and scale for 2016 in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll and Bute Council.
2. HITRANS officers to engage with Transport Scotland, CMAL and operator of the CHFS contract to undertake a more comprehensive review of RET on different islands infrastructure and services.

Risk	Impact	Comment
RTS delivery	√	This work supports several strategic objectives of the RTS.
Policy	√	This work supports the development of the RTS Delivery Plan
Financial	-	Funding of £10,000 to cover HITRANS contribution was allocated in the 2015/16 Business Plan. A further report will be submitted to the next HITRANS Partnership meeting should any substantial increase on this be required for 2016/17.
Equality	-	Improvement of public transport services helps reduce social exclusion by improving access to employment and services for those living in our most remote areas.

Report by: Neil MacRae
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 26th January 2016