

**Argyll, Lochaber, Skye, and Small Isles Ferry Stakeholder Group**  
**(Oban, Colonsay, Mull, Iona, Lismore, Kerrera, South Uist, Barra, Skye, Small Isles, Raasay, Coll & Tiree)**

Minute of Meeting held virtually through Microsoft Teams, on Monday 11 December 2023 at 2.00pm.

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| IN ATTENDANCE | <p><b>ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL</b><br/>Mr Scott Reid</p> <p><b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</b><br/>Cllr. Iain A MacNeil</p> <p><b>THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL</b><br/>Cllr Calum Munro<br/>Cllr Drew Millar<br/>Cllr Sarah Fanet<br/>David Summers</p> <p><b>TRANSPORT SCOTLAND</b><br/>Mr Ewan Swaffield<br/>Mr Liam Seaton<br/>Mr Mark Hoskins<br/>Ms Fiona Lodge<br/>Ms Emma Neary</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LTD (CALMAC)</b><br/>Mr Finlay Macrae<br/>Ms Fiona Galbraith<br/>Ms Diane Burke<br/>Mrs Donna Lockhart</p> <p><b>FERRIES COMMUNITIES BOARD</b><br/>Mr Angus Campbell<br/>Ms Kirsty MacFarlane</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD. (CMAL)</b><br/>Ms Blair Moglia<br/>Mr Chris Fisher</p> <p><b>HITRANS</b><br/>Mr Neil MacRae<br/>Mr Ranald Robertson</p> <p><b>HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE)</b><br/>Mr Ian Philip<br/>Mr Nicky Sobey</p> <p><b>MALLAIG HARBOUR</b><br/>Ms Jacqueline McDonell</p> <p><b>SLEAT TRANSPORT FORUM</b><br/>Mr Rob Ware</p> <p><b>SMALL ISLES COMMUNITY COUNCIL</b></p> |
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|           | <p>Ms Camille Dressler</p> <p><b>MULL AND IONA FERRY COMMITTEE</b><br/>Mr Finlay MacDonald</p> <p><b>TIREE COMMUNITY COUNCIL</b><br/>Mr John Holliday</p> <p><b>COLONSAY FERRY COMMITTEE</b><br/>Mr David Hobhouse</p> <p><b>NATIONAL FARMERS UNION (NFU Scotland)</b><br/>Al Walker</p> <p><b>BUSINESS</b><br/>Jane MacLeod</p> <p><b>CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT</b><br/>Mr Ker Corbett (Scottish Citylink)</p> |
| APOLOGIES | <p>Cllr Kate Willis (Highland Council); Mr Joe Reade (Mull and Iona Ferry Committee); Mr Brian Gordon (Transport Scotland); Cllr Cllr Jim Lynch (Argyll and Bute Council); Cllr Iain MacLeod (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar); Kevin Hobbs (CMAL); Lauren Worrell (NFU Scotland); Brian Fulton (CMAL); Des Bradley (ScotRail); Billy Neilson (Crofting Commission); Cllr Andrew Kain (Argyll &amp; Bute Council)</p>            |

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| 1 | Minute of Meeting held on 19 June 2023   | The Minute of Meeting of 19 June 2023 was <b>approved</b> .   |
| 2 | Matters Arising – Action Tracker   | <p>With reference to item 2 of the Minute of Meeting of 19 June 2023, HITRANS submitted the Action Tracker detailing updates on the action points for all the Ferry Stakeholder Groups.</p> <p>Issues were raised relating to the ability to contact CFL by phone for agricultural bookings and in respect to Iona on request sailings.</p> <p><b>It was agreed to note the updated Action Tracker.</b></p>   |
| 3 | Caledonian MacBrayne Operational, Commercial and Performance Update covering (CFL) | <p>With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023, CalMac, submitted an operational report which addressed the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marketing</li> <li>2. Timetable Integration and Consultation Update</li> <li>3. Ar Turas Update</li> <li>4. Route updates</li> </ol> <p><b>Marketing</b></p> <p>The update on the marketing and commercial side of the business stated that CalMac were continuing their Digital Refresh project and were working through areas of integration with the new Ar-Turas e-booking system, development of content, new functionality, and working through Digital Scotland assessments to create a much-improved online experience for all their customers. CalMac continue their repositioning of the CalMac brand, have taken delivery of the new brand guidelines and have sign off from the Court of Lord Lyon to use the proposed changes. MV Loch Frisa is the first vessel to bear the new CalMac lettering font on her hull.</p> |

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|  | <p>The report noted that CalMac are currently running a recruitment campaign to fill over five hundred seasonal vacancies, targeting jobseekers in local communities on the West Coast of Scotland and on the islands CalMac serves.</p> <p><b>Timetable Integration and Consultation Update</b></p> <p>Work continues on finalising a launch date for the Summer 2024 timetable, but CalMac are waiting on a fare's decision from Transport Scotland before this can be published. It is hoped that an update will be available before the end of the year.</p> <p>Consultation on the Winter 2024/25 timetable will begin shortly and CalMac are urging all ferry committees and community councils to seek feedback from their local communities in anticipation of this.</p> <p><b>Ar Turas Reservations System Project Update</b></p> <p>Following the implementation of the new booking and ticketing system earlier in the year, CalMac experienced a challenging period following its release. Since that time, CalMac have worked in conjunction with the supplier, eDea, to prioritise the issues and develop a plan to resolve these. The Report detailed the various stages of a "release plan" which sought to resolve issues in various stages and also included details of ongoing improvements being made to the system.</p> <p>Ranald Robertson of HITRANS noted that CalMac have agreed to share details of the outstanding issues in relation to the Ar Turas booking system in an easier to read format in week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> December.</p> <p>The report also provided members with a current update on each of the Argyll, Lochaber, Skye and Small Isles Ferry Stakeholder Group routes.</p> <p>Finlay Macrae of CalMac stated that the performance figures for the last period were unavailable but once the figures were available, he would forward them onto HITRANS for onward submission to the rest of the group.</p> <p>Discussions were held about current issues affecting different ports and ferry services around the area namely:</p> <p>Communication around deployment and operation of MV Isle of Arran on Craignure services where people locally felt the vessel could have served Craignure during recent weeks. The Ferry Committee understand how this was not possible but it would be good to ensure this is more widely understood.</p> <p>Al Walker highlighted that their members were frustrated with online booking system and challenge to get support through the call centre. Cal Mac they were aware of issues with software upgrade scheduled for January 2024 and that resourcing issues were being addressed.</p> <p>The Mull and Iona Ferry Committee welcome the recent hybrid timetable rather than MV Loch Frisa only but the existence of additional sailings could be better communicated. It has proved impossible to increase public transport connectivity with additional sailings and the bus operator has operated on the basis of a MV Loch Frisa only service meaning no connections are being achieved.</p> <p><b>Action – CalMac will revisit the previous Action Tracker Commitment that the Timetable Integration Manager would meet twice per annum with HITRANS and the Local Authorities to look at optimising integration between ferry and other modes.</b></p> <p>Recent issues experienced by passengers seeking to book as a foot passenger on the Colonsay service. David Hobhouse agreed to share details on this issue with Donna Lockhart.</p> <p>Issues with booking for Blue Badge Holder Car Ticket in conjunction with the Concessionary Passenger Fare experienced by Colonsay resident.</p> |
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|  |  | <p>Concerns about readability of the Small Isles Timetable on the website which can be difficult to follow for non residents who are unfamiliar with this.</p> <p><b>Action – Calmac to review the way Timetables are displayed for Small Isles services and discuss with community.</b></p> <p>Concerns that the Ar Turas system seems to be cumbersome for regular users and it appears to have gone backwards for many users despite the system now being live for nearly 7 months. Coll residents have seen an issue that a previous practice that allowed passengers to travel on the first call in Coll on the off chance they will manage to travel from Tiree – Coll – Oban with the charge being treated as Coll – Oban only but now the Coll – Tiree leg needs to be paid.</p> <p><b>Action - Finlay MacRae agreed to check if Coll residents could book Coll – Oban ticket rather than Coll Tiree leg as well could be applied on new ticketing system as per practice prior to its introduction.</b></p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Macrae, Ms Lockhart, Ms Galbraith, and Ms Burke for the update, and it was agreed to note the report.</b></p> |
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| 4 | Transport Scotland Updates | <p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 19 June 2023, Transport Scotland (TS) submitted a report updating members on the following Initiatives:</p> <p><b>Island Connectivity Plan:</b><br/>The Report gave details of two consultations that would shortly be published:</p> <p>a) <b>Draft Scottish Government’s Strategic Approach to Islands Transport Connectivity</b> – over the past year TS have completed a review of previous public consultations and stakeholder engagement, including feedback received from the recent NZET committee’s report, and the delivery of the Ferries Plan and Strategic Approach paper have reflected the key issues/themes that have emerged from the reviews.</p> <p>It was noted that eleven draft themes emerged from the reviews and the Strategic Approach paper set out the vision for ferry services underpinned by four priorities, each of which had three associated outcomes addressing the key issues raised.</p> <p>b) <b>Long Term Plan for Vessels and Ports (LTPVP)</b> – the initial draft of the LTPVP was published late last year, comments were then invited from key stakeholders and this informed additional engagement undertaken over the summer period. The Plan for consultation will be published shortly.</p> <p>As well as focusing on a Community Needs Assessment, TS are also looking at their fares policy, onward and connecting travel (OCT), a low carbon plan, and stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Kirsty MacFarlane asked for a timetable of community engagement events on Community Needs Assessments to be published so island communities can be prepared to meet on this important issue.</p> <p><b>Fair Fares Review:</b> TS are progressing the Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares. The review is considering both the cost and availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available to ensure the public transport system is more accessible, available, and affordable for all, with the costs of transport more fairly shared across government, business, and society.</p> <p>The Fair Fares Review will recommend a package of measures which can be considered for implementation from 2024-25 onwards. Decisions on 2024/25 fares will be taken as soon as possible to allow bookings to be opened. It is hoped that recommendations will be made by the end of 2023.</p> <p>TS are also looking at the free inter-island travel within the Western Isles and on internal ferries in Orkney and Shetland for the U22 local residents together with a voucher scheme for travelling to the mainland.</p> <p>One of the recommendations that is likely to come from the Fair Fares Review will be the need to have a Freight Fares Review and the need to consult on this, work will then begin on the consultation which is expected to take place in early 2024. It was discussed that it would be important to ensure that all stakeholders are part of the consultation on this. Ewen Swaffield welcomed early engagement with others in the group to ensure that key stakeholders were part of the consultation process.</p> <p>Ranald Robertson noted that services such as Raasay to Sconser share more in common with the Orkney Ferries network in terms of utility travel and suggested these should be considered for the extension of unlimited free Under 22 travel.</p> <p><b>Action – Ewan Swaffield agreed to include the feedback on short crossings such as to Raasay and Gigha in the consideration of free Under 22 travel.</b></p> |
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|   |        | <p><b>Operational Matters</b></p> <p>MV Alfred – Extension of Charter</p> <p>An agreement has been reached with Pentland Ferries to extend the charter of MV Alfred for a further six months until the end of July 2024. This will help maintain resilience on the CHFS network during the winter and into the summer months.</p> <p>David Hobhouse asked if there was any update on whether the Alfred would be deployed to Arran in January and free MV Isle of Arran or MV Hebridean Isles to redeploy to Islay and address the lack of a Monday service to Colonsay on each Monday in January.</p> <p><b>Action – Finlay MacRae confirmed that a decision has not been made yet on the deployment of MV Alfred in January but this will be shared with the Membership via the Secretariat once deployment plans are finalised.</b></p> <p><b>Route Prioritisation Matrix</b></p> <p>As requested by Ministers’ following disruption to services earlier this year, CalMac have reviewed their Route Prioritisation Matrix for the major vessel fleet. This has been done with support from the Ferry Community Board, who have had input throughout including the format of the consultation which ran from 28 August to 24 September.</p> <p>Full details of the prioritisation approach were provided in the Report.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Swaffield for the update.</b></p>  |
| 5 | CHFS 3 | <p>On 16 November 2023, the Transport Minister provided a statement to Parliament regarding the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract. The current contract expires on 30 September 2024 and as part of a range of measures designed to improve the ferry services, an exploration of a direct award via a Teckal exemption in accordance with the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015 to CalMac Ferries Ltd is the Scottish Ministers’ preferred direction for the new contract.</p> <p>Information on the next steps in this process until the final decision on the contract is made was included and also information on the public consultation which launches in December 2023. Transport Scotland (TS) have also launched a dedicated webpage to provide regular updates.</p> <p>Mark Hoskins of Transport Scotland summarised the Report. TS start a 12-week public consultation on week commencing 18 December 2023. During that time, they are keen to get out to as many islands as possible as part of an engagement exercise. Updates from the consultation and engagement events will be uploaded to the webpage.</p> <p>Rob Ware noted that only a week’s notice was given to those communities involved in the initial phase of events and this was not long enough to communicate to the wider community.</p> <p>Finlay Macdonald noted that connection times at Oban for Mull is proving challenging and it would be good to ensure that CHFS 3 ensures connectivity between rail / bus / coach and ferry is improved and passengers are given every opportunity to connect. There should be no early departure of vessels and where passengers are able to make a connection they should be helped with this.</p> <p>Neil MacRae noted that the contract can facilitate ways of focussing on customer experience more than on performance against operations and timetable robustness which while important can often mean that the passenger is disadvantaged by a leg of their journey adhering to timetable and resulting in missed connections. Kirsty MacFarlane noted that in the past Calmac would invite passengers with onward public transport connections to make themselves known at the Purser’s office which seems not to be the case to the same extent when a service has fallen behind schedule.</p> |

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|   |  | <p><b>Action – Fiona Galbraith / Donna Lockhart will communicate the issue raised by Kirsty MacFarlane with the Lochboisdale, Castlebay, Coll and Tiree vessels</b></p> <p><b>Members thanked Mr Hoskins for his update.</b></p>  |
| 6 | CMAL Update                            | <p>With reference to item 4 of the Minute of Meeting of 19 June 2023 Blair Moglia of CMAL submitted a report updating members regarding the overall activities and projects underway for both Vessels and Port Infrastructure. The following items were highlighted:</p> <p><b>Vessels:</b> All four ferries being built in Cemre; Turkey are on track and the delivery dates were provided in the Report. All four vessels would be broadly identical and would provide resilience to the fleet.</p> <p>The Small Vessel Replacement Programme (SVRP) is progressing well and the seven vessels in phase 1 will be ready to go to procurement in Q1 2024. They will be fully electric vehicles with a back-up diesel generator which would only be used should there be an overnight power outage.</p> <p>A statement of technical requirements is being developed for the replacement of MV Carvorra as she is proving to be too small to meet demand on the crossing to Kerrera.</p> <p><b>Port Infrastructure:</b> CMAL continue to drive de-carbonisation and recently participated on a panel at the Cross-Party Group for Sustainability. CMAL continue to engage with Trust Ports and the Council Owned Port Facilities as required. The naming competition for the two Islay vessels is closed and votes are now being taken for the two most popular names – MV Isle of Islay and MV Loch Indaal, the naming competition for the two Little Minch vessels has just opened.</p> <p>Phase 2 of the traffic management works at Armadale (motorhome parking) has been agreed with stakeholders pending agreement from CalMac. Works will proceed in early 2024, with site clearance undertaken during December 2023.</p> <p>An Award Letter has been provided to George Leslie Ltd in relation to the port enabling works at Kennacraig, Port Askaig and Colonsay. A pre-construction public engagement session was held at Tarbert (Loch Fyne) Village Hall ahead of works at Kennacraig with sessions planned on Islay and Jura in January 2024 and Colonsay in February 2024.</p> <p>Ground investigation work was completed onsite in Port Ellen w/e 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023, allowing ferry service operations to recommence on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023 as planned. Environmental surveys are complete and appropriate applications have been submitted to the Marine Directorate. The Harbour Revision Order consent process has now commenced.</p> <p>Some minor repairs are required at Bullhole to secure the overnight berthing on the Fionnphort to Iona route. The tender deadline is 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 with works to be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.</p> <p>The pier repairs at Colonsay have recently progressed well following considerable delays over the past 2 years. Only 2 work activities remain prior to demobilisation, due to be completed by December 2023. This does not affect the ferry service as the work is on the north side of the pier.</p> <p>CMAL continue to engage with a variety of Community Groups and would welcome input from the Ferry Stakeholder Groups in where they should focus their attention.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Ms Moglia for the update.</b></p> |
| 7 | Other Ports and Infrastructure Updates | <p>With reference to item 8 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023, verbal updates were provided as follows:</p>  |

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|   |                          | <p><b>Mallaig Port Authority</b></p> <p>Jacqueline McDonell reported that the main issue being looked at by the Harbour Authority is the opportunity to develop an additional overnight berth within the inner harbour to accommodate those vessels service South Uist, Skye and the Small Isles. This work is being progressed in partnership with CMAL and recognises that a short term fix is needed as the long term ambition set out in the Mallaig Harbour Masterplan is unlikely to secure funding in the near term.</p> <p><b>Argyll and Bute Council</b></p> <p>Scott Reid provided the update verbally on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council covering the following updates noting that he will share this information as a separate note following the meeting:</p> <p>Oban Harbour Revision Order has been published and statutory consultees have been consulted. The detail is available on the Argyll and Bute Council and there is an email address included for people to respond to the consultation.</p> <p>Council officers met with MIFC regarding Craignure Terminal. Ground Investigation works contract has been awarded. The initial plan was to begin in August but this has been delayed as full licensing is required before Ground Investigations can commence meaning this will be delayed to Spring 2024.</p> <p>A webpage is being developed to keep people up to date on the Craignure Development.</p> <p>Craignure PAS is becoming increasingly difficult maintain due to age and availability of parts. A design and build contract will be looked for to replace this. The intention will be that the new PAS will be designed to fit with the vessels that will be the main vessels on the route in the medium to long term.</p> <p>Iona infrastructure improvements to include a breakwater, slipway improvements and toilet block. This is expected to be a 12 month construction once it starts.</p> <p>Fionnphort Environment and Socio Economic Impact Assessments are progressing. When Marine Scotland approve the EIA the Council will move forward with the licensing process. It is estimated that this project will be about 12 months behind the Iona breakwater project.</p> <p><b>Action - Argyll and Bute Council update to be shared with members</b></p> <p><b>Highland Council</b></p> <p>Ranald Robertson updated on the recent announcement in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement of the reallocation of £20 Million of funds within the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal to fund essential landside infrastructure improvements for the Corran Ferry. This will allow a Loch Class type vessel to serve the route and provides an important step towards securing the route. The Council continues to work closely with CMAL on the SVRP.</p> <p><b>Members thanked all representatives for their update.</b></p> |
| 8 | Communities Board Update | <p>Mrs Kirsty MacFarlane from the Ferries Communities Board updated members on the activities of the Board since the last meeting. The Board have had two main Board meetings in the past six months, the first one in Uist in September and one in Clyde on 1 December. The Board have also met with Young Islanders Network, this was successful, and the Board were impressed at how well the youngsters were able to articulate themselves on their needs and requirements from the ferry network.</p> <p>The Board have also met with the new Transport Minister on two occasions. The new CHFS3 contract is the Board's main focus and they have engaged with officials on this over</p>  |



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|    |   | <p>the past few months and will continue to raise the main concerns that came from the recent Project Neptune Consultation.</p> <p>Over the next two weeks the Board have a meeting with the Board of DML and on Wednesday 20 December they will be in the Scottish Parliament to give evidence on the Citizens Petition campaigning for an island presence on the various ferry boards.</p> <p><b>Members thanked Mrs MacFarlane for her update.</b></p> |
| 10 | Confirm Pre-agreed Date of Next Meeting | <p>It was agreed that the next meeting of the Argyll, Lochaber, Skye and Small Isles Ferry Stakeholder Group would take place in Fort William (unless Members express a preference for MS Teams only) on Wednesday 5 June 2024, time to be agreed.</p>  |

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