



THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP

**HEBRIDES FERRY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**  
**(Barra, the Uists, Lewis and Harris)**

Minute of Meeting held virtually through Microsoft Teams, on Thursday 7 December 2023 at 10.00am.

IN ATTENDANCE	<p><b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</b> Cllr. Uisdean Robertson (Chair) Cllr. Iain A Macneil Cllr. Duncan MacInnes MBE Cllr Iain M Macleod Cllr Susan Thomson Cllr Grant Fulton Mr Calum Mackenzie Mrs Linda Cunningham Mrs Shona Hadwen (Clerk) Mrs Fiona Maciver</p> <p><b>TRANSPORT SCOTLAND</b> Mr Ewan Swaffield Ms Liz Jack Mr Mark Hoskins Ms Margaret McGunnigal Ms Ashley Jones Ms Athena Avratidis Ms Lyndsey Whiteside Ms Emma Neary</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MACBRAYNE LTD (CALMAC)</b> Mr Finlay Macrae Ms Fiona Galbraith Ms Diane Burke Ms Donna Lockhart</p> <p><b>FERRIES COMMUNITIES BOARD</b> Mr Angus Campbell Mr Murdo Maclean</p> <p><b>CALEDONIAN MARITIME ASSETS LTD. (CMAL)</b> Mr Brian Fulton Ms Morven Bridges Ms Blair Moglia Mr Chris Fisher</p> <p><b>HITRANS</b> Mr Neil Macrae Mr Ranald Robertson</p> <p><b>THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL</b> No attendees</p> <p><b>HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE (HIE)</b> No attendees</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES COMMERCE GROUP</b></p>
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	<p>Ms Gail Robertson</p> <p><b>CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT</b> Mr Ker Corbett (Scottish Citylink)</p> <p><b>OUTER HEBRIDES TOURISM</b> Mr Alan Graham</p> <p><b>ULLAPOOL HARBOUR TRUST</b> Mr Kevin Peach</p> <p><b>STORNOWAY PORT AUTHORITY</b> Mr Alex Macleod</p>
<b>APOLOGIES</b>	Cllr Calum Munro (Highland Council); Mr Andrew McIvor (Highland Council); Mr Brian Gordon (Transport Scotland); Cllr Callum Munro (Highland Council)

1	Minute of Meeting held on 10 January 2023	The Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023 was <b>approved</b> .
2	Matters Arising – Action Tracker	With reference to item 2 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023, HITRANS submitted the Action Tracker detailing updates on the action points for all the Ferry Stakeholder Groups. There were no matters arising.  <b>It was agreed to note the updated Action Tracker.</b>
3	Caledonian MacBrayne Operational, Commercial and Performance Update covering (CFL)	With reference to item 3 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023, CalMac, submitted an operational report which addressed the following:  <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> 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> <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> 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>

**Ar Turas Reservations System Project Update**

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.

The report also provided members with a current update on each of the Hebrides Ferry Group routes.

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.

Discussions were held about current issues affecting different ports and ferry services around the area namely:

Sound of Harris: the new part for the Loch Portain should be arriving within next two weeks, the Loch Bhrusda will be back to support the route until the Loch Portain is repaired.

Lochboisdale to Oban: website states all sailings are cancelled until at least Sunday 10 December stating weather conditions. Finlay confirmed this was due to weather conditions and nothing else. All sailings follow the weather forecast, and schedules are changed due to this. Safety first on all occasions.

Concerns from Uist and Barra members about islanders potentially being unable to get to the mainland to attend Hoolie in the Hydro due to the ferry cancellations. Fiona Galbraith informed members that they were currently working behind the scenes to try to get a sailing from Lochboisdale on Saturday so that islanders could attend, she would update the group before end of the meeting.

**Update: Fiona Galbraith confirmed that there would be a sailing on Saturday morning from Lochboisdale to Oban, leaving at 5.55am, arriving Oban at 11:40am.**

Finlay Macrae highlighted the issues with the previous booking system on CalMac ferries stating that it was end of life. There were many problems encountered particularly in the first few weeks post launch on 17 May 2023. The Report went into detail on the different fix release phases.

Ranald Robertson of HITRANS asked if it would be possible for CalMac to share details of the outstanding issues in relation to the Ar Turas booking system in an easier to read format. Diane Burke of CalMac stated that they were currently working on these details and would have a list of the outstanding issues to the group by Monday.

**Members thanked Mr Macrae, Ms Galbraith, and Ms Burke for the update, and it was agreed to note the report.**

4	Transport Scotland Updates	<p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023, Transport Scotland (TS) submitted a report updating members on the following Initiatives:</p> <p><b>Island Connectivity Plan:</b> 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><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 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>Angus Campbell from the Ferry Communities Board raised a concern that the focus should be on ensuring sustainable communities and giving communities what they needed in terms of transport links, rather than focussing on balancing the Transport Scotland budget.</p> <p>Ranald Robertson of HITRANS asked if the consultation would capture the cost of change to fares and details of the economic impact any changes to fares such as removal of RET for visitors or the introduction of free U22 travel scheme would have. Fares reviews and implementation of changes have an intended consequence, and it was important that this was also captured in the consultation not just the cost of the intervention in terms of the CHFS contract / Transport Scotland ferries budget.</p>
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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>Ranald Robertson raised a concern about the performance figures being reported in that they do not accurately reflect the reality of the customer experience. Improved Operational reporting that captures real performance against timetables in a similar way to the PPM in rail contract monitoring needs to be at the centre of the new CHFS contract, otherwise it will be more of the same.</p> <p>Concerns were also expressed about the terms of the new contract and that it needed to be different from that of CHFS 2, Transport Scotland acknowledged this.</p> <p><b>Operational Matters</b></p> <p><b>MV Alfred – Extension of Charter</b></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><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 Hoskins for his update.</b></p>
6	CMAL Update	<p>With reference to item 4 of the Minute of Meeting of 29 June 2023 Brian Fulton 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</p>

		<p>with a back-up diesel generator which would only be used should there be an overnight power outage.</p> <p><b>Port Infrastructure:</b> Tarbert Terminal Building was officially opened on 8 October 2023 by the Transport Minister and feedback on the whole project has been positive. SVRP Port Infrastructure is being prioritised in SSEN calendars due to the remote location of the ports. The Gasay terminal development public engagement took place on 12 September 2023 and work has progressed on the Outline Business Case and a final draft prepared.</p> <p>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>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 Mr Fulton for his 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> <p><b>Stornoway Port Authority</b> Mr Alex Macleod reported that Stornoway Port Authority (SPA) were currently having difficulties with their Passenger Access System (PAS). SPA was in discussions with CalMac and CMAL with a view to having the PAS repaired as soon as possible.</p> <p>The Deep-Water Terminal development is due to be completed by end of February 2024.</p> <p><b>Ullapool Harbour Trust</b> Mr Kevin Peach reported that following completion of the pier works at Ullapool, several upgrades have been completed: delineated walkways in the car park and additional lighting have also been provided. Works on the road system are now complete and this makes for improved traffic flow. Concerns have been raised about the roundabout at the end of the main street and the Harbour Trust are currently looking at improvements in this area.</p> <p><b>Comhairle nan Eilean Siar</b> Mr Calum Mackenzie updated members on the Lochmaddy Pier development and stated that this phase should be completed within the next two weeks. The outline business case for the new linkspan had been submitted and it was hoped to run an engagement session week commencing 22 January 2024 to coincide with the decision on the new linkspan.</p> <p>Mr Mackenzie stated that installation of the linkspan would mean disruption to ferry users; when this would happen and for how long was unknown. A dolphin was also needing to be replaced so this would add to the outage time.</p> <p>Small Vessel Replacements – the landing sites on both the Sound of Barra and Sound of Harris would need to be upgraded to be able to accommodate the new vessels and the Comhairle are keen to get early engagement with the residents on the new infrastructure required.</p> <p>In discussion it was mentioned that there are plans to build a sub-station on the pier to reduce noise, the electricity connection is on site, but it will not go live until the new vessel in place. Inevitably there would be disruption and noise to users of the Marina.</p> <p>The new road-markings at Lochmaddy Pier were causing concerns. Mr Mackenzie informed members that the Comhairle are monitoring the situation as it does take road users a while to get used to a new road layout.</p>

		<p><b>Highland Council</b></p> <p>A written report had been submitted on the day of the meeting, but the file was corrupt, and members of the group were unable to open it. Members were informed that the pier development at Uig was near completion and would be re-opened on Saturday 16 December 2023, only a few days later than originally planned but this would allow for the completion of critical works. All parties were working towards this deadline.</p> <p><b>Members thanks all representatives for their update.</b></p>
8	Communities Board Update	<p>Mr Angus Campbell 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 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 thanks Mr Campbell for his update.</b></p>
10	Confirm Pre-agreed Date of Next Meeting	<p>It was agreed that the next meeting of the Hebrides Ferry Stakeholder Group would take place in Stornoway on Tuesday 4 June 2024, time to be agreed.</p>