House of Commons

Scottish Affairs Committee

Fixed link connectivity in Scotland's islands

Second Report of Session 2026–27 HC 167

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Summary

Scotland's island communities are a unique part of Scotland and the UK's identity, and make a significant contribution the UK's economy, energy security and future growth ambitions. Despite this contribution, Scotland's islands face longstanding connectivity challenges, driven primarily by an ageing and increasingly unreliable ferry network. These connectivity challenges are exacerbating depopulation and demographic decline, which threatens the long-term sustainability of island life and culture.

This report examines the potential role of fixed links (bridges and tunnels) in improving connectivity for Scotland's islands and the role the UK Government could play in supporting these proposals, given that transport is devolved in Scotland. Drawing primarily on evidence relating to proposals in Shetland and the Western Isles—which have some of the most developed fixed link proposals in Scotland—and informed by case studies from Skye and the Faroe Islands, we find that fixed links can help strengthen local economies, improve access to services, and support population retention. However, they are also expensive, come with trade-offs, and can place additional pressure on wider infrastructure if not carefully managed.

We do not seek to endorse any specific fixed link proposals. Decisions on whether specific projects should proceed must be led by the island communities themselves. Rather, our focus has been on highlighting how fixed links can support UK strategic objectives, including delivering clean energy infrastructure, supporting space launch capability, strengthening national security, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of island communities and culture.

This report finds that the delivery of any potential fixed links need not be solely a devolved matter, and the UK Government should not regard it as such. The Government should actively engage with island communities, the Scottish Government and local authorities where proposals align with wider UK interests and give serious consideration to how it can support such projects. In doing so, it should ensure that its appraisal processes place appropriate weight on the wider social, cultural and strategic benefits of improved connectivity, as such projects are unlikely to be viable on the basis of economic return alone.

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Introduction

1. Transport connectivity is a critical challenge for Scotland's island communities. Reliance on an ageing and unreliable ferry fleet, combined with limited alternative public transport and high travel costs create persistent barriers, restricting access to essential services and entrenching inequality and isolation.[1] At the same time—or perhaps consequentially—depopulation is a stubborn challenge on Scotland's islands, with the decline of older populations and the rapid out-migration of younger, economically active families.[2] The Western Isles alone has seen a 5.5% population decline since 2011—the highest percentage decrease in the whole of Scotland[3]—and is set to decrease by a further 6% by 2028.[4]

2. Despite these challenges, Scotland's islands make a substantial contribution to the UK's economic and cultural life—a contribution which is expanding. The Islands Strategic Partnership—which brings together the councils of Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles—notes that they account for around 13% of the UK's oil and gas production, 50% of Scotland's aquaculture Gross Value Added[5] (GVA) and a third of Scotland's seafood GVA.[6] Together, the islands are central to the UK's energy transition, with ScotWind developments in these areas alone having the potential to generate enough renewable energy to power every home in Scotland three times over.[7] They also contribute significantly to Scotland and the UK's cultural identity, with their globally renowned traditions in textiles and knitwear, as well as Shetland's internationally recognised music scene.[8]

3. The UK Government has identified the Highlands and Islands as a key region for economic growth through its clean energy and space sectors.[9] However, there is evidence to suggest that growth in these sectors is already placing additional strain on, and is limited by, current transport infrastructure,

1 Scottish Human Rights Commission (CISFL0032) p 1
2 HC Deb, Wednesday 11 September 2024, col 324WH
3 HC Deb, Wednesday 11 September 2024, col 324WH; Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 1
4 HC Deb, Wednesday 11 September 2024, col 324WH
5 Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the economic value generated by a producer, industry, sector or region.
6 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 1
7 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 1
8 Q5
9 UK Government, The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, November 2025, p 108

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particularly ferry services.[10] Without investment to improve capacity and reliability, increased demand risks exacerbating connectivity challenges, constraining future growth and compounding the pressures faced by island communities in their daily lives.[11]

Our inquiry

4. Fixed links, such as bridges and tunnels, are increasingly being considered as a means of improving connectivity within some of Scotland's islands. For example, Shetland Islands Council has recently approved the Outline Business Case for four subsea tunnels,[12] while Transport Scotland has been exploring the feasibility of fixed links between parts of the Western Isles, and between Mull and mainland Scotland.[13]

5. We first became interested in the potential of fixed links during a visit to the Shetland Islands in 2025, where we heard directly from the council, businesses and residents about the opportunities fixed links could unlock.[14] While transport policy in Scotland is devolved, the national and cultural importance of our islands led us to launch this inquiry to examine the potential case for UK Government involvement in fixed link projects.

6. We launched our inquiry at the end of 2025. We received 28 written evidence submissions and held two oral evidence sessions, hearing from: councillors from Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles; Regional Transport Partnerships HiTrans and ZetTrans; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; civil engineering consultant COWI; and ferry operator CalMac, who provide ferry services on Scotland's west coast. We also undertook three visits in connection with the inquiry:

- to Skye to examine the long-term impact of the Skye Bridge, which connects Skye to the mainland;
- to the Faroe Islands, where an extensive network of tunnels connects remote communities; and

10 For example, Space Watch UK reported that the impact of spaceport traffic in Shetland on local ferries was felt to be "significant." There is also "contention" over ferries and the Viking Wind Farm: Space Watch UK, UK Space Expansion: Benefits for All? Local Perceptions of the SaxaVord spaceport, August 2025, pp 5 and 12–13

11 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to Faslane, Glasgow and Lewis and Harris, December 2024, pp 3–4

12 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026

13 Transport Scotland, Islands Connectivity Plan, 1 February 2024 (accessed 23 July 2026)

14 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to Shetland, May 2025, p 2

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- to the Western Isles, where fixed link proposals are being developed to link the Sounds of Harris and the Sound of Barra, as part of the Scottish Government's Islands Connectivity Plan.

We are grateful to all of those who contributed to this inquiry.

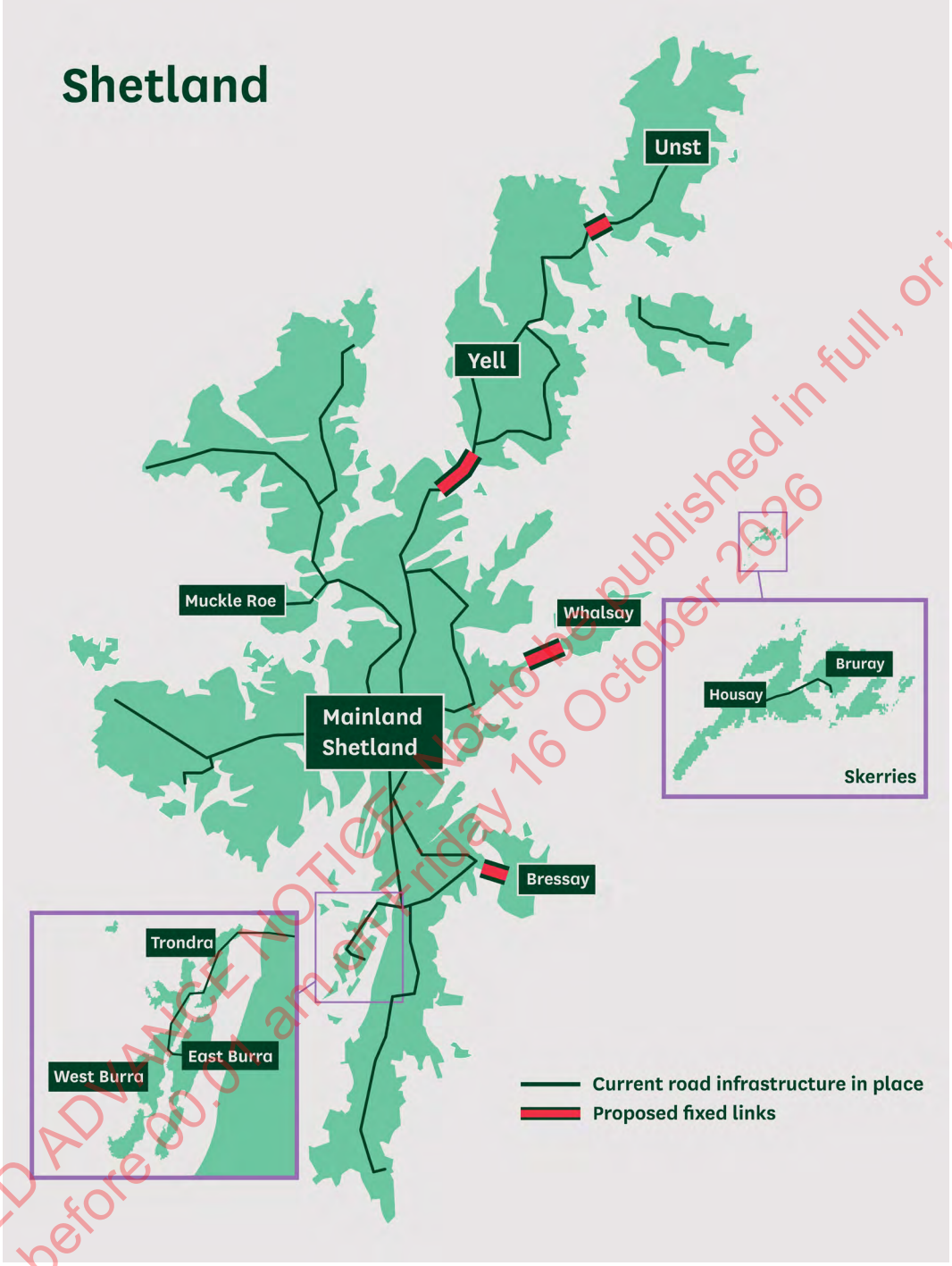
Our approach

7. We have not sought to assess every potential fixed link project in Scotland through our inquiry. Instead, this inquiry has drawn primarily on the proposals for Shetland and the Western Isles—which currently have some of the most developed proposals—as case studies through which to assess the potential benefits and trade-offs of fixed links.

8. In Shetland, Shetland Islands Council (SIC) has approved an Outline Business Case for its Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, which proposes a combination of improved inter-island ferry services and fixed links.[15] SIC's preferred option includes subsea tunnels linking Unst and Yell, Yell and mainland Shetland and—in the longer term—fixed links to Bressay and Whalsay.[16] The programme for all four links is estimated to cost around £1.5 billion,[17] although a high-level cost profile for delivering these links will not be completed until September 2026.[18] SIC has identified a range of potential funding mechanisms, including capital grant funding from the Scottish and UK Governments, local authority borrowing, and private finance supported by grant or toll revenues.[19] A Fixed Link Model study, which was undertaken by civil engineering consultancy COWI to assess the feasibility of the proposed subsea tunnels, concluded that the links are both "buildable and investible".[20] The study's conclusion was informed by engagement with three international tunnel contractors and 17 financial organisations, suggesting the project can attract private investment.[21]

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15 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026
16 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 2
17 BBC News, "Shetland backs 'transformative' £1.5bn plan to replace ferries with tunnels," 30 June 2026
18 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 2
19 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 2
20 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 1
21 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 1



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9. In the Western Isles, the Scottish Government has identified potential fixed links between Harris and North Uist, and Barra and South Uist, as part of its Islands Connectivity Plan, which sets out how ferry services and other transport modes will be delivered in future.[22] The Plan suggests that replacing existing ferry services with fixed links could improve "reliability, connectivity, capacity and travel times".[23] No further action has been taken

22 Transport Scotland, Islands Connectivity Plan, accessed 27 July 2026
23 Transport Scotland, Islands Connectivity Plan, accessed 27 July 2026

on these proposals,[24] including how such projects may be funded, although community consultation and engagement is expected to take place in the future.[25] The Council estimates that a fixed link across the Sound of Harris would cost between £109.6 million and £145.1 million.[26] It is also suggested that integrating the project with tidal and wind generation could help offset some capital costs through energy exports, though this would itself require an additional investment of £135 million.[27]

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24 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 2
25 Qq19–20
26 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 5
27 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 5



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Our report

10. Decisions on whether to pursue fixed links should rest with island communities, local authorities and the Scottish Government, which hold responsibility for transport policy in Scotland. Accordingly, we do not seek to endorse any individual proposal. Instead, we address a broader strategic question about the role the UK Government could play in supporting fixed links in Scotland where they support wider UK strategic interests.

11. While we do not seek to express a view on individual proposals, this report uses the proposed projects in Shetland and the Western Isles as case studies to support our analysis. We also draw on evidence from the Skye Bridge and the Faroe Islands' tunnel network to provide additional context and inform our conclusions.

12. This report is split into two chapters. The first assesses the case for fixed links, examining both their potential benefits and the trade-offs they present for island communities. It draws on evidence from our visits to explore the wider system impacts of improved connectivity and the continuing role of ferry services. The second chapter then considers the potential role of the UK Government, examining the extent to which it could or should support fixed link projects in Scotland.

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1 Assessing fixed links—benefits and trade-offs

Ferry services

13. Island communities in Scotland are currently partially or fully reliant on ferry services to travel to the mainland, between islands or other parts of their communities. Throughout this inquiry, ferry services have been described as a "lifeline" for island residents.[28] However, we have also heard significant concerns from both locals and businesses about the lack of resilience and capacity in the ferry network.[29]

14. Many of the vessels serving Scotland's islands are ageing and becoming increasingly unreliable. Ferries over 30 years old are considered to be beyond their expected operational lifespan as they become more susceptible to faults beyond this age.[30] The average age of CalMac's current fleet—Scotland's largest ferry operator—is just under 26 years,[31] with some vessels now more than 40 years old.[32] In Shetland and Orkney, the average ages of vessels are 31.5 years[33] and 31 years[34] respectively.

15. Disruption to services due to technical faults has increased as a result of ageing fleets. For example, cancelled services on CalMac's fleet caused by technical faults have increased significantly—from 10.4% in 2015, to 54% of all cancellations in 2025.[35] By contrast, weather-related disruption was responsible for 38.2% of cancellations in 2025, marking the first time in a decade that technical issues were the leading cause of service disruption.[36]

28 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 1
29 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 2
30 BBC News, "The problem with CalMac's ageing ferries," 13 May 2022
31 Q78
32 For example, MVs Loch Linnhe, Loch Riddon, Loch Striven are 40 years old, and MV Cumbrae is 50 years old: Caledonian McBrayne, "The Fleet," accessed 23 July 2026
33 Letter from Shetland Islands Council regarding the Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme, 30 June 2026, p 1
34 Orkney Ferries, "The Fleet," accessed 23 July 2026
35 Holyrood, "CalMac technical cancellations sharply increased over the last ten years," 30 March 2026
36 Holyrood, "CalMac technical cancellations sharply increased over the last ten years," 30 March 2026

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16. During our visit to the Western Isles locals described how the cancellation of services can leave people and goods unable to travel to or from the islands, with few or no alternative means of transport available.[37] We heard that this can have serious consequences for access to healthcare in particular. Patients requiring regular treatment, such as chemotherapy or dialysis, may need to travel to Stornoway or the mainland, with journeys often taking up to three days and entailing considerable expense.[38] Similar concerns were raised during oral evidence, with Councillor Steele explaining that expectant mothers from Barra and South Uist are required to travel away from home up to two weeks before their due date because of unreliable ferries. He cited one case in which a resident incurred costs of approximately £3,000 to travel to Stornoway to give birth.[39] Furthermore, residents are reimbursed at only £60 per night which is claimed retrospectively,[40] leaving people out of pocket. The impact can be even more substantial if travel to Glasgow is required for medical treatment.

17. Ferry disruption also has a significant impact on local businesses and the wider island economy. During our Western Isles visit, businesses described the severe operational challenges created by unreliable services. The South Uist Business Group estimates that local businesses collectively lost approximately £1.4 million over a six-week period in 2026 due to ferry disruption.[41] We heard that farmers face difficulties in transporting livestock and securing feed deliveries, while hospitality businesses reported losing bookings at short notice and, in some cases, being forced to temporarily close because visitors were unable to reach the islands.[42]

18. Islanders have emphasised to us the urgent need to improve ferry services[43] with Moraig Lyall, Chair of Regional Transport Partnership ZetTrans, warning that islands are in a "race against time".[44] However, we have heard that simply replacing vessels with newer ones may not be sufficient to address the islands' long-term connectivity challenges. CalMac's Fleet Director, Louis de Wolff, told us that climate change is contributing to an increase in weather-related disruption and ferry cancellations.[45] He explained that

37 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 2
38 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 3
39 Q31
40 Western Isles NHS Board, Patient Travel Claim Form, pp 1–2
41 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 3
42 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 3
43 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 3
44 Q64 [Moraig Lyall]
45 Q91

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operators are now more aware of the dangers associated with sailing in adverse weather conditions and have become more risk adverse, resulting in sailings being cancelled in circumstances where they may previously have gone ahead.[46] While he noted that a newer fleet will be more resilient to weather, CalMac's Chief Executive, Duncan Mackison, also noted that a proportion of sailings will inevitably continue to be cancelled or disrupted due to weather conditions.[47]

19. Fixed links could serve as an alternative to ferry services on certain short crossings. The vast majority of island communities will, however, continue to rely on ferry services to travel to the mainland or to islands where fixed link connections are not feasible because of their geography, population size and remoteness.[48] Moraig Lyall told us that fixed links should be seen not as a replacement for ferry networks, but as a way of allowing vessels and investment to be focused on those routes that will continue to depend on ferries, so that new vessels and infrastructure are deployed more strategically across the network.[49]

20. **CONCLUSION**

Ferries are a lifeline for Scotland's island communities. However, fleets are under considerable pressure, and the poor level of service across much of the network is placing intolerable limitations on people and businesses. Fixed links offer permanent, reliable connections but, realistically, they will only ever be a viable solution on a handful of specific, shorter crossings, and the vast majority of islanders will continue to rely on ferry services. Fixed links are therefore only one small part of a full, reliable transport network, which affords islanders the agency they deserve. Discussion of specific proposals for fixed links must therefore not distract from the urgent need to improve the ferry network across Scotland.

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46 Q91
47 Q92
48 Q71
49 Q71

Benefits of fixed links

Faroe Islands case study

21. Evidence suggests that fixed links have the potential to deliver significant benefits for island communities. The Faroe Islands provides a useful case study. The archipelago of 18 islands, which is part of the Kingdom of Denmark and home to 55,000 people, is situated half-way between Scotland and Iceland.[50] Since the 1960s it has developed an extensive network of 325 bridges and 23 tunnels, including four subsea tunnels.[51] The programme is the basis of a long-term vision to ensure that everyone can reach the island's capital and principal labour market, Tórshavn, within an hour.[52]

22. We visited the Faroe Islands in March 2026 to understand the challenges that the Faroese face and how the tunnel network seeks to address these issues. Like Scotland's islands today, the Faroe Islands have been concerned about the outmigration of young people. During our visit, stakeholders told us that Shetland and the Faroe Islands had previously faced similar demographic challenges.[53] In the 1960s, the Faroe Islands had a population of around 34,000,[54] compared with approximately 17,000 in Shetland.[55] While Shetland's population increased during the 1970s due to oil-related activity, and has remained relatively stable at around 22,000–23,000 since the 1980s,[56] the population of the Faroe Islands has continued to grow, reaching around 55,000 today.[57] While outward migration still remains a concern in the Faroe Islands, we heard that the islands are currently experiencing an annual population growth of around 1%.[58] Many of the Faroese interlocutors we spoke to during our visit argued that the Islands' improved connectivity through tunnels and bridges has been a key factor in enabling this population retention and growth.[59]

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50 Local.fo, "Total population of Faroe Islands passes 55K mark," 20 August 2025
51 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 1–2
52 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 2
53 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 3
54 WorldStats, "Faroe Islands Population History," accessed 29 July 2026
55 Shetland Islands Council, "People," accessed 29 July 2026
56 Shetland Islands Council, "People," accessed 29 July 2026
57 Local.fo, "Total population of Faroe Islands passes 55K mark," 20 August 2025
58 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 1–2
59 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 3

23. We heard during our visit to the Faroe Islands that there are differences in population trends between islands that are served by fixed links, and those that are not. Islands without fixed link connections have continued to experience population decline and ageing populations.[60] By contrast, communities connected by fixed links have more stable populations, with average ages closer to the national average.[61] We were also told that islands connected by fixed links benefit from higher incomes per capita than those that remain dependent on ferry services.[62]

24. We have also seen evidence that the tunnel network addresses housing issues, something also experienced by Scotland's islands.[63] The Faroe Islands are currently experiencing a housing shortage, particularly in the capital of Tórshavn, which is home to around 40% of the population.[64] However, on the island of Sandoy, which has had a subsea tunnel connected in 2023 and reduced journey times to Tórshavn from around six hours to 30 minutes,[65] local mayors told us that the tunnel has already encouraged housebuilding, attracted investment and made the community more appealing as a place to live for a wider range of residents, including young families—something locals have described as "life affirming".[66]

25. The Sandoy mayors also highlighted the wider social benefits that the tunnels have brought to residents, including having greater agency over their daily lives. The Sandoy tunnel has reduced disruption caused by adverse weather and removed the need for residents to organise work, leisure and community activities around ferry timetables and cancellations, with residents now able to travel more reliably.[67] They cited an example of their local youth football team which, prior to the tunnel opening, would have to withdraw from tournaments in Tórshavn due to poor weather disrupting ferry services. Since the tunnel has opened participation has become far more reliable, allowing young people to take part in sporting and social opportunities that were previously less certain.

60 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 2–3
61 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 2–3
62 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 2–3
63 HC Deb, Wednesday 11 September 2024, col 324WH; Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Skye, Monday 8 December 2026, December 2026, p 4
64 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 1–2
65 BBC Global, "The unique tunnels that link the Faroe Islands," 16 August 2024
66 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 3–4
67 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 3–4

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26. Finally, we were struck during our visit by the acknowledgement that there has never been a strong economic case for building tunnels in the Faroe Islands due to their high capital cost relative to the populations they serve.[68] However, there is a strong consensus amongst the Faroese on the benefits of fixed link connectivity, notwithstanding its considerable cost.[69] The Faroese Economic Council, for example, noted that a new proposed tunnel connecting Sudoroy (the Faroe Islands' southernmost island), is the most ambitious and expensive subsea tunnel project to date: it is likely to be built because of support amongst islanders and politicians.[70]

Scotland-specific examples

27. We received evidence suggesting that there is similar evidence of the positive impact of fixed links in some parts of Scotland. The Islands Strategic Partnership—comprising Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council—described existing bridges and causeways in their communities as delivering a "significant" social return on public investment:

- In the Western Isles, Eriskay's population declined by 60% in the 50 years before the opening of the Eriskay causeway in 2001. Since opening it has seen a population increase of almost 20% in 20 years.
- In the Shetland Islands, the island of Trondra's population fell from 91 to 17—a decline of around 81%—in the four decades before the bridge was constructed in 1971. It has since risen to around 135, representing an almost 700% increase from its pre-bridge low.
- In Orkney, the populations of South Ronaldsay and Burray, which are connected to mainland Orkney by the Churchill Barriers—causeways which were originally constructed during the Second World War to deter submarine activity—have grown by around 10% over the past decade. By contrast, the populations of Westray, Rousay, Sanday and Hoy—none of which are connected by fixed links—have declined.[71]

28. During oral evidence, representatives from the Islands Strategic Partnership emphasised that the benefits of fixed links extend beyond population growth. Witnesses highlighted how existing bridges and causeways have improved access to employment, education and public services,

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68 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 3–4
69 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 4
70 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, pp 5–6
71 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 4

strengthened labour mobility and enabled greater economic integration across island communities.[72] Nicky Sobey, of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, noted that causeways on Scalpay, Berneray and Eriskay in the Western Isles made commuting for work more straightforward and expanded access to local jobs.[73] Moraig Lyall also pointed to the benefits for emergency services, noting that fixed links mean that "an ambulance getting in and out is much cheaper and quicker".[74]

Trade-offs

Centralisation of services and loss of island identity

29. There are, however, a number of potential disbenefits associated with fixed links. Councillor Paul Steele—Leader of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar—noted concerns that improved inter-island connectivity in the Western Isles could contribute to the centralisation of services, leading to the reduction of services in smaller communities and requiring residents to travel further afield.[75] This was also raised as a concern by locals during our visit to the Western Isles in June 2026.[76] However, Councillor Steele argued that such trends are, to a certain extent, already occurring as a result of "shrinking budgets".[77] During our visit, residents also expressed concern about the impact that tunnels or bridges could have on the communities located around their entry and exit points.[78]

30. Regional Transport Partnership HiTrans noted in written evidence that fixed links also have the potential to reduce accessibility for those without access to a car if appropriate public transport is not developed alongside them,[79] particularly if there is a reduction or withdrawal of ferry services where fixed links are present, as has occurred in parts of the Faroe Islands.[80] We also heard that, in specific cases, residents may prefer ferries. For example, in Shetland residents of Bressay are served by a ferry crossing of around seven minutes directly into the town centre. It was suggested that replacing such

72 Q66
73 Q66 [Nicky Sobey]
74 Q66 [Moraig Lyall]
75 Q12
76 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 4
77 Q12
78 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 4
79 HITRANS - Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (CISFL0009), p 3
80 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 4

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connections with fixed links could, in some cases, lengthen journeys and reduce convenience, particularly if fixed links are built outside of central areas and ferry services were subsequently reduced or withdrawn.[81]

31. Some island residents suggested fixed links could affect island culture and erode islands' strong sense of identity.[82] However, this view did not appear to be widespread. Ranald Robertson of HiTrans told us that there is little evidence that fixed links undermine local culture or community identity, pointing to the North Ford and South Ford crossings connecting Uist (Western Isles) as an example where the links had not "in any respect chang[ed] the tradition and the culture and the feeling".[83] Similarly in Shetland, where the Outline Business Case for four subsea tunnels have recently been approved, Councillor Paul Robinson noted that residents today travel between the islands, either via ferries or existing fixed links, and this has not had a "significant" negative effect on the culture and heritage of the islands.[84]

32. Overall, the Islands Strategic Partnership suggested that the disbenefits of fixed links are limited.[85] During our visit to the Western Isles there appeared to be broad, although not unanimous, support for proposals in the Islands Connectivity Plan for fixed links between Harris and Barra.[86] This assessment was shared by Councillor Steele, who indicated that public attitudes towards fixed links in the Western Isles are "generally positive".[87] Even where there was not unanimity amongst communities on fixed links providing the right solution to connectivity challenges, there was unanimity that the status quo is unacceptable, and the challenges need to be addressed *somehow*.[88]

Wider infrastructure impacts

33. Much of the evidence we received for this inquiry focused on the wider trade-offs associated with increased connectivity and the need to ensure supporting infrastructure keeps pace with any resulting population growth. Evidence we received highlighted that the increased economic activity, tourism and population mobility which can be generated by fixed links

81 Q16 [Councillor Robinson]
82 BBC News, "The undersea tunnel network that could transform Shetland's fortunes," 14 July 2025
83 Q66 [Ranald Robertson]
84 Q16 [Councillor Robinson]
85 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 4
86 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026, p 4
87 Q13
88 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Western Isles, June 2026

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places additional demands on local infrastructure and services. In written evidence, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar highlighted that this could be an issue if their bridge projects were to go ahead, noting that local shops, fuel services and even local primary school and elderly care facilities near fixed links could become overwhelmed.[89]

34. This trend has been observed in other parts of Scotland where fixed links have been introduced. During our visit to the Isle of Skye in December 2025 we heard that the Skye bridge, which opened in 1995 and connects the Isle of Skye to the mainland, has contributed to a substantial increase in visitor numbers, helping to make Skye one of Scotland's most visited destinations.[90] However, housing, roads and public services on the island have not kept pace with the influx of visitors, creating pressures for local communities.[91] We heard concerns that the ease of access the bridge provides has shifted the tourism trends from multi-night stays to day trips which generate less economic benefit.[92] We also heard that Skye has become highly dependent on the bridge connection, while the remaining ferry service is considered by many residents to be unfit for purpose.[93]

35. **CONCLUSION**

Fixed links have the potential to deliver transformative benefits for Scotland's island communities. Both national and international examples demonstrate that, when designed and implemented effectively, fixed links can help reverse depopulation trends, improve quality of life, and strengthen the economic prospects of fragile communities.

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89 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 4

90 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Skye, Monday 8 December 2026, December 2026, p 2

91 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Skye, Monday 8 December 2026, December 2026, p 2–3

92 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Skye, Monday 8 December 2026, December 2026, p 2

93 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Skye, Monday 8 December 2026, December 2026, p 8

36. **CONCLUSION**

Some of Scotland's islands, particularly the Shetland Islands, have well-developed proposals for fixed links. We have heard a clear consensus, but not necessarily unanimity, amongst those communities in favour of these proposals. However, fixed links can also create additional pressures. While the benefits are clear, they can generate additional demand on local infrastructure, which will require long-term investment across the wider system and entail ongoing maintenance costs to ensure links are sustainable. Concerns that fixed links can also result in a loss of island identity and the potential centralisation of services must not be ignored when weighing the merits of specific proposals.

37. **CONCLUSION**

These risks underline our view that the decision on whether to progress with fixed links lies, first and foremost, with the affected communities. Nonetheless, the proposals put forward in Shetland and the Western Isles appear to have transformative potential. The proposals in Shetland are particularly developed and warrant serious consideration by the UK and Scottish Governments.

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2 The role of the UK Government

38. Transport policy and infrastructure development in Scotland is devolved, with the Scottish Government and local authorities responsible for ferry provision and planning, and constructing and maintaining roads, including fixed links. However, there is precedent for the UK Government providing funding and support for transport projects in Scotland where they align with wider UK objectives.

39. For example, in July 2025 the UK Government announced £66 million of funding for three major transport schemes in Scotland.[94] The then Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray MP, described this investment as demonstrating the UK Government's commitment to improving infrastructure and driving economic growth to all parts of the UK.[95] There are also other funding mechanisms that demonstrate the UK Government's capacity to invest in devolved spaces. For example, the Pride in Place programme focuses on local regeneration and community-led development and can be used to fund local infrastructure projects.[96] Previously, local authorities could apply for government funding via the Levelling Up Fund, with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland receiving a combined amount of £798 million.[97]

40. Highlands and Islands Enterprise noted examples of the UK Government supporting transport projects specific to the Highlands and Islands: these included providing match funding with Shetland Islands Council for the Fair Isles ferry replacement project—delivered through the Levelling Up Fund—as well as part-funding a HiTrans-led Sustainable Aviation Test Environment project, via UKRI's Future Flights Challenges.[98]

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94 HM Treasury, Scotland gets £66 million transport boost as part of record Spending Review settlement, 25 July 2025 (accessed 23 July 2026)

95 HM Treasury, Scotland gets £66 million transport boost as part of record Spending Review settlement, 25 July 2025 (accessed 23 July 2026)

96 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Communities to seize control over high streets and retore pride, 24 September 2025 (accessed 23 July 2026)

97 House of Commons Library, Which areas have benefited from the Levelling Up Fund?, Insight, Wednesday 25 January 2023.

98 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (CISFL0024) p 9

Why should the UK Government support fixed links in Scotland?

41. In written evidence to this inquiry, the UK Government has said that its role in fixed link projects in Scotland is "limited" and that any future support would "respect devolved responsibilities while promoting connectivity and economic growth across the UK".[99] In July the Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP, told us that he would approach UK Government support for fixed links "with an open mind".[100] While witnesses such as ZetTrans accept that fixed links in Scotland should be coordinated and have the support of both the Scottish and UK Governments,[101] there is clear evidence that investment in fixed links would also support policy areas which engage reserved matters, including supporting growth in nationally significant sectors, the UK's security in the North and the social and cultural rights of islanders.

National economic benefits

42. The potential benefits of fixed links extend beyond the communities they directly serve. Scotland's islands are home to some of the UK's nationally significant sectors. The islands of Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles alone have enough ScotWind licenses to power every home in Scotland three times over, produce 13% of the UK's oil and gas, and produce 50% of Scotland's Gross Value Added[102] (GVA) from aquaculture, and a third of Scotland's seafood GVA.[103]

43. Scotland is also set to receive increased investment in key sectors. In the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, the Highlands and Islands has been earmarked as a key region for economic growth through its clean energy and space sectors,[104] with the Western Isles alone expected to receive £6.2 billion of private investment in energy by 2030.[105] Shetland is also home to SaxaVord spaceport, which is essential to delivering the UK's ambitions for a sovereign space launch capability, though it can only currently be accessed via two inter-island ferries.[106]

99 Department for Transport (CISF0028)
100 Oral evidence taken on 14 July 2026, Q164
101 ZetTrans (CISFL0004) p 7
102 Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the economic value generated by a producer, industry, sector or region.
103 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 1
104 UK Government, The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, November 2025, p 108
105 welovestornoway.com, "Oversight alert on £6.2bn isles energy investment," 25 November 2025
106 SaxaVord Spaceport (CISFL0027) p 1

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44. Despite this potential and the inflow of investment, the Islands Strategic Partnership has argued that its ability to contribute "fully" to Scotland and its future growth prospects is constrained by underinvestment in infrastructure, and the "continued demographic challenge which poor infrastructure accentuates".[107] During a visit to the Western Isles in December 2024, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar told us that the recent investment in renewable energy development and resulting movement of workers had the potential to put further strain on the current ferry service and threaten growth in the sector, while connectivity issues could deter both workers and potential investment in the island.[108] A report by Space Watch UK on the UK's space expansion also noted that there was a significant impact from spaceport traffic on local ferry services.[109]

45. We saw for ourselves when we visited SaxaVord the ways in which fixed link infrastructure could support the spaceport's operations and growth potential. In an evidence session with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Douglas Alexander MP acknowledged that SaxaVord could benefit from fixed links.[110]

Security and defence

46. Shetland occupies an increasingly important strategic position for the United Kingdom. Russia has increased its military activity in the North Atlantic and High North,[111] while Shetland is home to a remote radar facility intended to strengthen the protection of UK northern airspace.[112] During our visit to Shetland in 2025, we were told that SaxaVord can help to improve the UK's defence and security.[113] Earlier this year, the then Defence Secretary, John Healey MP, also noted that the UK Government "deeply values" the contribution that Shetland and Scotland make to the security of the UK, highlighting the importance of robust transport connectivity in these strategic areas.[114]

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107 Islands Strategic Partnership (CISFL0021) p 2
108 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to Faslane, Glasgow and Lewis and Harris, December 2024, p 4
109 Space Watch UK, UK Space Expansion: Benefits for All? Local Perceptions of the SaxaVord spaceport, August 2025, pp 12–13
110 Oral evidence taken on 14 July 2026, Q164
111 Scottish Affairs Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2022–23, Defence in Scotland: the North Atlantic and the High North, HC 1576, para 2
112 Ministry of Defence, New Shetland radar to better protect UK Northern airspace, 26 January 2018
113 Scottish Affairs Committee, Scottish Affairs Committee visit to Shetland, May 2025, p 3
114 HC Deb, 2 February 2026, col 7

47. Although not originally conceived as transport infrastructure, the Churchill Barriers in Orkney provide a precedent for defence infrastructure delivering fixed-link connectivity. Built during the Second World War to prevent the movement of submarines into Scapa Flow,[115] the barriers subsequently provided permanent road links between several of Orkney's islands.

Local economic benefits

48. As well as supporting nationally significant sectors, there is also evidence to suggest that fixed links can support local economies, such as growth in the tourism sector. For example, Highlands and Islands Enterprise found that 62% of visitors to Berneray in the Western Isles would not have travelled to the island in the absence of a causeway, while 49% of visitors to Scalpay stated that they would not have visited without the bridge connection.[116] Similarly in the case of the Skye bridge, traffic increased by around 20% immediately after the bridge opened, highlighting how demand to visit Skye was previously restricted by the ferry service.[117] The Skye bridge has also led to an expansion of the labour market catchment areas in South Skye and Lochlash, enabling employers to recruit from a wider pool of workers and giving residents access to a broader range of employment opportunities.[118]

Cultural and social rights

49. In written evidence, the Scottish Human Rights Commission told us that, without substantial investment in transport infrastructure, island communities will "continue to experience disproportionate barriers that undermine their human rights", noting that the ability for Scotland's island communities to access employment, healthcare, education, food, cultural life and social participation depends on a reliable transport system that is affordable.[119] When we put this assessment to the Islands Strategic Partnership, witnesses agreed unequivocally. Leader of Orkney Islands Council, Councillor Heather Woodbridge, described existing transport provision in some communities as being "far below what would be acceptable in this day and age", noting that her home island of North Ronaldsay receives only one ferry per week during the winter timetable and that limitations in transport connectivity make it difficult to access fresh food.[120]

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115 Q10
116 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (CISFL0024) p 6
117 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (CISFL0024) p 6
118 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (CISFL0024) p 7
119 Scottish Human Rights Commission (CISFL0032) p 6
120 Q41 [Councillor Woodbridge]

50. Witnesses also highlighted the impact poor connectivity can have on access to healthcare. Councillor Paul Steele told us that transport barriers can make it difficult for residents to access medical treatment, particularly where appointments require travel to Stornoway or the mainland. He cited an example of a constituent who considered foregoing cancer treatment because of concerns about the cost and reliability of travelling to Edinburgh for care.[121]

51. We heard evidence that poor transport links can contribute to wider social inequalities. Councillor Gary Robinson referred to Highlands and Islands Enterprise research on the minimum income standard for remote rural Scotland, which found that households in island communities require significantly higher incomes to achieve an acceptable standard of living than households elsewhere in Scotland.[122] He argued that transport and connectivity challenges contribute to these additional costs and can limit people's ability to remain in the communities in which they were born and raised.[123]

52. **CONCLUSION**
Devolved responsibility for transport does not mean the UK Government's role in fixed link projects in Scotland should be limited. Fixed links could be a key enabler of industries which are strategically important to the whole of the UK, including space launch and clean energy. They could also strengthen national security, and help preserve the viability of island life, culture and heritage in the UK—all of which should be strategic priorities for the UK Government.

How could the UK Government support fixed links in Scotland?

53. The cost of constructing fixed links would present a significant financial challenge for local authorities acting alone. In written evidence, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted that the proposed Sound of Harris fixed link is estimated to cost between £109.6 million and £145.1 million.[124] The Council suggested that integrating the project with tidal and wind generation could create opportunities to recover some capital costs through energy exports, although such integration would itself require a significant additional investment of £135 million.[125] Meanwhile, the proposed inter-island tunnels in

121 Q41 [Councillor Steele]
122 Q41 [Councillor Robinson]
123 Q41 [Councillor Robinson]
124 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 5
125 Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) (CISF0022) p 5

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Shetland are estimated to cost around £1.5 billion.[126] Similarly to the Faroe Islands, Shetland could potentially recover costs through the use of tolls,[127] although no official estimates of the revenue this could generate have been published. However, Councillors Robinson and Steele told us that the level of capital funding needed would make it difficult for local authorities to finance through existing capital budgets or borrowing powers alone.[128]

54. Both the Western Isles and Shetland Islands Councils argue that the UK Government could help bridge this funding gap. Councillor Steele told us that the loss of EU Structural Funds had removed an important source of investment for major transport infrastructure projects in the islands. He noted that many of the significant road and transport schemes delivered over the past two to three decades had benefited from EU support and suggested that the UK Government could help fill the gap left by that programme.[129]

55. We heard that support would not necessarily need to take the form of direct capital funding. Witnesses highlighted a range of non-financial ways the UK Government could contribute. ZetTrans suggested that the UK Government could be a strategic partner in research, engineering and innovation for fixed links; provide guarantees, loans or risk sharing arrangements; and support projects through national agencies like the UK National Wealth Fund.[130] Highlands and Islands Enterprise suggested the Government could support innovation in low-emission vessels and fixed link engineering; and support collaboration between the Scottish Government, Regional Transport Partnerships and local authorities.[131]

56. Witnesses also emphasised the positive signalling effect of UK Government involvement. Councillor Robinson argued that in-kind support from the UK Government would demonstrate confidence in fixed link proposals and provide reassurance to potential investors that these are credible, long-term infrastructure projects.[132] He suggested that such support would send a broader message that the UK Government is willing to invest in the long-term sustainability of some of the UK's most remote and fragile communities.[133]

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126 BBC News, "Shetland backs 'transformative' £1.5bn plan to replace ferries with tunnels," 30 June 2026
127 Q54
128 Q35
129 Q35 [Councillor Steele]
130 ZetTrans - Shetland's Regional Transport Partnership (CISFL0004) p 7
131 HITRANS - Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (CISFL0009) p 4
132 Q38 [Councillor Robinson]
133 Q38 [Councillor Robinson]

Economic versus social return

57. Whatever form UK Government support for fixed links could take, we heard consistent evidence about the importance of assessing such projects through the lens of social value. During our visit to the Faroe Islands, we were told that there had never been a compelling economic case for fixed link projects on the islands, given their high capital cost relative to the populations they serve. Instead, these investments have been undertaken primarily for the public good, rather than because they offer a high economic return on investment.[134]

58. Both the UK Government's Green Book methodology and the Scottish Government's Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) framework assess the costs and benefits of transport infrastructure projects. Some critics have argued that historically the Green Book methodology unintentionally favoured already-prosperous regions, making it harder for other areas to secure funding for infrastructure projects.[135] However, revisions to the Green Book in February 2026 now place greater emphasis on wider social and place-based impacts, and explicitly recognise that a benefit-cost ratio below 1.0 (that is, that £1 of investment delivers less than £1 in economic return) does not automatically mean poor value for money if there are other unmonetisable benefits.[136] Similarly, the STAG process assesses options against a broader range of criteria, including environment, climate change, health and wellbeing and equality, although Andy Sloan of engineering consultancy COWI noted that benefit-cost ratios still play a significant role in the STAG process.[137]

59. Andy Sloan argued that while financial costs will always play a role in appraisal processes, greater weight should be given to the wider economic and social effects of improved connectivity. This includes not only considering the reduction in journey times, for example, but also the potential to support economic development and the wider "social fabric" of communities.[138]

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134 Scottish Affairs Committee, Note of the Scottish Affairs Committee visit to the Faroe Islands and Copenhagen, Sunday 8 - Wednesday 11 March 2026, March 2026, p 3

135 Institute of Civil Engineers, "Rewriting the rules: what does the new Green Book mean for infrastructure," 11 February 2026

136 Institute of Civil Engineers, "Rewriting the rules: what does the new Green Book mean for infrastructure," 11 February 2026

137 Q53

138 Q53

60. **CONCLUSION**

It is clear that the scale, complexity and cost of any fixed link projects would benefit from UK Government support. This need not be solely financial. The question is therefore not whether the UK Government can support fixed link projects in Scotland, but whether it is willing to do so.

61. **RECOMMENDATION**

While it is for island communities themselves to determine whether fixed links should progress, we welcome the UK Government's open mind to projects. The UK Government should actively engage with any proposals progressed by those communities and give serious consideration to the support it could offer them. However, in doing so, it must recognise that fixed links are unlikely to be viable on the basis of economic return alone. In assessing any potential support, the UK Government should ensure that its appraisal of any projects fully captures the social and cultural benefits they could deliver, recognising that limited direct economic return on investment does not necessarily limit their worthiness.

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Conclusions and recommendations

Assessing fixed links—benefits and trade-offs

1. Ferries are a lifeline for Scotland's island communities. However, fleets are under considerable pressure, and the poor level of service across much of the network is placing intolerable limitations on people and businesses. Fixed links offer permanent, reliable connections but, realistically, they will only ever be a viable solution on a handful of specific, shorter crossings, and the vast majority of islanders will continue to rely on ferry services. Fixed links are therefore only one small part of a full, reliable transport network, which affords islanders the agency they deserve. Discussion of specific proposals for fixed links must therefore not distract from the urgent need to improve the ferry network across Scotland. (Conclusion, Paragraph 20)

2. Fixed links have the potential to deliver transformative benefits for Scotland's island communities. Both national and international examples demonstrate that, when designed and implemented effectively, fixed links can help reverse depopulation trends, improve quality of life, and strengthen the economic prospects of fragile communities. (Conclusion, Paragraph 35)

3. Some of Scotland's islands, particularly the Shetland Islands, have well-developed proposals for fixed links. We have heard a clear consensus, but not necessarily unanimity, amongst those communities in favour of these proposals. However, fixed links can also create additional pressures. While the benefits are clear, they can generate additional demand on local infrastructure, which will require long-term investment across the wider system and entail ongoing maintenance costs to ensure links are sustainable. Concerns that fixed links can also result in a loss of island identity and the potential centralisation of services must not be ignored when weighing the merits of specific proposals. (Conclusion, Paragraph 36)

4. These risks underline our view that the decision on whether to progress with fixed links lies, first and foremost, with the affected communities. Nonetheless, the proposals put forward in Shetland and the Western Isles

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appear to have transformative potential. The proposals in Shetland are particularly developed and warrant serious consideration by the UK and Scottish Governments. (Conclusion, Paragraph 37)

The role of the UK Government

5. Devolved responsibility for transport does not mean the UK Government's role in fixed link projects in Scotland should be limited. Fixed links could be a key enabler of industries which are strategically important to the whole of the UK, including space launch and clean energy. They could also strengthen national security, and help preserve the viability of island life, culture and heritage in the UK—all of which should be strategic priorities for the UK Government. (Conclusion, Paragraph 52)

6. It is clear that the scale, complexity and cost of any fixed link projects would benefit from UK Government support. This need not be solely financial. The question is therefore not whether the UK Government can support fixed link projects in Scotland, but whether it is willing to do so. (Conclusion, Paragraph 60)

7. While it is for island communities themselves to determine whether fixed links should progress, we welcome the UK Government's open mind to projects. The UK Government should actively engage with any proposals progressed by those communities and give serious consideration to the support it could offer them. However, in doing so, it must recognise that fixed links are unlikely to be viable on the basis of economic return alone. In assessing any potential support, the UK Government should ensure that its appraisal of any projects fully captures the social and cultural benefits they could deliver, recognising that limited direct economic return on investment does not necessarily limit their worthiness. (Recommendation, Paragraph 61)

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Formal minutes

Wednesday 9 September 2026, morning sitting

Members present

Patricia Ferguson, in the Chair

Maureen Burke

Dave Doogan

Lillian Jones

Douglas Lumsden

Angus MacDonald

Douglas McAllister

Susan Murray

Kirsteen Sullivan

Fixed link connectivity in Scotland's islands

Draft Report (*Fixed link connectivity in Scotland's islands*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 61 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

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Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till this day at 2.00pm.

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Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Councillor Heather Woodbridge, Leader, Orkney Islands Council; **Councillor Paul F Steele**, Leader, Western Isles Council; **Councillor Gary Robinson**, Depute Leader, Shetland Islands Council Q1–43

Andy Sloan, Managing Director, UK and Ireland, COWI Q44–59

Wednesday 17 June 2026

Nicky Sobey, Senior Policy Manager, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; **Ranald Robertson**, Partnership Director, HITRANS (Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership); **Moraig Lyall**, Chair, ZetTrans (Shetland's Regional Transport Partnership) Q60–77

Duncan Mackison, Chief Executive, CalMac; **Louis de Wolff**, Fleet Director, CalMac Q78–102

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Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

CISFL numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Buziuk, Hleb (Independent policy researcher and human-rights advocate, FairGo CIC)	CISFL0001
2	COWI	CISFL0010
3	Cormack, Dr Walter	CISFL0005
4	Highlands and Islands Enterprise	CISFL0024
5	Islands Strategic Partnership	CISFL0021
6	Joy, Mr Rupert	CISFL0003
7	Kermode, Mr Neil	CISFL0011
8	Newby-Tucker, Mr Travis	CISFL0002
9	North Yell Development Council (NYDC)	CISFL0030
10	Quality Meat Scotland	CISFL0018
11	Road Haulage Association	CISFL0015
12	Salmon Scotland	CISFL0023
13	SaxaVord Spaceport	CISFL0027
14	Scottish Human Rights Commission	CISFL0032
15	Scottish Wholesale Association	CISFL0006
16	Seafood Shetland	CISFL0026
17	Shetland Islands Council	CISFL0012
18	Sinclair, Mr Leslie	CISFL0007
19	The Department for Transport (DfT)	CISFL0028
20	The Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)	CISFL0009
21	The Institution of Civil Engineers	CISFL0017
22	The Scotch Whisky Association	CISFL0020
23	Unst Tunnel Action Group	CISFL0029

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24	VisitScotland	CISFL0019
25	Webster, Mrs Caroline	CISFL0013
26	Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)	CISFL0022
27	Yell Tunnel Action Group	CISFL0031
28	ZetTrans—Shetland's Regional Transport Partnership	CISFL0004

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List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2026–27

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Clean Power by 2030: A fair deal for Scotland?	HC 164

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
6th	Draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2026	HC 1652
5th	The work of the Committee in 2024–25, and Industrial transition in Scotland	HC 1651
4th	The future of Scotland's oil and gas industry	HC 459
3rd	Problem drug use in Scotland follow-up: Glasgow's Safer Drug Consumption Facility	HC 630
2nd	Scotland's space sector follow-up: launch	HC 671
1st	The financing of the Scottish Government	HC 456
7th Special	Draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Schedule 5) Order 2026: Government Response	HC 1708
6th Special	The future of Scotland's oil and gas industry: Government Response	HC 1603
5th Special	Scotland's space sector follow-up: launch: Government Response	HC 1495
4th Special	Problem drug use in Scotland follow-up: Glasgow's Safer Drug Consumption Facility: Government Response	HC 1485

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Number	Title	Reference
3rd Special	The Financing of the Scottish Government: Government response	HC 1357
2nd Special	Scotland's space sector: Government response	HC 801
1st Special	Science and Scotland: Government response	HC 800

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