

ARRAN VOICE ARTICLE

The ferry service is inextricably linked to levels of business in Arran on three different levels

1. price of service
2. reliability of service
3. frequency / operating hours of service.

PRICE OF SERVICE

It is great news that RET will be extended to Arran but extremely disappointing and worrying that the pilot scheme will not be implemented until 2014 especially as the scheme is being extended to Islay, Colonsay and Gigha in October 2012. This puts Arran at a severe disadvantage to other islands in a competitive tourism situation which is extremely unfair.

Arran suffered a downturn in tourism income in 2010 when tourism income fell 6% from £30.4m to £28.59m. This year it looks as though income will decline by a further 8% and given lower growth forecasts for 2012, Arrans income could decline by a further 10% to 23.7m by the end of 2012.

We also know that carrying figures for Cal Mac have declined by 5.93% for passengers and 5.77% for cars in 2011. Arran is therefore down 43,852 passengers and 8,221 cars on 2010 with carrying figures now down to pre 2009 levels.

Arran has a higher number of tourists than many other remote islands, however, it also has a higher population and higher number of businesses to sustain. Arran seems to be regarded as a successful and vibrant island that does not need as much help as other islands however the economy is extremely fragile and many businesses struggle to survive even in better times. As far as Auchrannie is concerned, our income and room occupancy is down year on year whilst costs continue to rise.

With current RET arrangements in place, Arrans economy will most likely be severely affected by 2014. We believe that visitors will bypass Arran and visit other islands who have cheaper fares thus compounding the effect of the economic downturn and accelerating Arran's economic decline.

We sincerely hope that a way can be found to offer lower fares, particularly in shoulder and winter periods, which will allow Arran to compete on a more level playing field prior to 2014.

RELIABILITY OF SERVICE

The problems with Ardrossan Harbour are well documented and a solution must be found. In this financial year, Auchrannie has suffered the loss of 96 room nights due to ferry cancellation against 19 room nights in 2010/11. Often, these room nights are replaced financially and in terms of bed spaces by guests who are stranded on Arran as a result ferry cancellation. The real problem here is that the guests stranded on each side of the water are put off visiting Arran in the future. Many guests have also been subjected to ferry delays on each side of the water during the last winter which results in a wasted day hoping a ferry will sail. Again, these guests will be disincentivised by their experience to return to Arran.

FREQUENCY / OPERATING HOURS OF SERVICE

The current proposals set out in the “Scottish Ferry Services”, Draft Plan for Consultation would represent a vast improvement to the Arran service by providing longer operating hours and a more frequent shuttle service using two separate vessels. This would lead to greater tourist numbers and also allow the island population the opportunity to grow through a mix of increased tourism and ability to commute to the mainland. However, it was also suggested that the Lochranza – Claonig service would be reviewed. Continuation of this service is essential to encourage through traffic from Arran to Kintyre and the islands serviced from the peninsula and to utilise partnership opportunities with these areas.

CONCLUSION

An affordable, frequent, competitively priced, reliable ferry service is essential to the sustainability and success of island tourism.

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