

Arran Community Council

Response to the Scottish Governments Draft Ferry Review Plan.

Our views have been formed from the public feedback collected at a meeting attended by approx 100 island residents held recently and includes views from our High School students.

Chapter 2. How should ferries be funded and procured?

We noted that all ports were not currently under the one ownership and that discussions were ongoing as to the final configuration that this important aspect of the service would take. We would like to take this opportunity to highlight an important omission in the draft review regarding infrastructure where the Ardrossan port has been omitted from the plan. As this is currently held under the ownership of “Clydeport” and is a serious limitation to the consistency of our services we wish to express the local residents concerns that no development for this port is currently included and demand that the final plan addresses this aspect of our service provision in detail.

With regards the procurement of future vessels the designs and capacities of vessels must be “Fit for Purpose” and recognise the weather and port entry restrictions which may prevail on some routes.

Chapter 3: Fares

RET:

Road Equivalent Tariff has a proven record on the trial routes and will be welcomed on both the Arran routes. It is considered a fair and reasonable basis for setting fares for all categories. We also note the plan to extend the scope of the trial scheme to include 6 Metre length commercial vehicles. This is welcomed for small businesses.

Managing Demand on Busy Sailings:

As RET is proposed as a uniform basis for fare setting any deviations from this must be totally transparent and not be used to indirectly increase the revenues from the route. Any increase to peak travel fares must be reflected in the “off peak” charges and recognise the volumes for each. The net result should be neutral.

All fare tariffs should be easily understood and consistently applied.

Consideration should also be given to the service providers managing bookings and late cancellations particularly of freight that currently block book and then cancel at short notice thereby restricting passenger car traffic. Statistics on traffic volumes should be collected and made available to support any proposed system.

RET for commercial vehicles:

We have no argument for the HGV proposals and welcome the recommendations to included coaches in the RET fares scheme.

Concession Tickets:

We note the proposal for the national scheme. Currently our senior citizens have entitlement to the SPT scheme which we understand will continue. We do however disagree with the proposal to continue to disadvantage our “young persons” and ask that consideration is given to extend the scheme to facilitate travel to and from education and sporting events where ferry travel is the only transport choice. This will significantly improve the social inclusion aspects of the island youngsters. This scheme should be expanded to allow a greater number of trips and also be available to all students in full time education rather than expire at age 18. Survey of our students indicates an average usage of 2 trips per month. If involved in sporting activities this rate is higher.

Multi-Journey tickets:

Whilst the introduction of RET will more than negate any previous benefits derived from multi-journey tickets it is a concern that volumes of traffic at the ticket offices could be an issue unless an efficient electronic ticketing system is introduced. Details and timescales for this feature should be included in the final plan.

Future fare increases should not be greater than the price inflation levels and also reflect efficiencies in the operators procedures.

Chapter 4: What kind of Ferry Service should be funded?

Ardrossan to Brodick:

The proposed introduction of a two vessel service operating an extended schedule is welcomed by all sections of the community. It was strongly supported that the earliest sailings should be scheduled to ensure that commuting and educational studies would be catered for. A start time of 7am was felt to be most practical. Final sailings back to the island which allowed residents to also participate in sports and cultural events were also supported with 10pm generally being acknowledged as a practical time.

It was also highlighted that any extension to the ferry schedules should be integrated with the rail and bus connections to ensure maximum benefit for all travellers.

Providing a full Sunday service was also requested and this feature could be implemented very quickly with the existing vessel.

Development of this service could have long term beneficial impacts to island life and particularly help to reverse the current trend of low winter volumes for local business outlets. This aspect of the review should be introduced as soon as practical.

The current RET trials have demonstrated the potential for approx 25% increases in volumes and this must be recognised when the specifications for the two vessels is defined.

The draft plan recognises the need for infrastructure upgrades to the Brodick facilities and before the final layout plans are submitted for this significant investment we ask that the design elements of future vessels are also considered to ensure compatibility from the start.

As stated in our introduction the Ardrossan infrastructure and poor weather limitations at this location need to be addressed urgently and included in the final plan when it is released.

The draft plan has no reference to alternative ports in the case of inaccessibility of primary mainland port. Following recent experiences which have highlighted the adverse impact caused by such incidents we suggest that each route should have a designated alternative destination to ensure “Lifeline” services are maintained at least with a minimum daily services. The provision of “Relief” vessels in a timely manner in cases of emergency should also be integrated into any future operating conditions.

Claonaig – Lochranza:

The draft plan states this route “largely fulfils a specialist function”. We strongly refute this view. It is true that dangerous goods currently use this route but it also provides a valuable service for both commercial and residential users on a regular basis.

It also provides an essential lifeline alternative route if the Brodick / Ardrossan ferry is unable to sail.

The farming community rely on this route for transporting stock to markets in Oban etc. The alternative road journey if this route were to be removed would entail a journey in excess of 100 miles.

Local businesses are dependent on the trade from the ferry users on this route in both summer and winter and local residents also rely on the route to enable shopping trips to Tarbet and beyond.

The historical user numbers must be interpreted with an understanding of the limits imposed for safety and weather conditions and the reduction in the service in the winter months.

It is a critical part of the tourist routes from mainland Ayrshire through Arran and onto Argyll and the Western isles and this traffic also supports local village businesses along these routes. The Carradale golf course is a favourite for both residents and tourists and this route is the only practical service to support this business from Aran.

The “whisky trail” and “hopsotch” routes also rely on the provision of this service.

Such is the potential demand for this route that the local community would propose that the winter ferry from Tarbet to Lochranza be a twice daily run during the winter months, to enable them to work or shop on the mainland. Retention and development of this route will contribute to an improved quality of life for the local residents.

The potential impact of RET should be recognised in the design of future vessels for this route and in reviewing the schedules to ensure potential benefits are optimised. Improved public transport links for this route would also increase potential volumes.

Chapter 6: Accessibility

Arran has a high percentage of senior residents and this section is important in terms of accessibility for mobility impaired passengers at both port services and on board facilities.

The access to the medical rooms on board ship and the facilities provided are of interest.

We received some feedback related to the provision of defibrillators on board. This should be considered for future features.

General points:

The services provided should be considered as “lifeline services” and not treated as convenience benefits.

How government plans to monitor operator performance and what critical measures will be used to ensure that the significant investment is delivering the intended benefits has not been quantified. Nor has any method of ensuring user’s are able to engage with the providers in service matters been discussed. Current methods are not effective.

Some recognition of these important consultative features and how the ferry services will integrate with the other transport services for Bus and Rail should also be clearly defined to ensure that residents and visitors enjoy a service which to use the phrase from the public meeting is “Fit for Purpose”. The contract terms must comprehensively cover all aspects of the service with measures set to ensure that the **users’** needs are foremost in decision making. It would be useful to clearly understand the mechanism by which pre-tender scrutiny of the next contract by, or on behalf of, the community will be arranged

RET is being delayed to ensure infrastructure improvements are completed at Brodick port it is of general concern that no recognition has been mentioned or funding proposed to reverse the obvious decay in our road infrastructure. With current vehicle volumes our roads have deteriorated significantly in recent years and unless government action is forthcoming we will have reached crisis level just as volumes are set to increase. This should be addressed as part of a wider consultation.