

Aviation, Maritime, Freight & Canals

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Cllr Alan Reid
Cowal Transport Forum
Customer Service Point
22 Hill Street
Dunoon
PA23 7AP

Date:
16 July 2018

Dear Cllr Reid,

Thank you for your letter of 6 July 2018 in relation to the passenger ferry service between Gourock and Dunoon.

I note your concerns regarding the present ferry service and its reliability and in response I can advise that the safety of all passengers, crew, vessels and ports is paramount and any decision taken to cancel a sailing is done so with this in mind. The Merchant Shipping (Master's Discretion) Regulations 1997 gives the Master of any ship sole responsibility for deciding whether in his or her professional judgement it is safe to sail. It is a criminal offence for the owner, charterer or manager of a ship, i.e. Argyll Ferries Ltd, or any other person to prevent or restrict the Master from exercising that judgement. Ferry travel has its own distinct challenges and the Masters have a duty to ensure the safety of passengers above other considerations.

You may wish to note that should the service provided by the operator fall short of the expectations of Scottish Ministers, as per the terms of the Public Service Contract, performance deductions are imposed when scheduled sailings are cancelled or delayed and are not related to adverse weather. Late arrivals and departures due to inclement weather do not incur a financial deduction following the decision taken by the Master.

To address your point in terms of the future plan for the service, the current Public Service Contract between Scottish Ministers and Argyll Ferries Ltd has been extended to 20 January 2019. An announcement was made by the then Minister for Transport and the Islands, Humza Yousaf on 20 December 2017 on the procurement policy review. This included the publication of the Interim report setting out emerging findings of the policy review, a copy of which can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/ferry-services-procurement-policy-review-interim-report-emerging-findings-20-december-2017/>

Following this report the Minister made a further public statement to the Scottish Parliament on 2 February 2018, a transcript of which can be found via the following link:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10768&i=98763>

I can confirm that arrangements for the development and procurement of the next Gourock to Dunoon Public Service Contract will be made public shortly however at this stage of the Public Service Contract, Transport Scotland has no plans to change the vessels.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret E Horn

Margaret Horn
Head of Ferries Policy and Contract Management
Transport Scotland