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Dear Alan

Thank you for your letter of 14 February 2019 regarding future plans for the Gourock-Dunoon ferry service and your invitation to attend the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum on 11 March 2019. Unfortunately due to diary commitments I was unable to attend, as you will know and I apologise that we did not manage to get back to you on that at the time. However this offers an opportunity to recap where we are at present.

As you know, I announced on Wednesday 12 December 2018 that responsibility for providing a passenger-only ferry service linking the railhead at Gourock with Dunoon town centre would transfer from Argyll Ferries to CalMac Ferries from 21 January 2019, under the provisions of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract. I am pleased that this transition has now been successfully completed and, while there have been challenges, the service has seen passenger numbers rise by a modest percentage between January and the end of August.

At that time, however, I made clear that the service would initially continue with the existing vessels to the current timetable and that, once the transfer has taken place, further consideration would be given to future passenger vessel, shoreside infrastructure and service requirements. Consideration will also be given to improved harbour-side facilities for passengers. Having completed the service transfer, my officials have initiated discussions on future vessel and shoreside options with CalMac and also with CMAL and Argyll and Bute Council as the owners of Gourock and Dunoon harbours respectively.

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The Clyde Ferry Stakeholder Group provides the official forum for consultation on matters pertaining to this service and is attended by officials from CalMac, CMAL and Argyll and Bute Council amongst others. However I anticipate that more focused engagement will also be appropriate as future projects take shape. I therefore want to reassure you that officials will keep the Cowal Transport Forum informed of progress.

Kind regards

PAUL WHEELHOUSE

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