

Update for Argyll Islands Strategy Group

Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan

- The draft report is being finalised for consideration by Ministers and then publication. Progress has been delayed – in part to enable the emerging outcomes of Transport Scotland's Outer Hebrides STAG study and CMAL's Mallaig / Armadale port STAG study to be taken into account. Emerging conclusions particularly on investment planning are being built into forward Budget plans ahead of the Scottish Government's Capital Spending Review this summer. Proposed investment plans cover major and small vessel fleets and harbours.

Project development and implementation

Work going forward following earlier VRDP reports, or which might also be of interest to Group members, includes the following.

Islay vessel project

- Ministers have committed to a new ferry for the Islay service. Transport Scotland and the Steering Group, which includes Argyll & Bute Council officials, are currently taking forward design and specification for the new vessel which is 'based on' the lead vessel on the route, the MV Finlaggan, as a starting point in terms of vessel dimensions, which the Islay Steering Group conveyed at the public meeting in August 2019.
- The detailed design work currently being undertaken by CMAL and the steering group, including naval architects and is looking to improve on the MV Finlaggan vessel design which includes: carrying capacity, deadweight, speed/power, fuel consumption, fuel type, emissions, freight – taking account of future demand – and passenger comfort. In addition, the group are aware of proposals from commercial operators to introduce a freight-only service and are taking cognisance of this.
- CMAL and the Steering Group are meeting with the naval architects in January 2020 and a vessel design report is expected shortly thereafter. Public information events on the Islay vessel project are expected to take place in February 2020.
- Transport Scotland are working with CalMac and CMAL on considering the ability to operate freight-only overnight sailings with the new vessel. There are a range of issues to be assessed in relation to any overnight service, including additional operating costs, revenues and wider benefits, crewing and crew accommodation, timetabling and other operational implications within the design of the vessel.
- The current timeline, subject to positive feedback from local consultees, anticipates CMAL initiating the first phase of tender period for the new Islay vessel in Summer 2020.
- Funding provision has been included for in the Transport Scotland budget, although that remains subject to the Budget setting process for 2020/21. The draft Scottish Government Budget is due to be published on 6 February 2020.

Council projects

Transport Scotland continues to liaise with the Council (and with CalMac and CMAL) on a number of key infrastructure projects on the CHFS network.

- Craignure port developments: interim and long-term – Council STAG completed and Outline Business Case for interim solutions due to report to the Council in February 2020. Working Group established including TS, CalMac, CMAL and Mull/Iona communities.
- The Ferries Plan included a long-term proposal to construct a berthing facility at Fionnphort which would allow for a longer operating day and provide a more suitable overnight berth in terms of crew access. The proposal is dependent upon new shore-side infrastructure which is now being taken forward by the harbour owners, Argyll & Bute Council, who are also looking at an improved facility on the Iona side. A feasibility study at Fionnphort has been completed with outline plans that can now move on towards the sedimentation modelling analysis and full design stage.
- Council officials have also been in discussion with Transport Scotland and CMAL over a replacement for its passenger vessel the MV Lismore.

Replacement for the Ferries Plan 2013-22

- The slides I attached last time are still largely current.
- We have been awaiting the finalisation of the first National Islands Plan (published late 2019) and the new National Transport Strategy (due for publication shortly). These will provide much of the strategic context for the development of the next Plan.
- The majority of commitments set out in the Ferries Plan 2013-22 have been or are being delivered.
- We review and publish plans for vessel replacement on an ongoing basis through the Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan reports. Three such reports have been published to date; the latest was in January 2018 (see above for the next report).
- In advance of work commencing formally on the successor to the Ferries Plan, we have undertaken in-depth appraisals of services to Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides.
- An evaluation of the impacts of the final rollout of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) fares on Clyde & Hebrides services has recently concluded and is intended for publication shortly.

- Initial plans for the scope of the next Plan have been discussed at the Islands Transport Forum and Ferry Industry Advisory Group.
- This will be an inclusive process, building on the recent extensive and ongoing engagement with island and remote/rural communities carried out across Government.
- The final version of the Plan will be concluded by December 2022 at the latest, though we aim to make some key decisions, particularly around vessel investment, well before that deadline.

Transport Scotland
20 January 2020