

Campbeltown / Ballycastle Ferry Service

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the ongoing support of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership for the reinstatement of the Campbeltown – Ballycastle Ferry service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the CPP writes to the Scottish Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson and Northern Irish First Minister, Ian Paisley, seeking the reinstatement of the £300,000 p.a. subsidy from the Northern Ireland Office and the immediate re-tender of the service.
- 2.2 That the CPP asks constituency and regional MSP's, and their own particular organisations, to write in similar terms.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A summer only ferry service between Campbeltown (Scotland) and Ballycastle (Northern Ireland) was established in the late 1990's. Necessary infrastructure was installed e.g. ferry terminal in Campbeltown, however the service proved commercially unviable due to short operating period and restricted marketing activity.
- 3.3 Significant interest in the route has been maintained across a range of strategic partners within the Highlands and Islands and Northern Ireland who recognise the potential of the route as an economic and cultural catalyst for the area and a key tourism driver for the West Highlands.
- 3.4 The Scotland/Ireland Cross Border Programme is currently being prepared by the Special EU Programmes body in Ireland and the Scottish Executive. The broad priorities are likely to support a range of activities including enterprise, tourism, transportation and environment – many of which could add value to such a transport link.
- 3.5 In September 2005 the Scottish Executive and Northern Ireland office announced the issue of tenders for the route on a basis of £1m p.a. subsidy over a five year contract period. £700,000 of the subsidy was to be met by the Scottish Executive with the balance (£300K) being met by the Northern Ireland office. No tenders were received from the four original bidders.
- 3.6 Following representations from interested parties, including potential operators, the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland office agreed in March 2006 that a final effort be made to identify any potential ferry operator, however prior to the tender being reissued the Northern Ireland office in October 2006 withdrew their funding commitment.

- 3.7 The return to devolved government within the Northern Ireland Assembly presents a significant opportunity for the funding commitment to be reasserted. The First Minister, Ian Paisley represents Ballycastle within his constituency and has always been a supporter of the route.

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