

Agenda Item	8
Report No	LA/23/17

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Lochaber Area Committee

Date: 04 October 2017

Report Title: Corran Ferry Update

Report By: Director of Community Services

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides members with information on the current operation of the Corran Ferry, giving an update on outstanding issues discussed at previous meetings e.g. smart ticketing/ future communication plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to scrutinise the information provided on the current operation of the Corran Ferry which gives an update on outstanding issues discussed at previous meetings e.g. smart ticketing/ future communication plan.

3. Background

3.1 At the last Lochaber Area Committee members:

AGREED that an additional report on the current operation of the Corran Ferry be submitted to the next meeting to provide an update on outstanding issues discussed at previous meetings e.g. smart ticketing/ future communication plan.

3.2 Reports from previous meetings are referenced in Background Papers at the end of this report.

3.3 A Glossary is included at the end of this report explaining the definitions for various acronyms that appear in the report.

4. Communication Plan

4.1 Communication Strategy

Interruptions to the service require to be speedily communicated to the public, local radio and Traffic Scotland at all times, as highlighted by the recent incidence of steering failure on 15 July 2017 which resulted in the loss of the ferry service for 5 days until repairs could be completed.

4.2 Such a loss has significant socio-economic consequences for the area. Business continuity planning for a resilient service is Highland Council's priority, and the Corran Ferry Communication Strategy has been enhanced further to ensure that ferry service issues are effectively communicated, including out of office hours. This latest version of the Communication Strategy is attached to this report in **Appendix A**.

4.3 Additional strategy measures that have been taken include:

- Shortened url (webpage address) to make the webpage more searchable www.highland.gov.uk/corranferry
- Other websites have been asked to promote the link (Northlink and Calmac)
- Timetable and fares information has been added to the webpage
- Duty Directors have been given access to the corporate Twitter feed
- Discussions are taking place with Transport Scotland to persuade them to prioritise disruptions for VMS road signage (VMS – Variable Message Sign)
- Regular tweets have been programmed to promote the webpage
- Further training is planned for staff and officers in using corporate social media accounts and responding to questions

These are explained further in **Appendix A**.

4.4 Additional improvements with regard to the internet:

- The Corran Ferry information has been given a separate webpage to avoid confusion.
- Conditions of Carriage are currently being checked and updated by Legal Services and then they will be displayed on the Corran Ferry webpage.
- Wikipedia content has been updated to include the webpage address and Twitter link

4.5 Signage

Officers have met with HITRANS and our signage supplier to improve arrangements at

both slipways to reduce sign clutter and improve clarity of message for customers. HITRANS have confirmed that they are willing to contribute seed funding for this project potentially up to 50%. It is possible that this will include some electronic signs if it will enhance the service. Similarly for additional local flip-down signage at key locations on the A82. We expect first draft drawings back from the sign supplier by late September 2017.

4.6 NADICS

Reference Transport Scotland and VMS trunk road signage mentioned in 4.3 above, HITRANS have helped by supplying appropriate NADICS officer contact details and a meeting is planned as soon as this can be arranged.

5. **Smart Ticketing**

5.1 HITRANS

HITRANS are happy to help progress such matters with the Corran Ferry to tie-in with advancing the general concept of a multi-operator ticket system.

5.2 Calmac

Transport Scotland trials with Calmac continue in order to develop Smart ticketing. We are following closely their trials at Colintraive – Rhubodach which are run by Calmac's SMART and Integrated Ticketing Manager. They are currently happy with the PDMS Bluebird hand-held devices and these have now achieved the ITSO compliance required to operate the SMART card system under the Transport Scotland guidelines. However WiFi connectivity was unreliable so they are currently trialling an alternative SIM card option for transaction data transfer.

5.3 Ultimately once they achieve a successful system it is likely that we will wish to adopt it. There would be considerable cost involved in changing system, not just in hardware but also purchase of software and systems support. It may be that we could piggy-back onto Calmac's system at an agreed rate to share/reduce overheads, with the additional incentive being to achieve Transport Scotland's SMART card aim of full integration for the end user.

5.4 Shiel Buses

To this end HITRANS and Transport Scotland have put considerable work and development innovation in to SMART ticketing with the Lochaber bus company Shiel Buses. We have spoken with their Director and he is happy to share information with us. PDMS is working with the maritime industry, whereas the bus companies are using other systems such as Ticketer (Shiel Buses) and Vix (Stagecoach & Citylink).

5.5 However Shiel buses now have significant practical experience working closely with Transport Scotland at the forefront of SMART ticketing technology. For example the latest innovation they see as a key investment is barcode readers which allow them to utilise go-mobile phone-payment technology, an important rapid-growth area.

5.6 Their systems are cloud-based, allowing live transactions which take only approximately 7 or 8 seconds, and their network connectivity is reliable at approximately 98%. However their current concern is the improvement needed in service and response times from back-up providers such as sQuid, their e-purse provider.

5.7 Of course when IT systems are down they rely on 'old technology' and continue to

handle cash, concession cards, travel passes, etc.

6. Fares

- 6.1 In his Report No HC/29/17 to Highland Council on 07 September 2017 entitled Financial Approach 2018- 2023, the Highland Council's Director of Finance explains the assumptions and pressures on Highland Council finances, including the requirement to set a balanced budget, revenue, expenditure and reserves, and resulting in a 5 year total saving requirement of £159.2m. His financial approach outlines 5 key thematic areas where work will take place to develop ways of delivering a balanced budget. These are Prioritisation, Efficiency, Redesign, Commercial and Income.
- 6.2 As appropriate there will be full consultation with members and interested parties on any such work done with regard to the Corran Ferry. The Corran Narrows crossing being a life-line service and second busiest, arguably the busiest, in Scotland, the socio-economic impact of fares have been well documented and this continues to be a primary consideration.
- 6.3 In this context all fees and charges will be reviewed going forward, therefore it is planned that proposed fares for 2018/19 for the Coran Ferry will be confirmed in February 2019 with the approval of the 2018/19 budget.

7. Maintenance and Operations

- 7.1 MV Maid of Glencoul
Following various delays which have affected her return from spring refit, the back-up vessel MV Maid of Glencoul is currently expected to finally return to her Ardgour mooring, all being well, on Monday 25 September 2017.
- 7.2 Refit this year included full overhaul of one CAT engine. Next year the other will be overhauled. This year both aft and forward propeller units required to be refurbished by Rolls-Royce due to critically worn slewing rings.
- 7.3 It is noted that in terms of vehicle-carrying capacity the Maid is no longer fit for purpose with the increased number and size of modern vehicles.
- 7.4 MV Corran
The Corran refit is planned to commence 26th October 2017, after the school holidays and after the Mull Rally (which apparently is a smaller event this year).
- 7.5 Cost pressures include a full engine service due this year for the Starboard engine (full crank shaft strip down, resolve seal and pump problems, etc.), and the Port engine next year. One generator will be overhauled this year. The valves in the steering system will be replaced this year as an interim measure until the whole system is replaced next year. A spot check by the MCA this month has resulted in us having to replace the sea/load-line/draft indicator system. This will be done in the October refit too.
- 7.6 Ardgour Slipway

Following repair issues highlighted in May 2017, Arch Henderson were commissioned to survey the slipway. Following their July 2017 survey report which highlighted urgent repairs required plus significant refurbishment repairs, they were asked to produce design drawings for these works so that the urgent work can be actioned, and so that a tender can be progressed for the larger works. Arch Henderson have confirmed that we will receive the drawings week ending 29 September 2017.

7.7 Ferry Crew

Cover for holidays, sickness and training, overtime and out of hours work for repairs, maintenance and refits, all are becoming more challenging, and increased competition in the jobs market affects recruitment and succession planning.

7.8 The existing crew continue to be commended, and once again are being nominated for the Highland Council Quality Awards category for team of the year for their hard work and commitment.

8. **Options Appraisal for Corran Ferry**

8.1 This Options Appraisal will produce a Business Plan for the operation of the Corran Ferry Service in the Short and Medium Term. At the last Lochaber Area Committee members:

AGREED that the options appraisal for the Corran Ferry is commenced in 2017/18.

8.2 On 30 August 2017 Community Services managers met HITRANS in order to scope the Options Appraisal (and to confirm that there will be no duplication in relation to the HITRANS STAG which is looking at the Long Term options for The Narrows crossing, including a fixed link).

8.3 HITRANS is happy to help and advise in relation to our Options Appraisal and a meeting for discussion with Transport Scotland will take place at the end of October.

8.4 Prior to that meeting we will firm up our scoping document. Highland Council then intend to appoint a private consultancy to conduct the Options Appraisal as recommended by the Council Redesign Board Transport Services Review 14 February 2017 (see the last Lochaber Area Committee 22 August 2017 Report No LA/14/17 referred to in the Background Papers of this report).

8.5 Scope will include investment, efficiency and reliability of service delivery, and also fares.

9. **Implications**

9.1 Resource – as discussed in this and previous reports.

9.2 Legal – none identified at present.

9.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – the Corran Ferry is a lifeline service with the associated socio-economic implications for the local community.

9.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – clean energy options require to be considered in looking at any Business Appraisal for future operations.

9.5 Risk – increased resilience will reduce risk to future service provision.

9.6 Gaelic – There are no Gaelic implications

Designation: Director of Community Services
Date: 20 September 2017
Author: Richard Porteous, Roads Operations Manager
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Background Papers:

Report No HC/29/17 by the Director of Finance to Highland Council 07 September 2017 entitled Financial Approach 2018- 2023

Recent Committee Reports on the Corran Ferry –

- Report No. LA/14/17 Lochaber Area Committee 22 August 2017
- Report No. COM47/16 Community Services Committee 03 November 2016
- Report No. COM/8/16 Community Services Committee 04 February 2016

GLOSSARY

HITRANS – Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership.

ITSO – ITSO Limited is an organisation that supports, facilitates and enables the delivery of smart, integrated and interoperable ticketing across Great Britain. The abbreviation does not stand for anything; it is the name of the brand.

MCA - The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is an executive agency of the United Kingdom working to prevent the loss of lives at sea and is responsible for implementing British and international maritime law and safety policy.

NADICS - National Driver Information and Control System.

PDMS - Plant Design Management System as it is known in the 3D CAD industry, is a customizable, multi-user and multi-discipline, engineer controlled design software package for engineering, design and construction projects in offshore and onshore.

SIM - smart card inside a mobile phone, carrying an identification number unique to the owner, storing personal data, and preventing operation if removed.

SMART - Smart ticketing is the name given to the system where an entitlement to travel (or ticket) is stored electronically on a microchip rather than being printed on a paper ticket. In most smart ticketing schemes, the microchip on which a ticket is stored

is embedded in a smartcard.

STAG - Scottish Transport Analysis Guide, is intended to provide transport practitioners working on Scottish based transport projects, or any other interested party, with access to the latest information and guidance that they will need when developing and assessing transport schemes and strategies.

VMS - A variable message sign is an electronic traffic sign often used on roadways to give travellers information about special events. Such signs warn of traffic congestion, accidents, incidents, roadwork zones.

APPENDIX A

Corran Ferry Communication Strategy

Objective:

To ensure service issues are effectively communicated, including out of office hours.

Background:

Interruptions to service need to be speedily communicated to the public, local radio and Traffic Scotland at all times.

Social media is really the only effective way of getting a message out during weekends and evenings as there is no local radio or tv news coverage at these times and any press release issued on a weekend would not be picked up by local papers until several days later.

A Corran Ferry twitter feed @corranferry <https://twitter.com/CorranFerry> was established in May 2016.

Training was provided to two local staff and support and advice was provided to encourage followers, with the use of interesting tweets and scenic pictures. There are over 600 followers, including BBC and Traffic Scotland as well as other media.

The twitter feed is published live on the Corran Ferry page on our website to ensure that people can also access information here as well.

During office hours, the tweets are retweeted on the main council twitter feed @highlandcouncil which reaches a wider audience and feeds onto the twitter feed on the website home page.

We would also encourage Traffic Scotland to use Nadics (VMS) signage, however we cannot control their prioritisation.

In order to make the webpage more easily searchable, a shortened url has been created <https://highland.gov.uk/corranferry>

Unfortunately we don't have much control over what pages Google decides are important and surfaces to their users. This means we can't guarantee that our pages rise to the top on Google.

We do have some options though: Google decides that pages that have lots of websites pointing to them are important, and also decides that pages sitting on websites that get a lot of traffic/have lots of links pointing to them are important. So if we promote our links on other, prominent websites we have a good chance at improving the ranking of these pages.

Lochaber Transport Forum, Traffic and Travel, and other websites have been notified and asked to promote these links. This should push the webpage further up the search feed in google.

Key Methods:

- Social Media @corranferry
 - Social Media – retweets (in office hours) on @highlandcouncil and council facebook page
 - Ferry Webpage <https://highland.gov.uk/corranferry>
 - live @corranferry feed on the webpage
 - Printable timetable and fares on the webpage
 - Home webpage – live council twitter feed (in office hours) <https://www.highland.gov.uk/>
 - BBC and Nevis Radio – following twitter feed (out and in hours) and press releases (in hours)
 - Traffic Scotland website <https://trafficscotland.org/>
 - @trafficscotland (follows @corranferry)
 - BBC traffic updates info@trafficscotland.org
 - Nadics VMS signage info@trafficscotland.org t: 0131 203 8732 | m: 07801 988 860 |
- e: douglas.cairns@amey.co.uk
- Local members and Ward Manager (via email)

Key contacts:

Ferry Foreman - 07766028877