

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Lochaber Area Committee

Date: 10 April 2019

Report Title: Corran Ferry Service Update

Report By: Director of Community Services

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report details the latest update regarding ongoing issues with the Corran Ferry service following:-
1. The 30 August 2018 Lochaber Area Committee approval of the Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal containing the Strategic Business Case for the Corran Ferry Service, and the requirement for a Corran Ferry Staffing Review.
 2. The 08 November 2018 Environment Development and Infrastructure Committee approval of the Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal, and the appointment for a Project Manager to develop the required Outline Business Case for the Corran Ferry Service.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
1. Support the proposal of the Corran Ferry staffing review.
 2. Consider the developments in card reader and ticketing solutions.
 3. Consider the progress to appoint a Corran Ferry Project Manager
 4. Consider the progress of Hitrans' Corran Narrows Fixed Link STAG

3. Background

- 3.1 The Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal completed in autumn 2018 provided the Strategic Business Case for the ferry service (which examined the issues and proposals associated with the Corran Ferry service in planning for the immediate and medium term future to ensuring a resilient, reliable, sustainable and affordable service).
- 3.2 There has been progress in various areas of the Corran Ferry Service since November and this report summarise the progress made.

4 Staffing Review Summary

- 4.1 The ferry is now busy for approximately 9 months of the year, shuttling constantly during much of that time, and the current crew numbers are insufficient to meet requirements.
- 4.2 On the short crossing the high volume of traffic means that purser/deckhands do not have sufficient time to collect fares, issue tickets and marshal traffic.
- 4.3 This compounds other interlinked issues. Absence, whether unplanned due to ill-health, or planned for training and familiarisation drills, or vessel refits, is currently covered by overtime. This affects rest periods and as the vessel gets busier this becomes unsustainable.
- 4.4 When ferry foreman are required to cover absence, as is often the case, it also erodes into management and supervisory time necessary to comply with Maritime Safety Legislation.
- 4.5 Sickness absence is increasing with the rising average age of the crew.
- 4.6 Overtime is also required to facilitate out-of-hours maintenance of the vessel because there is no berthing structure so the crew must be on board to power up and operate the vessel, to provide lighting and power for maintenance etc.
- 4.7 Recruitment of staff who are already trained is very rare, so training of agency staff for absence cover is time consuming, limiting and costly.
- 4.8 Training up permanent staff with the necessary skills is a lengthy process, and with the high turnover of staff at present, succession planning is a problem and becoming a risk to the service.
- 4.9 The perceived solution is two additional purser/deckhands (one for each crew) which will allow sufficient time for purser/deckhands to collect fares, issue tickets and marshal traffic, and address absence cover and succession planning
- 4.10 It is possible that future improvements to card-readers and ticketing will give pursers/deckhands more time. However it is also possible that the opposite may be true from our trials and the experience of other operators.
- 4.11 Also, there has been mention of possibly collecting passenger fares in future, and that will also impact on pursers' time, even if just for ticket checks (for example if passengers were able to buy tickets by self-service at shore based ticket machines).

- 4.12 Aside from the ticketing issues which we are working to resolve and improve (see section 5. below), the additional crew will provide the resilience that is missing in the service for essential absence cover, health and safety supervision and succession planning.
- 4.13 It is anticipated that this proposal will be funded by existing resources but will be offset by anticipated reductions in overtime. The crew are more concerned about the improvement in conditions than any loss of overtime.
- 4.14 Members are asked to support this initiative which resolves the crewing situation, providing an affordable solution to ensure the essential resilience required for sustainability of the present delivery model.
- 4.15 Meanwhile we continue to progress operational technical and efficiency issues such as ticketing (see section 5. of this report), and the main strategic project - the Corran Ferry Service Outline Business Case (see section 6. of this report).

5 Ticketing

- 5.1 There are currently several issues with ticketing. These issues include:-
- 5.2 The provider of our old push-button ticket machines is expected to close soon, so we are forced to look for new ticket machines. It is proving hard to find new machines that are as fast, waterproof, hard-wearing and reliable as the old ones.
- 5.3 Their ticketing support software is old and soon to be unsupported. This has recently given us problems with collecting card payments. Although currently resolved, the solution is time-consuming and inefficient compared to modern software.
- 5.4 Also, a modern system would be easier to interrogate for management information on carryings, records and statistics.
- 5.5 We do not have the capacity to take payment by Smart-card, or web-based sales or mobile phone pre-payment apps.
- 5.6 We sell tickets by vehicle type rather than deck-space which is an antiquated system, with complicated administration and reports.
- 5.7 We have never charged for passengers primarily because the short crossing time does not allow sufficient time to collect that number of fares with the current ticketing system.
- 5.8 Therefore we are currently actively looking at ticketing providers. This includes speaking to suppliers.
- 5.9 Also, working with Council colleagues in IT who have good knowledge of various providers already supplying other Highland Council departments who take card payments.
- 5.10 And we have a colleague visiting the ticketing expo in Birmingham next week who is examining on our behalf various suppliers and options for card readers, ticketing and software.

5.11 We hope to progress this as soon as possible. There may be immediate or interim measures we can take, and there may be other elements that will be recommended in the Corran Ferry Outline Business Case (reference section 6. of this report).

6 Project Manager

6.1 Following the appointment of the new Chief Executive and clarity around recruitment control delays in the scrutiny processes, the Project Manager post for Corran Ferry - approved on 08 November 2018 at the Environment Development and Infrastructure Committee - has now been advertised internally.

6.2 It is hoped to appoint the Project Manager to start in the coming weeks for a two-year fixed-term appointment, with a review during the project of extension options or any such requirements for the position.

6.3 The project manager will progress all aspects for the Corran Ferry Service Outline Business Case, determining future proposals for capital investment in vessels, slipway structures, service delivery methods and future fares.

6.4 This will include essential consultation with Council Members and appropriate stakeholders.

6.5 Appropriate project governance will involve reporting to the Head of Roads and Transport Services, presenting to the Harbours Board, and working closely with the area Roads Operations Manager.

6.6 The Project Manager will also be involved with current ferry operations, including development in the areas described in this report.

7 Fixed Link STAG

7.1 Highland Council's Transport Planning Manager leads on this and has had a recent update from Hitrans who agreed to deliver this STAG appraisal to look at a fixed link option for the Corran Narrows.

7.2 (STAG stands for the Scottish Government's Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance methodology which ensures that transport appraisals are presented in a clear and consistent manner).

7.3 Hitrans are now progressing this STAG. They had been waiting for the outcome of our Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal (which looked purely at the ferry service, but which provides relevant information). They were also waiting to see how the STPR2 will progress, to ensure that their STAG will be compatible and so potentially be able to feed directly into that as appropriate.

7.4 (STPR2 is the Scottish Government's second Strategic Transport Projects Review which will take place in the next three years to identify potential transport investment in Scotland over the next 20 years).

7.5 The Corran Narrows Fixed Link STAG will aim to determine:-

- The main options (bridge/tunnel)
- The engineering feasibility
- Deliverability (relative to environmental constraints)

- Potential cost
- Benefits and impacts

8 Implications

- 8.1 Resource – resource implications are outlined within this report.
- 8.2 Legal – In remaining compliant with its operator’s licence the Corran Ferry passed its latest SMS audit by the MCA on 19 December 2019.
- 8.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – the Corran Ferry Service is recognised by Transport Scotland as a lifeline service.
- 8.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – the Corran Ferry Service SMS complies with all of the necessary environmental aspects. The Corran Ferry Service Outline Business Case will consider future options.
- 8.5 Risk – Current and future Corran Ferry Service proposals focus on reducing risk and sustaining the resilience of the Corran Ferry service.
- 8.6 Gaelic – there are no implications in this report.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 26 March 2019

Author: Richard Porteous, Roads Operations Manager,
Lochaber, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey.

Background papers: [Report - LA/19/18 - Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal](#)
[Report - EDI/80/18 - Corran Ferry Service Options Appraisal](#)