

## Ferries

Scottish ferries are lifeline links for the Western and Northern Isles and Firth of Clyde for essential freight, inter-island and mainland transport for islanders, and tourist travel. CalMac operates the largest fleet in the UK so it is essential that there is a long term ship replacement programme for after the current phase of ferry orders are delivered.

The Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) on CalMac routes has made ferry travel cheaper and has brought consistency to the fares structure. But there is evidence that the relative level of charges for vehicles and passengers has encouraged a shift towards more car traffic and less “classic” passenger travel by rail/bus and ferry. This has three adverse effects:

- Vehicle space on ferries is often oversubscribed, particularly in the summer
- Fleet replacement will have to increasingly provide larger and more expensive ships
- Use of the more environmentally friendly rail and bus connections will decline

Investment in port facilities should make it easier for “classic” passengers to interchange from bus or train to ferry. The current situation at Ardrossan, where the harbour has not been upgraded by Peel Ports for the new larger Arran ferries, necessitating diversion of Brodick ferries to the longer sea route to Troon Harbour which is not rail-connected, should be rectified as quickly as possible.

Our recommendations for future ferry policy are:

1. Ensure the lifeline ferry routes to the Western, Northern and Clyde Isles have good rail and/or bus and coach connections
2. Revise the RET formula to reduce passenger rates and increase car rates: this could be cost neutral for a car plus two passengers, but would make it cheaper to travel by ferry and train/bus rather than taking a car
3. Develop the huge tourist potential of scenic ferry journeys with combined rail/coach/sail tours
4. Maintain a contingency planning helpdesk for missed connections due to poor weather or other ferry delays

Scottish ferries provide an unrivalled tourist experience which could be further developed by marketing combined rail and sail excursions.

Ship design should provide sufficient outdoor accommodation to allow visitors to enjoy the scenery.

In the longer term, the route network should be reviewed to keep islands reliably connected in worsening weather brought about by climate change. Two examples:

- The “overland” route to Islay and Jura, which would require road upgrades and new construction through Jura, may have to be looked again if sea conditions regularly cause suspension of the exposed ferry routes from Kennacraig
- The Corran Ferry (Scotland’s second busiest ferry route) could potentially be replaced by a bridge across the Corran Narrows linking to the Ardgour-Strontian road. Upgrading the road onwards from Strontian to Lochaline would then create a reliable and fast route to Mull for cars and buses via the short ferry

crossing from Lochaline to Fishnish as an alternative to the longer and more exposed ferry route from Oban.

Both of these possibilities would significantly reduce the number of CalMac major ferries needed.