

Public Consultation for Islands Connectivity Plan - Strategic Approach Paper and Vessels and Ports Plan

Consultation Identifier Questions

Q1. Are you completing this on behalf of yourself or an organisation?

- Individual
- Organisation

Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community

Q2. If an organisation, please list below.

Q3. What statement best describes your living situation?

- I live on the mainland the majority of the time
- I live on a Scottish island or peninsula the majority of the time

SRITC represents a wide variety of communities across the mainland and islands. Therefore, we have responded to this question accordingly.

Q4. If you live on a Scottish island or peninsula, please comment below which one.

SRITC represents a wide variety of communities across the mainland and islands. Therefore, we have responded to this question accordingly.

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Q5. What age category are you in?

- Under 16s
- 16 to 18
- 19 to 21
- 22 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 59
- 60 and over

The above answer reflects the age of the person writing the response, as we understand its importance in terms of monitoring for the Scottish Government. In reality, the SRITC community has a variety of ages amongst its members.

Q6. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- Yes, limited a lot
- Yes, limited a little
- No

The above answer reflects the abilities of the person writing the response, as we understand its importance in terms of monitoring for the Scottish Government. In reality, the SRITC community has a variety of abilities amongst its members.

Q7. What do you mainly use the ferry services for?

- For Business
- For Employment/Education
- For Personal/Leisure
- All of the above

The community that is part of SRITC uses the ferries for all purposes.

Q8. How frequently do you use the ferry services?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Weekly
- Monthly

Transport Scotland

- Seasonally (Summer period)

The island members of our community use these services regularly.

Main Consultation Questions

Themes, Vision and Priorities

Transport Scotland has gathered feedback from previous workshops and consultations to identify priorities for the future of Island transport connectivity: ferry networks, supported by the integration with other transport services. This information has contributed to the development of themes, which are the focus for the Islands Connectivity Plan.

The following key themes emerged:

- Community voice and transparency
- Reliability and resilience
- Accessibility
- Timetables, unplanned and essential travel
- Integration of services
- Capacity and demand
- Freight
- Vessels and ports
- Low carbon and environmental impact
- Ferry fares
- Local authority services

Q9. Do you think these key themes capture the main aspects of transport connectivity for island and peninsula communities?

Yes (*somewhat*)

No

Please explain your answer.

From the engagement that SRITC has had with its community concerning Islands Connectivity, many of these themes emerged as key issues in a similar manner. However, the Plan does not give a sense of priority to the themes, indicating instead that these are of somewhat equal importance. (continued below)

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Reliability and resilience. The ferries are key, lifeline services upon which island communities rely not just economically, but for key services as well. Restoring the ferries to reliable, regular operation is the absolute top priority.

Cost of services. The cost of ferry services are a significant barrier to the economic development and prosperity of island communities. They impose significant additional costs for economic sectors which island communities stand in a good position to lead on, such as renewable energy.

Representation. Island communities often feel that their views are not heard or adequately considered by senior decision makers with responsibility for island connectivity. This needs to change.

Integration with other transport services. Often, this is non-existent, with each mode seemingly more interested in keeping to their own timetable as opposed to being flexible in providing seamless, integrated services. This is especially important to tackle to meet the objectives of NTS2.

Based on feedback and discussions with key stakeholders and drawing on Scotland's National Transport Strategy 2 and the National Islands Plan, we have developed a draft vision and associated priorities for ferry services, supported by other transport services.

Draft Vision

Scotland's ferry services, supported by other transport services, will be safe, reliable, affordable and inclusive for residents, businesses and visitors enabling transport connectivity, sustainability and growth of island and peninsula communities and populations.

Draft Priorities

Priority 1: Reliable and Resilient

Reliable and resilient ferry services that meet the needs of communities and businesses and support the transition to a well-being economy which is fair, green and growing.

Priority 2: Accessible

Ferry services that are accessible and provide easy to use and affordable transport connectivity for all users.

Transport Scotland

Priority 3: Integrated

Ferry services that enable sustainable and active travel choices which support our health and well-being and make our Island and other ferry dependent communities great places to live, work and visit.

Priority 4: Low Carbon

Ferry services that take actions to reduce the negative environmental impact of their operations and help to achieve Scotland's net-zero targets.

Q10. Do you believe the draft vision captures the aspirations of island and peninsula communities for their future ferry services?

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

Whilst the wording of the vision in the most part is reasonable as a vision, one key aspect missing within the vision that makes it relatable and real is something within it that reflects the impacts upon islanders and their communities. We would therefore recommend adding a second sentence that makes it clear what islanders and their communities can expect to see from this plan:

“For Islanders, this means that the ferries that they use frequently will be on time, will be affordable, be accessible for everyone, will compliment how they live their lives, and they will be able to get door-to-door with the upmost ease regardless of how they travel.”

Q11. Do you think the 4 draft priorities reflect what island and peninsula communities see for their future ferry services?

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

Priorities 1, 2, and 3 are priorities that members of the SRITC community agree with. Priority 4, while members of the SRITC community broadly agree with this priority, we consider it as a necessary outcome of the work that will need to be done as opposed to a high priority in its own right.

Community Voice and Transparency

We acknowledge the importance of empowering community voice and transparency in communications. The current methods of engagement that are used by operators to inform communities are through email and webpage updates, with further communications shared through relevant Ferry Committees and Transport Forums.

Local authorities and Scottish Government/Transport Scotland use engagement methods such as through project reference groups, stakeholder groups and webpage updates.

However, we have heard from communities that more can be done to take account of their views when it comes to decisions on ferry services and that there is a lack of clarity on how decisions are made.

Q12. Are there other ways of engaging with communities and stakeholders that would benefit decision making on ferry services, including vessels and ports projects?

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

All community engagement activity needs to be based on the principle that the communities most affected must be given a meaningful influence on the decision being made as part of any strategy or project. The methodologies mentioned are useful as consultation exercises. What we would argue is that this needs to go further.

One example could be is representatives of island communities being present on Boards responsible for decision making. Whether this be the Boards making decisions on ferry services, as part of tender exercises for new projects and services, or on specific project boards for individual projects. This should be with the equivalent voting rights of other Board members, and those individuals nominated by island communities being tasked with representing the views of community members as part of their role on these boards.

Accessibility

We propose introducing an Accessibility Standard that would be in addition to the legal requirements and could act as guidance for all ferry services. This is to ensure that our ferry services, vessels and ports are easy to use for all, while recognising that people have different needs and capabilities.

The Standard could include standards such as inclusive and disability training to be carried out frequently and an accessibility review carried out periodically on ferry services, ports and vessels.

Q13. Do you think an Accessibility Standard is a good idea?

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

In principle, an accessibility standard is a good idea. We would advocate that, as opposed to being guidance, that such a standard is integrated within contracts for ferry services and projects so that those bound by that standard can be judged by it, and be sanctioned where they fall short. This can be done through contract terms and conditions and performance metrics.

We would also urge the Scottish Government to, when developing this standard, closely engage with the island communities. This is so that all aspects of accessibility are considered, as opposed to a narrow transport-related definition of accessibility.

Q14. What do you think should be included in this standard?

Please explain your answer.

As mentioned in our previous answer, what is critical for this standard is that it is one that is enforceable. We would recommend that compliance with any such standard is included in the contracts for future services and projects.

We also recommend that island communities, especially groups with protected characteristics, are closely engaged in the development of this standard. This is so this standard reflects their accessibility needs.

Reliability and Resilience

Community feedback highlighted that the reliability and resilience of ferry services needs to be seen as a priority due to the impact on communities, businesses and visitors when ferry services are disrupted.

Q15. Do you agree or disagree that the first priority of the Islands Connectivity Plan should be to improve reliability and increase resilience of ferry services?

Agree

Transport Scotland

Disagree

Please explain your answer.

Poor accessibility has significant impacts upon the islands of Scotland. Whether that be connections to the mainland or connections between islands themselves. This is not a matter of the simple provision of a service, but the degree to which islanders can rely on these services.

SRITC has been told many stories of significantly disrupted personal and business travel due to cancelled or late running ferries. This has a significant impact on people's lives. Therefore, the first priority to recover the service is to get existing services running reliably, before any significant upgrades can be considered.

Timetable, Essential and Urgent Travel

We are aware that as ferry travel has become more popular, some services have become more difficult to accommodate short-notice spaces for essential vehicle travel by island residents and key workers.

Q16. Do you have any suggestions as to how the booking process could release vehicle space on services when island travel with a vehicle is essential?

Please explain your answer.

We have no specific suggestions in relation to providing priority access for vehicles on essential journeys as part of the booking process. We would highly recommend, however, that the Scottish Government works closely with island communities to define what is considered to be priority or essential travel. This would have the twin benefit of priorities reflecting the needs of local people, as well as a clear understanding to local communities and to passengers on what the relative priorities of different types of trips are.

Integration of Services

Journeys on our ferry networks are often only part of a longer journey between the traveller's ultimate origin and destination. The end-to-end journey can combine the use of several transport modes which can include public transport and/or active travel (walking, wheeling, and cycling) or a private vehicle. An integrated transport network that allows easier transition between the ferry and public transport or active travel is a key enabler to encourage the use of our ferry networks without the need for a private vehicle. This has benefits to the user such as making the transport system more accessible, making better use of capacity on ferries and contributing to net zero.

Q17. What would encourage you to use public transport or active travel as part of your overall journey when using the ferry services?

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The Scottish Government is correct in that trips to and from islands are part of a wider chain of trips, and ensuring that this chain works well is especially critical for active travel and public transport. The reality is that the whole journey needs to be seamless, including steps of the journey some distance from the crossing itself. But from our evidence, we have identified a number of factors specifically relating to the crossings and the immediate trips that, when developed with the close engagement of the community, could have a significant impact on the number of people using sustainable transport:

Close working with local sustainable tourism initiatives. There is significant potential for many islands to be at the forefront of sustainable and ecotourism, with sustainable travel being a bit part of that. Local tourism initiatives, such as Visit Arran, often have close links with smaller businesses and communities undertaking such work. Simply by promoting this work as part of trips to, from, and between islands, more people can travel by public transport, walking, and cycling.

Reviewing operational procedures in the event of delays. A late running or cancelled train or ferry can mean a missed connection, and sometimes a several hour or even overnight stay until the next service. In instances where an operational delay significantly disrupts passengers who are not using a private car, alternative transport and potentially overnight accommodation must be provided by the party responsible for the delay. This needs to be written into the contracts and performance agreements of all future operators with public sector contracts (notably ferries and ScotRail).

Development of mobility hubs at ferry ports. Ferry ports need to be developed in a manner that ensures that access by public transport, walking, and cycling to ferry services is safe and convenient. Such mobility hubs at ferry ports will need to be scaled to reflect the potential passenger use and scale of local services at each port.

Facilities for active travel on ferries. Current facilities for active travel on many ferry services are somewhat basic, in some cases with bicycles being stored in a corner of the car deck. Facilities for cycling on ferries need to be dedicated and be more than simple areas to store bicycles.

Considering island crossings as a holistic whole. While ferry crossings are the most popular way of travelling to, from, and between islands, other options like air services exist. But these need to be booked separately. If passengers were able to book trips to, from, and between islands, on tickets that are valid on multiple services (subject to pre-booking) as well as local public transport, this is a more attractive offer to potential public transport users.

Capacity and Demand

We have heard that the space for vehicles on busy ferry routes fills up quickly at popular times, especially in summer. This makes it difficult for residents of those islands, and visiting key workers, to travel with a vehicle at short notice.

We propose to address ferry capacity issues by:

- Using refreshed community needs assessments to identify different options for service frequencies and vessel size
- Collaborate with operators and communities to identify ways of using existing and planned capacity better
- Identify the key “pinch points” on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service and Northern Isles Ferry Service networks and consider options for additional vehicle capacity where this is practical, beneficial, and affordable.

Q18. Do you agree or disagree with this approach to dealing with ferry capacity due to increased demand?

- Agree
 Disagree

Please explain your answer.

Transport Scotland

SRITC has no specific strong view on this. Our only statement on this is that the Community Needs Assessment process should not be primarily based upon existing or potential demand, but based upon metrics and assessment criteria defined in close partnership with island communities across Scotland.

Freight

The Scottish Parliament's Net Zero Emission Transport (NZET) Committee recommended reconsideration of wider policy on the provision of freight capacity on our ferry routes; and the point at which profitable businesses should no longer be reliant on public subsidy of their freight costs.

Q19. In what way do you think the costs of island freight transport could be shared differently between users and public funding?

SRITC has no specific comments in relation to this question.

Vessels and Ports

To renew the vessel and port assets, required for the long-term sustainability of our current networks, prioritising where to invest is required due to budget constraints in the current financial environment. We are proposing that the following factors are taken into consideration when making decisions on prioritisation:

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- The sustainability of ferry services by maintaining and increasing reliability and resilience.
- Ferry routes and services providing the primary transport connection for people, goods and services required for the sustainability of each community.
- Those communities identified as at greater risk of depopulation and economic decline.

Q20. Do you agree or disagree that these are the right factors to consider when making decisions on prioritisation?

- Agree
 Disagree

Please explain your answer.

SRITC generally agrees that these are some of the right factors when making decisions on prioritisation. But what is critical is an understanding as to what the counterfactual position is in relation to investment. This is especially important for reliability. For example, if no investment was made and reliability continued to worsen, what impact would this have on the sustainability of a route is as important a question in making the case for a scheme as the impact of the scheme itself on improving reliability. Such an assessment method is common among other transport schemes.

Q21. Currently the factors above are not ranked. Do you think they should be?

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

Each of these factors are not only different to different stakeholders, but will also be different to different communities. Whilst SRITC would advocate for investment that closely engages with local communities in its development and optioneering, consistent assessment criteria is needed to assess different schemes seeking to access limited funds.

Low Carbon and Environmental Impact

A Strategic Environmental Assessment will be carried out on the of the Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure environmental and sustainability aspects of the Plan are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan.

Q22. What environmental issues do you believe should be captured in the Strategic Environmental Assessment in relation to this plan?

SRITC has no specific comments to make in relation to what issues should be captured in the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Please explain your answer.

The Scottish Government committed in the Climate Change Plan to 30% of the ferry fleet, owned by Scottish Government, to be low emission by 2032. The Scottish Government is committed to looking at how we can use hybrid and low carbon

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energy resources for the fleet, which is currently taking place through the small vessels replacement programme.

Q23. Do you have any other suggestions in how ferry services can contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions?

The primary means by which ferry services can reduce carbon emissions is through replacement of the existing fleet with lower carbon alternatives, and greater integration with sustainable transport services. The latter we have answered to previously in our response to question 17.

In relation to the ferry services themselves, we would welcome an acceleration of the 30% target for low emission ferries. There is a significant opportunity in Scotland for battery-powered ferries, not just in terms of the short distance of some crossings, but also to accelerate plans for renewable energy across the islands by being a customer.

Please share your views.

Ferry Fares

The Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) system of fares is in place across the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) network for passengers, cars, coaches and small (under 6 metres long) commercial vehicles. A different fares structure remains in place for the Northern Isles.

A key aim of RET was to allow ferry users to pay a fixed element plus a rate per mile travelled, which is linked to the cost of the equivalent journey length by road in a private vehicle. RET also resolved many previous issues of complexity in the fares offering and fare-inconsistency across routes, within the CHFS network.

The 3 key principles of RET are:

- **Simplicity and Transparency** - the basis for fares must have an established rationale and simple for a user to understand.
- **Comparability and Consistency** - the basis for fares should be the same for each community.
- **Public Sector Affordability versus Community Sustainability** - fare-setting needs to balance the different requirements of public sector affordability with sustaining communities.

Q24. Do you agree or disagree with retaining the current RET principles set out above, as the basis of a ferry fares structure?

- Agree
 Disagree

Please explain your answer.

A primary consideration in determining fares and fare policy needs to be the impact upon the communities served by such services. People who live in island communities face significant costs as a result of high ferry fares for what are often essential trips. Consequently, the focus should not be on fare revenue maximisation (taking advantage of the fact that there is no other choice in many instances), but on affordability. Whilst the RET makes fares simpler, and in theory better for the consumer, this should not be at the expense of lower fares for island communities.

Introducing different levels of fares such as “islander fares” on Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service routes, could increase overall fare revenue and keep services more affordable for islanders. It could also allow use of different fare types to tackle overcrowding of vehicle-deck capacity, on busier sailings through the year.

Q25. Do you agree or disagree with the option to create different levels of fares for different types of users, e.g. islander and non-island residents.

- Yes
 No

Please explain your answer.

SRITC is unable to answer without more information on the likely impact on island communities, as opposed to hypotheticals stated in the question. Whilst our general view is that affordable fares for islanders is something that should be sought as a goal, this need not necessarily come as a result of revenue maximisation for other markets, especially where those markets could also be price sensitive (such as visitor travel which is often discretionary).

Q26. Which of these groups do you believe should be eligible for islander fares?

- Permanent residents
- Second homeowners
- People who work, but do not live, on islands
- Island residents who are currently students and living at mainland addresses during term-time
- Service providers
- Nominated friends & family
- None

Without understanding the impact of any proposal on island communities, SRITC has chosen not to answer this question.

Q27. Do you agree or disagree with a fares structure that both encourages passengers to travel without a private vehicle and incentivises travel at quieter periods?

- Agree
- Disagree

Please explain your answer. If other, please add further information.

SRITC is unable to answer without more information on the likely impact on island communities, as opposed to hypotheticals stated in the question. Whilst our general view is that affordable fares for islanders is something that should be sought as a goal, this need not necessarily come as a result of revenue maximisation for other markets, especially where those markets could also be price sensitive (such as visitor travel which is often discretionary).