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TOURISM
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Your voice in tourism matters

Scottish Government Consultation on Islands Connectivity Plan: Strategic Approach and Vessels and Ports Plan

Scottish Tourism Alliance Submission (3 May 2024)

Themes

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

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

Yes X

No

Please explain your answer

The STA welcomes the work that has been undertaken by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to identify the main priorities for the future of island transport connectivity. Scotland's islands are an integral part of our visitor offer, acting as a major draw to tourists from around the UK and worldwide who want to experience these unique and beautiful destinations.

As set out in the national tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, "Connectivity – proactively investing in the right transport and digital connectivity" is one of the six

conditions of success to achieve the vision of our country being the world leader in 21st century tourism.

Ensuring that we have a reliable and resilient ferry service with accompanying public transport and digital infrastructure, is integral to achieving this vision.

The Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group has identified ‘sustainable transport’ as one of its priority missions among five key areas to achieve the ambitions of Scotland Outlook 2030, along with driving investment and sustainable growth as part of the Scottish Government’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET).

Vision and priorities

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.

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.

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

Yes X

No

Please explain your answer

The STA is supportive of the vision set out, including that it acknowledges the importance of the ferry network being supported by other transport services. Along with ‘safe reliable,

affordable and inclusive’, we would suggest that the vision includes the word ‘resilient’ (as set out under the priorities) to capture the importance of ensuring we have a ferry service in place that can meet future challenges as they emerge.

In order to deliver on the vision set out in Scotland Outlook 2030 to be the world leader in 21st century tourism, we would suggest adding the phrase “high quality” to aspire to delivering the best possible travel experience for tourists and members of the community.

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

Yes X

No

Please explain your answer

The STA believes that the four draft priorities effectively reflect what we have heard from tourism organisations and businesses in our island and peninsula communities. A reliant and resilient ferry service remains at the top of their priorities, above the other priorities set out.

We continue to hear concerns that disruption to ferry services, timetabling delays, and ongoing uncertainty about the delivery of new ferries and changes needed to ports to support these vessels is having a significant knock-on impact on accommodation providers, tour operators, visitor attractions, festivals and events, and the wider visitor economy.

Due to uncertainty and disruption to ferry services, the tourism and hospitality sector is regularly facing cancellations, while they struggle at times to get the goods and supplies they need to successfully run their businesses.

We strongly believe that Priority 1 needs to reflect the need for timely decisions and communication concerning CalMac ferry timetabling decisions, which has a serious impact on people delaying or cancelling visitor accommodation bookings, instead choosing to stay in another visitor destination.

This year we heard from Islay tourism businesses that the late release of the island’s summer timetable and a reduction in ferry capacity over this busy period risks having a seriously negative impact on the Fèis Ìle – The Islay Festival, which is reportedly worth up £10 million to the local economy and draws visitors from across the world.

With less than 100 days until the festival, people visiting, suppliers and performers had no way of booking their ferry trip, while the decision to not have additional sailings as normal during the nine-day long event starting at the end of May has had serious implications for the festival and local visitor economy.

Up to 20,000 people from around the world are usually expected to visit Islay and Jura during this period, but in March the festival warned an estimated 40% of visitors could not get a sailing, while the majority of visitors are unable to bring their vehicles on the ferry to

move around the island during their stay.

We also ask that 'visitors' be added to Priority 1 to capture the importance of ensuring reliable and resilient ferry services that meet the needs of visitors to the islands and continues to support the local visitor economy, alongside festivals and events.

Building on the Vision, Priorities 2 and 3 also need to capture the importance of ensuring a better integrated travel system, which is inter-connected to ensure that both visitors and members of the community have a seamless travel experience, particularly those travelling by foot and needing reliable public transport options to travel to and from mainland ferry ports and when they arrive at their island destination.

We go into further detail about the importance of this under the consultation section on 'Integration of services'.

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.

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

Please explain your answer

The STA has also received feedback from some of its island membership that there continues to be island residents that feel that there is a lack of a community voice when it comes to decision-making – both concerning day-to-day, medium- and long-term decisions.

We have heard frustrations from island members concerning the lack of input from local businesses when decisions are made about timetabling and capacity decisions (e.g. Islay's experience cited in the last answer). It's felt that this valuable local input is either not being heard or sought during these times.

Some of our membership have raised concern that CalMac's Ferries Community Board is failing to feedback and communicate discussions directly to the communities themselves.

As a result, we believe there needs to be a review concerning how the Board engages and communicates with local residents.

Improved engagement suggested to us, includes:

- ***Ensuring there is more opportunities for engagement and communication via digital platforms to ensure better transparency, which takes into consideration "consultation fatigue" and is not too burdensome;***
- ***Holding more engagement sessions at evenings and weekends so people working during the week and running businesses can attend. We've had feedback that some consultation and engagement events have regularly taken place during times they are more likely to be attended by retired members of the community;***
- ***Ensuring that engagement events happen across different parts of island areas;***
- ***Greater opportunities to open up the floor to questions at engagement sessions;***
- ***Effectively using island Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to facilitate proactive engagement with the wider island business community; and***
- ***Identifying new and innovative ways to more proactively engage with the island community by visiting them, rather than asking people to attend meetings. This includes opportunities to visit high schools to engage with young people, visiting people running local businesses, and speaking to locals and visitors travelling on ferries or waiting at ports about their travel experience.***

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.

5. Do you think an accessibility standard is a good idea?

Yes X

No

Please explain your answer

The STA welcomes the introduction of an accessibility standard and accompanying training that supports the different needs and capabilities of people using ferry services, vessels and ports.

The national tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, includes the strategic priority 'Our Memorable Experience' and a commitment that "We will ensure Scotland is an inclusive

and accessible destination, enabling all visitors to travel widely and enjoy the full range of the country's visitor experiences."

VisitScotland has previously reported that 1 in 5 people in the UK are disabled and that their collective spending power is worth £249 billion. As a result, improving the accessibility of travelling by ferry will deliver significant economic benefits for the visitor economy of Scotland's islands, along with delivering important social benefits for people with additional support needs and their carers and families.

A recent survey by 56 Degree Insights of over 1,000 people in Scotland found that 74% of respondents living with health conditions and impairments are not planning a holiday (Scottish Tourism Index, January 2024). For over half of respondents with any health condition (53%), travelling to and from destinations was cited as one their main concerns. For those who have a neurodivergent condition, concern about travelling significantly rose to among 74% – their most significant concern.

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

Please explain your answer

As set out in our previous answer, concern about travelling is a significant barrier to going on holiday for people who are neurodivergent and their families.

Building on assistance already offered to passengers requiring additional support while travelling on ferries, we believe that the standard and training should ensure it captures those with disabilities, conditions or chronic illnesses that are not immediately obvious to others, such as autism, acquired/traumatic brain injury, dementia, epilepsy, partial sight and hearing loss.

We would expect the user group established to develop the standard would represent a variety of different groups that support people with hidden disabilities, such as Alzheimer's Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland, RNIB Scotland, MS Society and Headway. We would also recommend the needs of older people travelling be taken into consideration by working with Age Scotland.

Just as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Inverness and Highlands & Islands airports have adopted the globally recognised Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme, we would advise all ferries to ensure all staff recognise the discreet sunflower lanyard that indicates passengers may need additional time, support or understanding. The scheme for hidden disabilities is already recognised by Condor Ferries, Hovertravel, Irish Ferries, P&O Ferries and Red Funnel.

Examples voiced to us that we recommend be taken into account as part of the accessibility standard include:

- ***Dedicated quiet spaces on ferries and at ferry terminals, with lower lighting levels;***
- ***More Changing Places facilities on ferries;***
- ***Clearer signage at ports for those who have requested to board early;***

- *Offering clearly signposted digital forms to arrange assistance when booking on the website, rather than just the current customer services number to phone;*
- *Promoting Relay UK to help people who cannot hear on the phone or have difficulties with their speech by providing a text-to-speech and speech-to-text translation service;*
- *Early and clear communication of changes to services via multiple channels, including email, text alerts and digital channels;*
- *Priority pass for onboard catering services to avoid queues;*
- *A visual guide available for boarding and embarking at each port;*
- *Further rollout of National Autistic Society developed sensory bags; and*
- *Support to disembark ferries earlier than other passengers to avoid queues. CalMac's early boarding option works well, but there is not the same support to disembark before others (e.g. priority access to exits if leaving on foot, earlier access to car before people begin queuing).*

Also, accessibility training should be for all members of staff to ensure the best possible user experience, whether it be booking assistance with customer services, port staff helping people board, or buying food and drinks from the ferry café.

At the same time, greater accessibility should be carefully balanced with not pulling ferry services if specific disability access is not available for a crossing, e.g. lifts are not working. Early and clear communication, with support to make alternative arrangements, must be key in these situations to avoid further disruption to ferry services.

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.

7. 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 X

Disagree

Please explain your answer

The STA strongly supports urgent action be taken to improve the reliability and resilience of our ferry services.

We must ensure that the day-to-day life of islanders are no longer impacted by the unreliability of their ferry services and that they are not encouraged to move away at a time when we need more than ever people of working age and their families to live in these communities and to support the local visitor economy.

Visitors must have confidence that they can reliably travel to and from our unique and beautiful islands, while accommodation businesses and the local visitor economy must no longer be impacted by regular cancellations due to travel uncertainty and ferries being pulled at key visitor times.

If we are to expect visitors from across the UK and the world to continue visiting our island destinations, for their local visitor economies to be protected and have the opportunity to grow, then reliability and resilience of our ferry services must be addressed first.

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.

8. 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?

No.

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.

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

Please explain your answer

As set out in the national tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, "Connectivity – proactively investing in the right transport and digital connectivity" is one of the six conditions of success for Scotland to become the world leader in 21st century tourism.

To achieve this, we set out the need for user-friendly transport options, along with enhanced planning and coordination between the tourism sector and transport operators.

Alongside improved infrastructure to help all visitors seamlessly end-to-end travel between destinations, this must be accompanied by improvements to communication

between different travel operators to better manage timetabling and disruption caused by cancellations, delays and strike action.

Building on Scotland Outlook 2030, one of the key asks of both the Scottish and UK governments in STA's Policy Agenda for 2024-2028 is that they "Deliver better transport and digital connectivity: ensuring an enhanced and seamless visitor experience and protecting the sustainability of our local communities and businesses, while realising innovation and future-proofing opportunities for the sector."

This includes improving our rail network's reliability, frequency of service, and expanding current capacity to improve the visitor experience, which will have an integral role in supporting sustainable and active travel choices for those travelling to and from ferry ports on the mainland, along with bus services.

More also needs to be done to support barrier-free travel, with timely communication and integrated smart ticketing across the transport network and linked offers for different forms of public transport, supporting seamless travel for both visitors and local communities.

If cars are to be left at home, then the creation of more flight routes, offering lower-cost and more frequent flights connecting islands to the Scottish mainland are needed, supporting visitors to more easily travel to the island for leisure and business purposes. We welcome that the draft Islands Connectivity Plan sets out a commitment to wider action on aviation for all of Scotland, including Highlands and Islands air travel.

The STA further believes there is a need for Transport Scotland and different travel operators such as Scotrail and Stagecoach to work together to better engage with visitor representatives, such as destination management organisations (DMOs), tourism and hospitality businesses, and island communities to inform their timetabling decisions and public transport provision.

Tourism organisations, local businesses and members of the community can be part of the solution and provide a valuable insight that can help come up with informative, innovative, low-cost ideas when issues arise. It is important to recognise the valuable role that island DMOs are already playing when there are ferry cancellations and disruption.

For example, we have heard that there is limited time between ferries arriving from Arran to the mainland and catching the connecting train. If ferries are delayed, then it's regularly the case that those travelling as foot passengers will miss their train. When there are delays and disruptions this has a knock-on impact on contingency planning for foot passengers. If we are to encourage more active travel and foot passengers, then it's integral this is addressed.

Also important is ensuring that there are readily available transport options when foot passengers arrive on islands, especially since off-peak travel is proposed in the Islands Connectivity Plan strategy. Increased bike and electric bike provision is very welcome, but not everyone will be physically able to actively travel and will need to rely on public

transport if they are to leave their vehicles at home, such as older people, young families, disabled people, etc. Reliable public transport options are needed once people arrive on the island from the ferry and for the duration of their stay.

To further encourage people to not take their vehicles on the ferry, there is a need to improve parking facilities and electric vehicle charging points at mainland ferry terminals and connecting train stations to support people to leave their vehicles behind, alongside offering cheaper parking options.

Further consideration is also needed about access to public transport where ferries are regularly being uprooted to different ports, which do not have the same transport links in place compared to where passengers normally disembark.

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

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

Agree X

Disagree

Please explain your answer

The STA would caution the need to ensure that this approach does not negatively impact on visitors’ access to ferries during times of increased demand, particularly during key festivals and events that attract tourists to islands.

If tourists struggle to book a ferry crossing during peak visitor times, there is a risk of damaging the reputation of Scotland’s islands as an attractive visitor destination, leading to people booking holidays elsewhere or cancelling bookings. This in turn will negatively impact on the local visitor economy, further harming vulnerable tourism and hospitality businesses.

We also recommend that as well as collaborating with operators and communities, there must be meaningful stakeholder engagement with tourism and hospitality businesses,

particularly accommodation providers, to identify ways of using existing and planned capacity better.

For example, in the Hebrides the typical changeover day is a Saturday and there are challenges sourcing enough service staff to clean properties to meet visitor demand. There is also not enough ferry capacity for all properties to changeover on the same day – leaving some vacant. To help manage demand better and spread the volume, there is potentially an opportunity to incentivise mid-week travel with cheaper fares.

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.

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

Please explain your answer

n/a

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:

- 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

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

Agree X

Disagree

Please explain your answer

We agree with the factors outlined for making decisions on prioritisation. Given the importance of tourism and hospitality to supporting local island communities and providing employment, the STA believes that an additional factor that should be considered when prioritising vessels and ports is “ferry routes that are crucial to supporting the island’s visitor economy and Scotland’s wider tourism offer.”

Forward consideration of changing visitor demand and traveller behaviour is also needed to be able to respond the new opportunities.

For islands such as Arran and Islay that are popular visitor destinations, the impact on ferry services over the last few years, particularly during the busy summer season, has had a detrimental impact on tourism and hospitality businesses. Every summer, island destinations face another year of uncertainty and disruption as a result of the ongoing ferry crisis.

Frustrations from our membership have been shared with us that the only berth that the chartered catamaran Alfred can access to reach Arran is at Troon, increasing travel time to the island and where there are poorer rail connections. Furthermore, the two new CalMac ferries being built at Ferguson shipyard planned for Arran cannot use the Ardrossan port. We urge the Scottish Government, North Ayrshire Council and Peel Ports to urgently revisit proposals to upgrade the harbour at Ardrossan.

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

Yes

No X

Please explain your answer

The factors outlined are all interconnected and need to be considered in situ to properly inform decisions on prioritisation.

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.

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

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

Please explain your answer

Ferries must continually review ways of working to adopt innovative practices to support the national net zero and circular economy agendas.

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

We do not have any further suggestions. Our tourism and hospitality sector full supports Scotland's ambition to become a net-zero society. New vessels being built to support the ferry network will have a key role in utilising new hybrid and low carbon energy to reduce carbon emissions. However, we ask that urgently addressing the current ferry crisis impacting on local communities, businesses and visitors take precedence.

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.

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.

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

Agree X

Disagree

Please explain your answer

The RET has delivered cheaper ferry fares that continue to support the local visitor economy by extending the tourist season and attracting more tourists to our island destinations. It offers a simpler to understand fare system and ensures that there is a consistent fee structure travelling between islands.

We strongly urge the Scottish Government to retain the RET scheme, which makes a valuable contribution to Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector, as well as supporting islanders to visit the mainland.

We believe changes to the fares system is not the way to manage demand and the continued shortcomings of the ferry network.

Any increase in fares that discourages visitors will have a significant impact on local businesses, with visitors already potentially facing an added visitor levy charge on top of their travel costs.

The RET scheme must be accompanied by complementary investment to support the impact of greater volumes of tourists visiting the islands, with the right infrastructure in place and timely vessel replacement. Supporting the important work of island DMOs in managing tourism in their localities is also integral to achieving this.

The independent review 'Evaluation of Road Equivalent Tariff on the Clyde and Hebridean Network' found across the wider Clyde and Hebrides network that there was clear evidence of an extension of the tourism season for most islands, greater numbers of visitors and, as a result, increased business confidence and greater investment in the tourism sector (Stantec, prepared for Transport Scotland, 2020).

By 2018, RET had increased passenger and car carryings by 11.6% and 20.6%, respectively. The research also reported growth in 'secondary tourism', where islands such as Raasay have been benefitting from "discretionary and unplanned visits" from neighbouring areas.

We would further encourage the Scottish Government to continue discussions with the UK Government on RET under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 to secure the introduction of these measures across privately-run Orkney ferry services.

Any proposal to extend or amend the RET scheme must carefully consider unintended consequences for businesses and the local island economy, which have already been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be affected by ferry cancellations and disruption. Any discussion on the future of fares must properly capture the voices and concerns of island businesses and tourism representatives, such as DMOs.

17. 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.

Agree

Disagree X

Please explain your answer

The RET system has already effectively delivered cheaper ferry fares that both island residents and visitors continue to benefit from. The Evaluation of Road Equivalent Tariff on the Clyde and Hebridean Network (2020) reported that across the network the average fare paid per passenger and car is estimated to have dropped by 34% and 40%, respectively.

As set out under the Island Connectivity Plan strategy, the STA welcomes proposals that foot passenger travel become free for residents under-22 within the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland Island groups.

We believe this needs to be taken a step further and that free ferry travel for island residents and workers under-22 should be rolled out to cover ferry travel between all Scottish islands and the mainland, similar to the Scottish Government's free bus travel scheme for the same age group.

Introducing this measure would not only deliver parity with free bus travel, but will also encourage more young people to stay and work in island communities, supporting employment in the tourism and hospitality sector. It also supports more students to travel between their island homes and studying at mainland colleges and universities, meaning they can continue to work at weekends on the islands.

It also supports and encourages more families to live on islands, meaning that children and young people can afford to travel to the mainland for extracurricular activities such as sports competitions, music and dance tuition and performances, etc. This would help island families to cope with the increase in living and energy costs experienced in recent years, particularly for island and rural communities.

18. 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

19. 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 X

Disagree

Please explain your answer

In principle, we support using the fares structure to strategically encourage travel at quieter periods and promote active travel to help manage ferry capacity. As set out previously, this would be valuable to accommodation providers to manage demand better and spread the volume of visitors at different points throughout the week.

However, this must be supported by greater investment in parking at ports and connecting train stations, better support for visitors to travel to and from ferry ports and around islands during their stay, and taking into consideration older people, disabled people and families with young children who are unable to participate in active travel options, such as

cycling or walking long distances. For those travelling to islands for business purposes, a quicker and reliable option is also needed.

Improving interconnectivity and reliability of Scotland's public transport system is key to encouraging more visitors to travel on foot and book during quieter periods, along with ensuring an integrated, simpler and enhanced ticket booking experience making it easier to book multi-journey tickets online (e.g the Cumbrae to Largs ferry route).