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# **Process Evaluation Mallaig to Lochboisdale (Winter) Pilot Ferry Service March 2016**

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## 1. Executive Summary

### Background

- 1.1. In 2013, the Transport Minister announced a three year winter pilot ferry service between Mallaig and Lochboisdale using the Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) vessel the MV Lord of the Isles.
- 1.2. The pilot service began in November 2013 and has been operating over five months of the year (mid-November to late March / early April inclusive) with sailings on Tuesdays and Saturdays and with a crossing time of 3 hours 30 minutes. This compares with the sailings from Oban to Lochboisdale which take around five hours, or around seven hours if the ferry goes via Barra.
- 1.3. Transport Scotland commissioned a process evaluation of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service. The aim of the evaluation was to use the monitoring data and the views of users and stakeholders to learn lessons from the pilot by gathering feedback on a number of specific research questions:
  - Who is using the service (residents, visitors etc), at what frequency, for what purposes? What were their travel patterns prior to the operation of the pilot service?
  - What are the carrying trends for the service? How many sailings took place and how much capacity was used?
  - What were the key project issues?
  - Why were services cancelled? What factors contributed to this?
  - How suitable is the vessel?
  - What are the views of households, visitors and businesses (both users and potential users) regarding the ferry service?
  - What changes to the timetable and operating period would provide travellers with the greatest benefit?
  - What has worked well during the project and what has worked less well?
  - If the project were to be repeated, how might it be improved or refined?
  - What would have to change to encourage more use of the service?
- 1.4. Research was conducted between 26<sup>th</sup> November and 30<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and views were collected from over 250 respondents using a range of methods including:

- An online survey
  - Researcher administered questionnaires
  - Face-to-face interviews, both on South Uist and on-board ferry services
  - Telephone interviews
- 1.5. In addition, researchers were given access to CalMac data relating to the Oban to Lochboisdale and Mallaig to Lochboisdale routes.

### **Main findings**

- 1.6. The announcement of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service was widely welcomed, in particular by residents and businesses in South Uist and Mallaig.
- 1.7. Travellers from across the UK and beyond reported that they had used, or tried to use, the service and South Uist residents in particular reported many trips or attempted trips on the service.
- 1.8. However, while more than three-quarters of respondents (78%) had used or tried to use the pilot service over the past two winters, many respondents (71%) had experienced delays or cancellations and this has led to a decrease in those planning to use the service.
- 1.9. Most (84%) see the service as particularly useful for visiting family and friends; large percentages of respondents from South Uist, from other islands and from the mainland and beyond identified visits to family and friends as a key reason for using, or wishing to use, the service.
- 1.10. Over half of respondents (53%) say they use, or would use, the service once a month or more; this compares to under a third (32%) who say they use the Oban service once a month or more.
- 1.11. The majority (70%) of those who have used the service say that their trips have only been made because of the availability of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service and the majority of respondents (61%) would prefer to use the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service rather than other services.
- 1.12. Amongst business users, and businesses involved in transporting goods or livestock in particular, both Oban and Mallaig are seen as preferable to Uig for a variety of reasons.
- 1.13. Carrying data for passengers indicates a downward trend in use for the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service alongside a smaller downward trend in use for the Lochboisdale – Castlebay/Oban service over the same period.
- 1.14. The main issue experienced during the pilot has been the high number of cancellations; 71% of respondents reported that a service they had tried to use had been cancelled and the majority of respondents (84%) reported that they

had been advised that their service had been cancelled due to adverse weather.

- 1.15. Data supplied by CalMac indicates that fewer than half (45%) of scheduled sailings on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale route were completed over the operating periods 2013/2014 and 2014/2015; the majority of cancellations (88%) were due to adverse weather.
- 1.16. Respondents, from all respondent groups and across survey types, speculated on a range of issues they felt contributed to cancellations during adverse weather and these included: issues with the size, location and layout of Mallaig Harbour along with wind speeds; some wind and tide issues at Lochboisdale Harbour; and the Lord of the Isles itself. However, respondents also reported that a lack of detailed information from CalMac has led to speculation over whether adverse weather is actually the reason for the high number of cancellations.
- 1.17. The main impact of the large number of cancellations has been a loss of confidence in the service with respondents commenting that they no longer book on the service as they expect that it will be cancelled. Many of those who have never tried to use the service say they have been put off by the number of cancellations.
- 1.18. Residents of Barra feel that the service has had little impact on Barra, although there was a perception that Barra had lost part of its lifeline service in order to provide the Lochboisdale – Mallaig service.
- 1.19. Respondents from Mallaig feel that the service could have proved beneficial to the area in terms of attracting higher visitor numbers and improvements to the local economy; however the high number of cancellations has meant that these benefits have not materialised.
- 1.20. It appears that the service has had little effect on either tourism or the local economies. While some expressed disappointment and frustration, as benefits had been expected both on South Uist and in Mallaig, other respondents had not expected a trial in winter months to provide any benefits.
- 1.21. More agreed (45%) than disagreed (30%) that the timetable suits their needs. However, a number of respondents would like to see the service leave South Uist later and arrive earlier; they felt that this would be beneficial for tourism. There were also calls for sailings on Fridays and Mondays to allow weekend visits both off and on South Uist; respondents felt that this would benefit both tourists and residents.
- 1.22. The shorter crossing was seen as the most important feature of the service; 50% of respondents said this was important to them personally; this figure rose to 60% amongst South Uist residents.

1.23. A large number of respondents (79%) felt that more people would use the service in the summer months. There was, however, concern over the summer service in the light of the summer timetable not including the Oban service. Respondents expressed concern that any similar issues with cancellations over the summer months could have a serious negative impact on tourism on South Uist.

## **Conclusions**

- 1.24. Respondents felt that the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service had the potential to deliver both social and economic benefits both to South Uist and to Mallaig but that due to the service being unreliable these benefits have not materialised and expectations have not been met.
- 1.25. The relatively high number of cancellations on the service coupled with a perceived lack of information from CalMac on reasons for cancellations has meant people have lost faith in the service.
- 1.26. It may be that more detailed information; and consultation with islanders about the information that would be beneficial to them; could help to address negative perceptions, dispel speculation and help to restore confidence.
- 1.27. A CalMac representative commented that if they are able to provide information then they would do so. They also stressed the importance of travellers making full use of all of the information sources that CalMac already do provide including information and status updates which are regularly updated on their website and on Twitter, the use of text alerts and the service status app for smart phones.
- 1.28. Other issues which respondents would like to see addressed include better integration with other ferries and with public transport and more direct consultation with residents and businesses over timetabling to ensure sailing times meet the needs of residents, businesses and tourists.

## 2. Background

### Introduction

- 2.1. South Uist is an island of the Outer Hebrides in Scotland. The 2011 census showed a resident population of 1,754. South Uist is linked to Eriskay in the south and Benbecula in the north, and beyond that North Uist, by causeways.
- 2.2. There are two main ferry routes linking South Uist with the mainland: the principal route from Lochmaddy on North Uist to Uig on Skye; and a triangular route, shared with Barra, that runs from Lochboisdale (South Uist) to Castlebay (Barra) to Oban.
- 2.3. Responses to a consultation on the 2011 Draft Ferries Plan called for a direct service from Lochboisdale to Mallaig on the mainland. However, the Scottish Ferry Services: Ferries Plan (2013-2022), published in 2012 and which details the provision of and support for Scotland's ferry services until 2022, explained that provision of a direct Mallaig to Lochboisdale service could only be achieved by a reduction in service provision on the Oban-Barra route or through the provision of an additional vessel, at an estimated cost of over £100m of public funding over the 30 to 40 year lifetime of a vessel.
- 2.4. The Plan went on to state that "when other planned improvements to services to, and within, the Western Isles are being made Ministers will consider the economic viability of a service between Mallaig and Lochboisdale". Subsequently, in 2013, the Transport Minister announced a three year winter pilot ferry service between Mallaig and Lochboisdale using the Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) vessel the MV Lord of the Isles. The objectives for this pilot service were:
  - to enhance transport choices and links for residents and businesses in South Uist, and to a lesser extent in Barra, Benbecula, North Uist and Mallaig;
  - to increase visitors to South Uist, and the Western Isles more broadly; and to support existing tourism markets;
  - to enhance the local economy of South Uist, and the Western Isles more broadly.
- 2.5. The pilot service began in November 2013 and has been operating over five months of the year (mid-November to late March / early April inclusive) with sailings on Tuesdays and Saturdays and with a crossing time of 3 hours 30 minutes. This compares with the sailings from Oban to South Uist which takes around seven hours and travels via Barra under the current arrangements.
- 2.6. A summer Mallaig – Lochboisdale service will be introduced in Summer 2016 providing a daily return service to the mainland. This was possible due to an additional vessel joining the CalMac fleet and a vessel redeployment programme being undertaken and agreed by local communities. There will be no service from Lochboisdale to Oban in the Summer 2016 timetable. This evaluation report is for the winter service only.

2.7. In November 2015, Transport Scotland commissioned a process evaluation of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service. The purpose of this research was “to provide lessons learned for Transport Scotland to use to consider the future of the service and they may also inform the implementation of any future pilot ferry services across the network”.

### **Methodology**

2.8. A range of different methods were used to collect views on the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service in order to allow as many people as possible to participate, and these included:

- An online survey; this was available between 26<sup>th</sup> November and 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2015 and was completed by 160 respondents.
- Researchers administering a questionnaire, similar to the online survey, on board the Clansman and Lord of the Isles ferries on 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015: 14 questionnaires were completed.
- More detailed face-to-face interviews conducted on board the Clansman and Lord of the Isles on 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015 with 8 respondents including ferry users and crew.
- Face-to-face interviews (single, paired depths and focus groups) conducted on South Uist on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015. These comprised interviews with 45 respondents and included:
  - Local authority elected members
  - Community council members
  - Representatives from local groups
  - Representatives from the Storas Uibhist community company
  - Local business owners
  - Local residents
  - Young people
- Telephone interviews conducted between 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> December 2015 with 25 respondents from key national, regional and local stakeholders as well as business owners and local representatives (from Mallaig, Barra and South Uist).
- A small number of respondents (5) submitted views by email.

2.9. In addition, researchers were given access to CalMac data relating to the Oban – Castlebay/Lochboisdale and Mallaig - Lochboisdale routes. Data used in this report relates to the first two operating periods of the winter pilot service:

- 12th November 2013 to 1st April 2014
- 29th November 2014 to 31st March 2015

2.10. Transport Scotland will consider the 2015/2016 data once it becomes available for the full period around May 2016.

2.11. The following chapters present the main views and issues expressed in the quantitative (online and on-board) responses and qualitative (face-to-face and telephone) interviews. While the quantitative survey gave those who wished to comment an opportunity to do so, given the self-selecting nature of this type of exercise, any figures quoted here cannot be extrapolated to a wider population.

2.12. The views presented in this analysis have not been vetted in any way for factual accuracy. Opinions and comments submitted by respondents may be based on fact or on what respondents perceive to be accurate but which others may interpret differently. As it is important for the analysis to represent views from all perspectives, the report may contain analysis of responses that are based on misunderstanding or misinformation but that, nevertheless, reflect strongly held views. In some instances, such inaccuracies and misunderstandings will be relevant findings in themselves.

### Profile of survey respondents

2.13. The following tables show the profile of the 174 respondents who submitted their views using the online survey or via the on-board questionnaire<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 2.1 Respondent profile (online or on-board survey): gender, age and place of residence**

	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Where live</b>		
Male	97	56	South Uist	81	47
Female	77	44	North Uist	3	2
			Benbecula	23	13
<b>Age last birthday</b>			Barra	15	9
16 to 17	2	1	Lewis	2	1
18 to 24	5	3	Harris	-	-
25 to 34	20	11	Western Isles (other)	2	1
35 to 44	30	17	Lochaber	12	7
45 to 54	52	30	Other Highlands	7	4
55 to 64	38	22	Other Scotland	19	11
65 to 74	21	12	Other UK	7	4
75 and over	3	2	Outwith UK	3	2
Prefer not to say	3	2			

Q's 1, 2, 3a: Base: 174 respondents

<sup>1</sup> This is referred to as 'the online survey' throughout the report

2.14. As can be seen in the table above, the majority of those who replied (66%) were aged over 45. Just under half (47%) live on South Uist with a further 15% from North Uist or Benbecula. Just under one in ten live on Barra (9%).

2.15. While the number of responses to the survey was very encouraging and indicated widespread interest in the pilot ferry service, particularly from South Uist residents, nevertheless as a sample it does still contain margins of error. The confidence intervals for answers ranging from 5% to 95% are shown in the table below for the sample of 174.

**Table 2.2 Margin of error attached to survey results (at 95% level of confidence)**

Survey Answer	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%	50%
95%	95%	90%	85%	80%	75%	70%	65%	60%	55%	50%
Margin of Error	3.5	4.8	5.7	6.4	7.0	7.4	7.6	7.8	8.0	8.0

2.16. To illustrate what this means in practice, 70% of our sample said that the journey(s) they made on the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service were only made because of the availability of this service. Statistically speaking, this means that we can be 95% certain that the true proportion of all those who only made their journeys because of the availability of the service lies within 7.4% of this answer (i.e. between 77.4% and 62.6%).

2.17. Respondents were also asked to describe their current employment status or situation, respondents could choose as many options as fitted their circumstances. The table below shows that over half of those who replied are in full time employment (53%).

**Table 2.3 Respondent profile (online or on-board survey): working status**

	Number	Percentage
Employed full time	92	53
Employed part time	16	9
Own / run business on South Uist	22	13
Own / run business on another island in Outer Hebrides	4	2
Own / run business elsewhere	8	5
Work from home	11	6
Unemployed; seeking work	-	-
Not looking for work as looking after home / family	1	1
Not looking for work as in education or training	4	2
Unable to work due to disability / illness	-	-
Retired	28	16
Other	3	2
Prefer not to say	9	5

Q3c: Base: 174 respondents

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

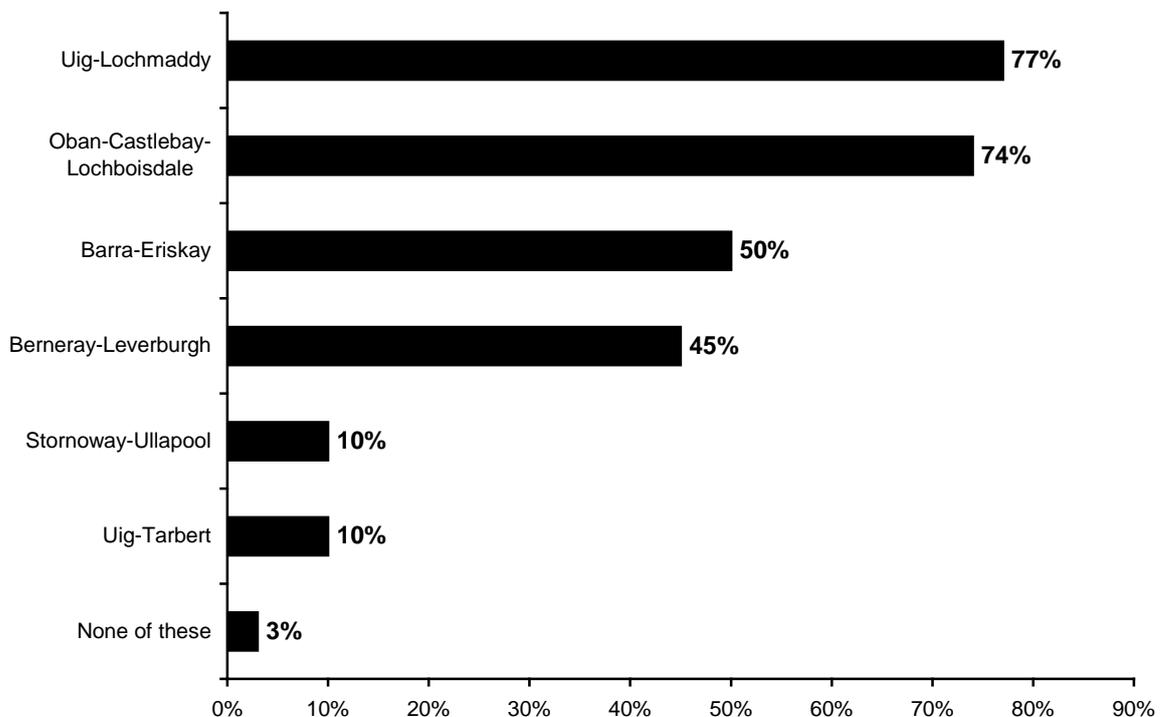
### 3. Travel patterns

3.1. In order to provide context to the research into the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter ferry pilot respondents were asked, in both the online survey and in face-to-face interviews, about the regular ferry services that they most commonly use and the reasons for travel.

#### Ferry routes used

- 3.2. As shown in the chart below, 77% have used the route from Lochmaddy (North Uist) to Uig (Skye) while 74% have used the Oban – Castlebay (Barra) – Lochboisdale (South Uist) route.
- 3.3. Usage of ferry services appears to relate at least in part, to geographic location. Looking at South Uist respondents only, data shows that 85% have used the Uig – Lochmaddy route while 83% have used the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale route.
- 3.4. 96% of North Uist or Benbecula respondents have used the Uig – Lochmaddy route while 54% have used the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale route.
- 3.5. Not surprisingly, 100% of the Barra respondents have used the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale route.

**Chart 3.1 Outer Hebrides ferry services used in the last two years**



Source: Q4: Please tell us which of the regular Outer Hebrides ferry services you have used in the last 2 years. Base = 174

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

- 3.6. In the face-to-face interviews, respondents commented on their use of the two main routes to / from the Uists; the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale route and the Uig – Lochmaddy route.
- 3.7. Respondents compared the two destinations (Uig and Oban) with a main comment being that Oban is seen as an actual destination for shopping or access to services as well as a way point for onward travel. Uig is generally seen only as a way point for all, apart from those with family or friends on Skye or for onward travel to the north of Scotland, primarily Fort William or Inverness.
- 3.8. Respondents who travelled further than the destination ports talked about the pros and cons of a shorter sail and longer drive (through Skye to their destination) compared with a longer sail and potentially shorter drive (from Oban to their destination). Respondents were fairly evenly split as to which service was preferred, with the choice often depending on the final destination, access to transport or day on which the respondent needed to travel.
- 3.9. The Lochmaddy route involves travel from South Uist to Lochmaddy, then the ferry crossing followed by a lengthy drive through Skye to the mainland. This route, however, was seen by many as preferable to the longer sail on the Oban route; especially in winter months when the crossing is more likely to be rough. There was a perception on the part of some respondents that this is the most reliable ferry service leaving the Uists and for businesses needing to get products to and from market was seen by many as the preferred route because of its reliability. Respondents also said that the Uig route is cheaper than the Oban route. There were, however, comments on the need for better transport links (public transport or taxi services) both to reach Lochmaddy and then from Uig to mainland destinations.
- 3.10. Others, however, preferred the Oban route with a longer time at sea, commenting that the roads on Skye cause them concern (in winter months when the weather may be bad as well as in summer when the roads may be busy with tourists). There were again comments that, especially for those without access to their own vehicle, the transport links and travel time on public transport from Oban onwards are far easier and quicker than those from Uig.
- 3.11. In addition, respondents reported that, particularly in the summer months, the Lochmaddy route can be booked up for weeks in advance (as this is the route most used by tourists and many hauliers) making it difficult for residents to arrange a trip to the mainland at short notice.

### **Use of air services**

- 3.12. Respondents also commented on their use of air services to the mainland, reporting that these are seldom used apart from business trips; reasons included:

- Cost of travel

- Small baggage allowance
- Number of cancellations in winter months

**Use of the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service**

3.13. While the Lochmaddy (North Uist) to Uig (Skye) route is the principal route for the Uists, given that the pilot provided a service from South Uist to the mainland, the questionnaire focused on comparisons between the pilot service and the other South Uist to mainland route (Lochboisdale to Oban), although respondents were also able to provide comment on other routes.

3.14. The 128 respondents who said they use the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service were asked why they use the service and, as shown in the following table, the main reasons were:

- To visit family / friends (78%).
- For short breaks(s) / holiday(s) (76%).
- To go shopping (39%).

**Table 3.1 Reasons for using the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service**

	Total		Leg(s) of journey		
	% (Base: 128)	No.	Oban - Castlebay %	Castlebay - Lochboisdale %	Oban - Lochboisdale %
To visit family / friends	78	100	17	8	87
For short break(s) / holiday(s)	76	97	19	11	92
To go shopping	39	50	20	6	78
To commute / for business reasons	27	34	21	3	82
To access leisure / sports facilities	20	26	23	4	85
To access medical / dental services	18	23	22	4	83
To make deliveries / pick-ups	13	16	31	6	75
For day trips	8	10	40	30	50
To access education	4	5	20	-	80
Other	9	12	33	8	75

Source: Q5a: Please tell us which of these describe your reasons for using the Oban - Castlebay - Lochboisdale service and on which leg(s) of the journey?

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

3.15. Other than the small number visiting relatives on Barra, most South Uist respondents used the ferry to travel to Oban rather than travelling only to / from Castlebay. This was generally because Castlebay does not offer any services

that cannot be directly accessed on South Uist. Additionally, there is a separate regular Eriskay – Barra service linking South Uist with Barra which takes 40 minutes, compared to around 1 hour 30 minutes for the Lochboisdale – Castlebay leg of the triangular service.

3.16. While a small number of respondents reported using the Oban – Lochboisdale or Castlebay – Lochboisdale journeys for day trips some provided clarification saying that they meant short, rather than day, trips. Respondents pointed out that one main benefit of the winter pilot to Mallaig was that residents could travel to the mainland and back in one day. In addition, there were comments that the Eriskay to Barra ferry would be used if planning a day trip on Barra.

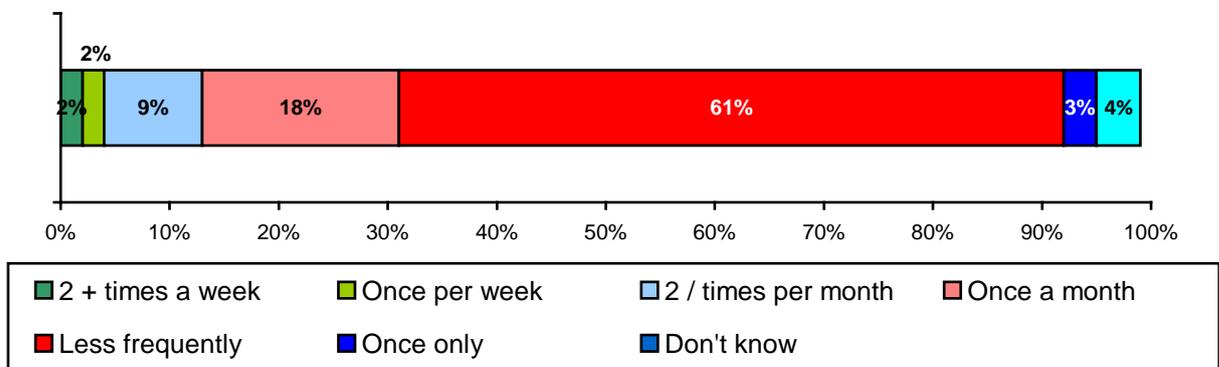
3.17. Barra residents reported that they always travel to / from Oban except for a small number who travel to South Uist for shopping or to visit family / friends:

- Shopping: 82% of those who use the service to go shopping said they use the Oban – Castlebay leg of the journey while 18% use the Castlebay – Lochboisdale leg.
- Visiting family / friends: 89% of those who use the service to visit family / friends said they use the Oban – Castlebay leg of the journey while 11% use the Castlebay – Lochboisdale leg.

3.18. During the interviews, most South Uist residents said that they use the Oban ferry to travel to / from Oban rather than to / from Barra. Again, an exception was those with family or friends on Barra, although the Eriskay ferry was the preferred method of travel for visiting Barra.

3.19. Respondents were also asked how often they used the Oban – Castlebay - Lochboisdale service. As shown in the following chart, just under a third (32%) said they use the service once a month or more; the majority use the service less frequently.

**Chart 3.2 Average frequency of using the Oban – Castlebay - Lochboisdale service**



Source: Q5b: On average, how frequently do you use the Oban - Castlebay - Lochboisdale service?  
 Base = 128

## **Summary**

Most respondents make use of both of the two main routes to and from the Uists; the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale route and the Uig – Lochmaddy route.

Respondents were fairly evenly divided between those who prefer the shorter sail and longer drive (through Skye and onwards to their destination) and those who prefer the longer sail and shorter drive (from Oban and onwards to their destination).

The main reason given by respondents for travelling on the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service is to visit family or friends. Most South Uist and Barra residents use the service to travel to the mainland, rather than between the islands. Most respondents say they use this route less than once a month.

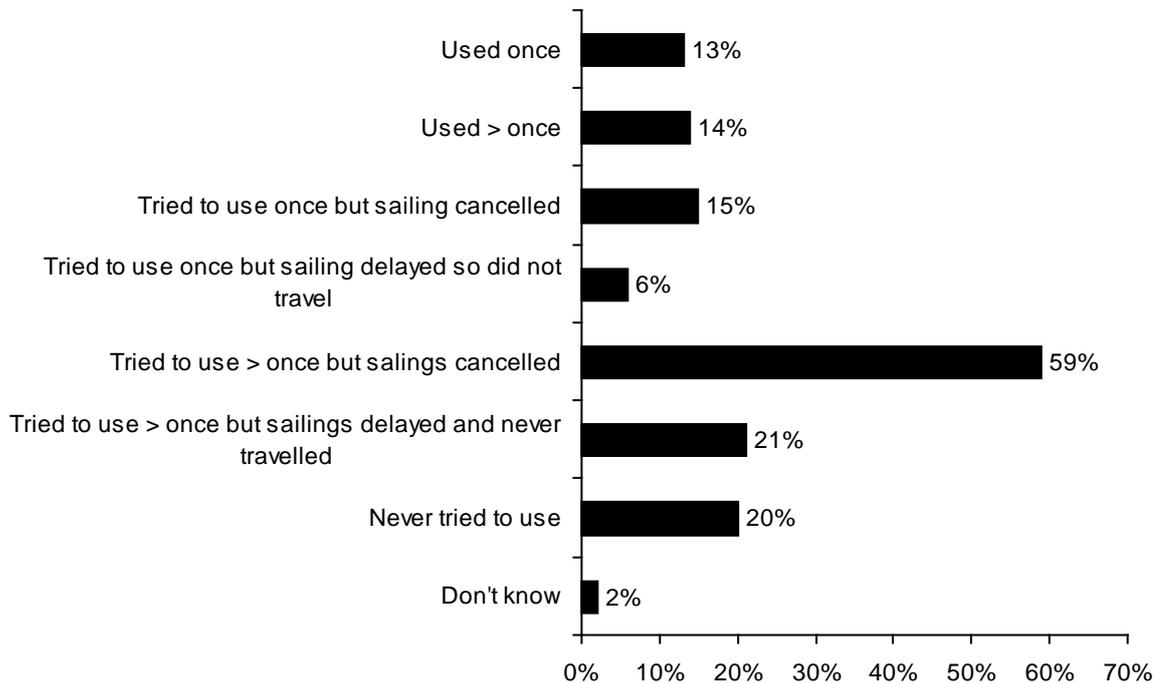
## **4. Use of the winter pilot service**

- 4.1. The Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service began in November 2013 and has been operating from mid-November to late March / early April each year, with sailings on Tuesdays and Saturdays and with a crossing time of 3 hours 30 minutes. The cost for a car and driver (from the winter 2015/2016 timetable) is £132.30 return, compared with £160.60 for a car and driver on the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service, with fares set under the Road Equivalent Tariff scheme.
- 4.2. Using the ferry service and public transport to reach Glasgow from Lochboisdale on a week day takes around 12 hours on the Oban – Castlebay - Lochboisdale service and around 9 hours on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service (travelling via Fort William).

### **Experience of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service**

- 4.3. In the online survey, respondents were asked their experience of using the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service. As shown in the chart overleaf, more than half of respondents (59%) said that they had tried to use the service on more than one occasion but it had been cancelled; and a further 15% said they had tried to use the service on one occasion but it had been cancelled. Just over a quarter (27%) reported that they had used the service on one or more occasions and 20% had never tried to use the service.
- 4.4. In total, 78% had used or tried to use the pilot service over the past two winters; 71% had experienced delays or cancellations.

**Chart 4.1 Experience of Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service**



Source: Q6a: thinking back over the last two winters, 2013/14 and 2014/15, what experience do you have of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service? base = 174

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

4.5. Respondents to the online survey came from across the Western Isles and from other parts of Scotland and beyond. While some respondents from each geographic area represented said they had at least tried to use the service, most of those who had used or tried to use it on more than one occasion came from South Uist.

4.6. When asked about their use of the winter pilot ferry service during interviews, respondents reported that there had been a great sense of anticipation on South Uist about the service. Respondents talked about the long campaign to have a direct service for Lochboisdale and how the announcement had been welcomed. One South Uist resident, for example, commented: *“When we first heard about it we were delighted. Years ago there was a regular sailing and it did wonders for the island”*.

4.7. However, several respondents, both residents and local groups including representatives from the Better Ferries for Lochboisdale group, commented that very little advance notice had been given of the start of the pilot and there had been little consultation with representatives about the days or times of the route. While most were positive about this new service, a small number queried why the service was being re-introduced when it has been tried on two occasions in the past and then withdrawn.

4.8. Nevertheless, residents had looked forward to the shorter crossing which, many commented, would enable them to access the mainland more easily allowing a

faster and cheaper trip to visit family and friends or to go shopping or access services. While there was disappointment that the service was not able to start on the date originally planned (due to adverse weather), on the first sailing day there had been a crowd of well-wishers at the harbour to see the Lord of the Isles off.

- 4.9. Respondents reported, however, that it quickly became apparent that the service was prone to cancellation and delay, with many now not making bookings on the service because of the anticipation that it would be cancelled. The following are some of the many comments received on this issue:

*“People are now scared to book it or depend on it for date or time critical events.”* (South Uist resident)

*“It’s had an adverse effect on the island – they raised expectations. You knew the Oban one would run but it’s pot luck now.”* (South Uist resident)

*“The service is so unreliable that people just ignore it and use the Uig/Lochmaddy ferry which is very reliable. This is a great pity as the Lochboisdale /Mallaig service has great potential but its service performance is so poor it has just become a joke locally.”* (South Uist resident)

*“FEWER CANCELLATIONS - I am NO LONGER prepared to use the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service as I have been inconvenienced far too many times by the frequent cancellations, meaning I have had to forego trips to see family and friends on the mainland.”* (Benbecula resident)

- 4.10. Several said they used the service if they saw it was about to sail but generally booked on the Lochmaddy – Uig service to be sure of travelling; most cancel that booking only when sure they can travel on the Mallaig service. Some respondents also commented that, because of the frequency of cancellation on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service, there is no need to book in advance. They commented that if the ferry does run, they know there will be capacity for individuals who turn up without booking in advance. One South Uist resident commented: *“We don’t bother booking now – we just turn up to see if it’s going”*.
- 4.11. The online survey asked those who had used the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service when and how often this was used. Those who had not used the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service were asked the number of times they had tried to use the service but had not done so because of cancellations or delays.

4.12. During the winter of 2013/2014:

- 40 respondents had used the service, on a total of 93 occasions
- 114 respondents had tried to use the service, on a total of 426 occasions

4.13. During the winter of 2014/2015:

- 31 respondents had used the service, on a total of 71 occasions
- 111 respondents had tried to use the service, on a total of 370 occasions

4.14. This data shows that the number of times the service has been used and the number of attempts to use this service have decreased in the winter of 2014/2015. Respondents taking part in the face-to-face interviews suggested that while the service is welcomed, because of the number of cancellations that have been experienced, fewer residents and businesses are advance booking on this service.

4.15. The service cancellations reported by the online respondents have also been experienced by almost all of the residents who took part in face-to-face interviews. The reasons for, effect of, and views on, these cancellations are described in the next chapter.

### **Reasons for using the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service**

4.16. Online survey respondents were then asked why they had used (or intended to use) the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service and, as was the case for those using the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service, the main reasons were:

- To visit family / friends (84%).
- For short breaks(s) / holiday(s) (69%).
- To go shopping (38%).

4.17. Visiting family and friends was the main reason given by respondents from South Uist, from other islands and from the mainland.

**Table 4.1 Reasons for use**

	Mallaig – Lochboisdale  % (Base: 137)	Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale  % (Base: 128)
To visit family / friends	84	78
For short break(s) / holiday(s)	69	76
To go shopping	38	39
To commute / for business reasons	26	27
To access leisure / sports facilities	14	20
To see what it was like / because it was new / to try the alternative	13	n/a
To access medical / dental services	12	18
To make deliveries / pick-ups	12	13
For day trips	31	8
To access education	3	4
Other	1	9

Sources:

Q5a: Please tell us which of these describe your reasons for using the Oban - Castlebay - Lochboisdale service and on which leg(s) of the journey?

Q7a: Which of these describe your reasons (or, if your sailing was cancelled, your planned reasons) for using the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service?

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

4.18. Visiting family or friends, shopping and onward travel to other destinations also emerged in interviews with residents and local businesses as main reasons for using, or wanting to use, the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service. One South Uist resident commented: *“This route would be better used if it was more dependable. It would also allow families living on the mainland to come home more often for short breaks if service was dependable. At present families going on short breaks go elsewhere.”*

4.19. During interviews, respondents talked about the two destinations (Mallaig and Oban) with one main comment being that Mallaig is not seen as a suitable alternative to Oban. There were comments that there is little by way of accommodation, shopping or other services in Mallaig, particularly through the winter when it mostly shuts down. While some respondents appreciated being able to travel to Mallaig as they have family or friends in the area, most travelled on to Fort William or Inverness (and also onwards to Glasgow or other destinations).

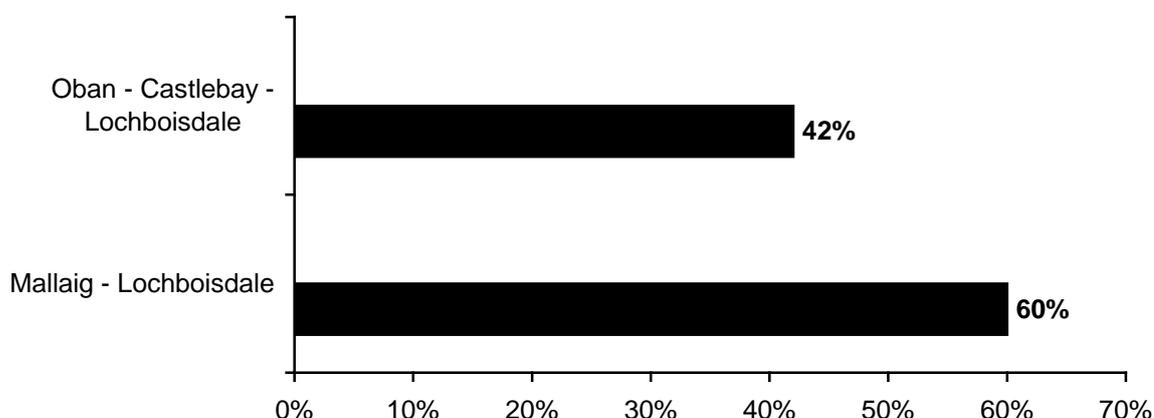
4.20. Transport links from Oban were also seen as superior to those at Mallaig. Although there is an existing train service from Mallaig to Fort William and Glasgow, respondents commented that no additional transport had been provided to integrate with the winter pilot service until a local bus company had put on a service meeting the ferry.

4.21. One accommodation provider from South Uist commented *“Mallaig isn’t geared up to be a ferry hub and it would take a long time for Mallaig to grow into an Oban-type role”*.

**Intended use of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service**

4.22. Online survey respondents were also asked whether they intended to use the winter pilot Mallaig – Lochboisdale service during the winter of 2015/2016 and 60% said they did intend to. When asked if they intended to use the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service during the winter of 2015/2016, 42% said they did.

**Chart 4.2 Intended use of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service and Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service in 2015/2016**



Sources:

Q8a: Do you plan to use the Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry service this winter (2015/2016) Base = 174

Q8b: Do you plan to use the Oban - Castlebay - Lochboisdale ferry service this winter (2015/2016)?

Base = 174

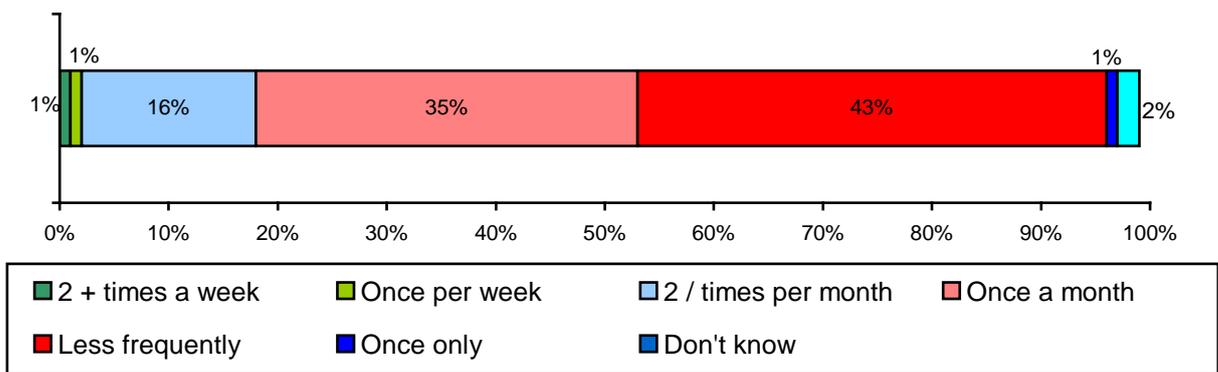
4.23. While the numbers reporting planned use of the winter pilot service are still fairly high, they are lower than the 78% who said they had used or planned to use the service over the first two years of the pilot. Respondents reported that the decrease in intention to use the service was almost wholly due to reliability issues. Indeed, during interviews, many respondents reported that they had now lost faith in the service and were either:

- Booking both the Mallaig – Lochboisdale and the Lochmaddy – Uig service to ensure that if the Mallaig service did not run they were still able to travel on the same day.
- No longer booking the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service but instead booking on the Lochmaddy – Uig or Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service (depending on the day they needed to travel and/or their final destination).

4.24. However, respondents reported that they are still keen to use the pilot service if they could be sure of it running.

4.25. When asked how often they use, or plan to use, the Mallaig - Lochboisdale service over half (53%) of respondents say they use, or would use, the service once a month or more; this compares to under a third (32%) who use the Oban service once a month or more.

**Chart 4.3 Average frequency of using (or planning to use) the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service**

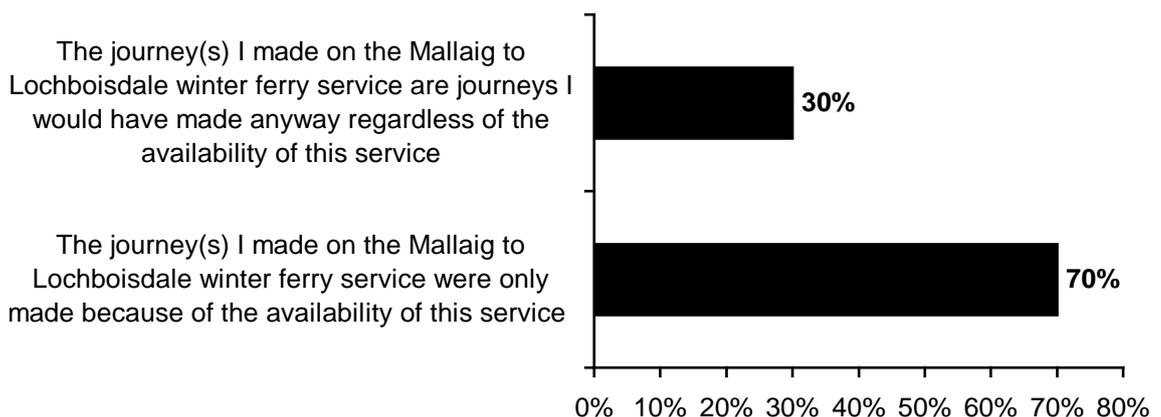


Source: Q7b: How frequently did you use (or plan to use) the Mallaig winter ferry service? Base = 137

**Use of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service**

4.26. Online survey respondents who had made a journey on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service were also asked whether the trip made (or planned) for the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service was a trip they would have made in any case, or a trip made only because of the availability of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service.

**Chart 4.4 Mallaig – Lochboisdale trip**



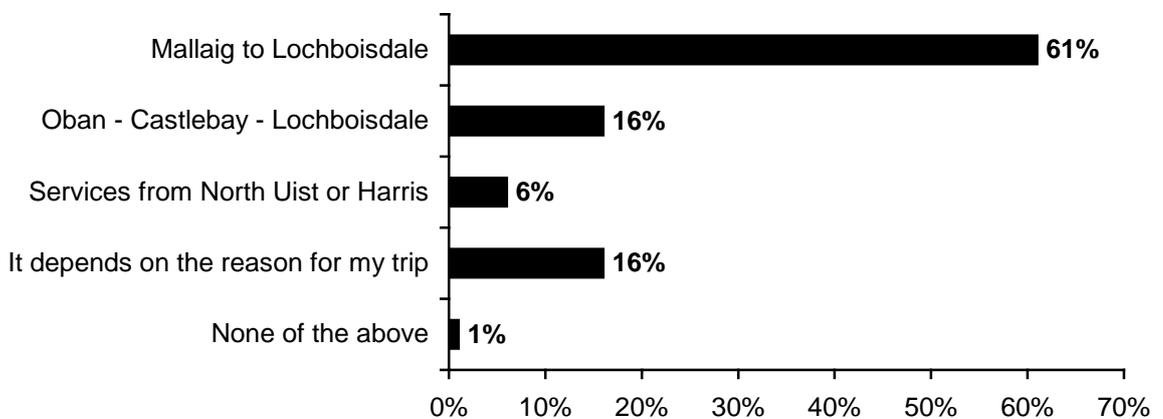
Source: Q7c: Which of the following applies to your use of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service? Base = 46

4.27. As shown in the chart above, this new ferry service has brought about some additional trips; 70% said their trip(s) were only made because of the availability of the service.

### Service preference - individuals

4.28. When asked which service they would prefer to use, 61% of online survey respondents said they would prefer the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service while 16% said they would prefer the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service and 6% said they would favour other routes. One South Uist resident commented: *“The route reduced journey times to most mainland destinations for the people of Uist and if a similar timetable was introduced for the summer it would ease congestion on the Lochmaddy route, allowing more people to travel to and from the islands overall. Good for tourists, good for tourism and good for islanders accessing the mainland for whatever reason”.*

**Chart 4.5 Service preference**



Source: Q8c: Assuming the services run to timetable, which would you prefer to use? Base = 174

4.29. Looking at those who live on South Uist:

- 69% of individual residents would prefer Mallaig – Lochboisdale
- 7% would prefer Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale

4.30. The picture is similar for those visiting South Uist from the mainland:

- 75% of visitors would prefer Mallaig – Lochboisdale
- 10% would prefer Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale

4.31. Looking at residents from other islands shows a different picture:

- 31% would prefer Mallaig – Lochboisdale
- 36% would prefer Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale

4.32. A similar pattern emerged amongst local residents and businesses who took part in interviews. Many said they would prefer to use the Mallaig service and the main reasons given were a shorter sea journey or lower cost. There were also comments that another benefit of Mallaig – Lochboisdale service is that it could take pressure away from the Lochmaddy – Uig service which, respondents reported, is overbooked all year round. The following is a typical comment, from a South Uist resident: *“Needs to run - needs to be reliable. Uig - Lochmaddy is a far longer drive on to Glasgow but at least it runs reliably. However it can be booked up far in advance in summer”*.

### **Service preference – businesses**

4.33. For those whose businesses involve transporting goods or livestock, both Oban and Mallaig are seen as preferable to Uig as the longer drive through Skye can lead to problems because of legislation regarding driver hours. During interviews, some hauliers said that they preferred to go through Oban while others said they would prefer Mallaig if it was a more reliable service; this depended on the final destination and also the type of lorry.

4.34. Mallaig was preferred to Oban by some hauliers, mainly due to the shorter route and the cheaper fare.

4.35. For others, Oban was seen as preferable as it provides facilities for livestock and the vessels used for sailings are perceived to be more suitable for livestock. Respondents commented that:

- Mallaig does not provide services for livestock while they are waiting to board vessels.
- Those moving livestock need to have two deck (cattle) or four deck (sheep) lorries; the bridges on the road to Mallaig are too low for these vehicles.

4.36. To overcome the problems of getting onto the Lochmaddy – Uig ferry, some hauliers block bookings months ahead for each season and then cancel the crossings that are not required. This practice has been common on most ferry routes for a number of years and is accepted practice for hauliers to ensure they can transport their loads as and when required. However, some respondents commented that this can cause problems for tourists or private car users as it can appear that ferries are full whereas the reality is that they are not because some of these block bookings will be cancelled close to the date of sailing. Conversely, other respondents commented that the block booking system is the only way some businesses can operate out of South Uist. While businesses would be happy to book the Mallaig service, the cancellations have meant that they do not do so because of concerns over reliability.

4.37. South Uist accommodation providers had different opinions on which service would be of most use in encouraging more tourists to the island.

4.38. There were comments that many tourists coming to South Uist travel from the central belt, the south of Scotland or from England with few coming from the Highlands. There was a feeling that these tourists might prefer the shorter drive to Oban and comments that many tourists enjoy the scenery on the ferry from Oban. However, others felt that the shorter time at sea coupled with a cheaper fare on the Mallaig ferry would be preferred by tourists.

**The Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service**

4.39. Many individuals and businesses also stressed the need to retain the Oban service with one South Uist resident commenting: *“I use the Lochboisdale to Oban service because I'm dropped off in Oban with all amenities at hand with no further travel or cost needed. On the Mallaig route I have to count on spending more money and time to get to Fort William”.*

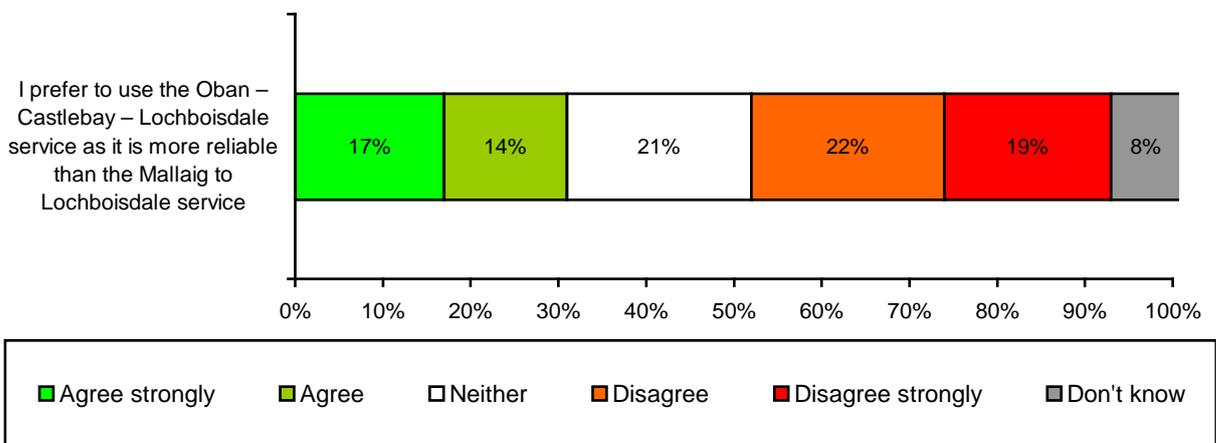
4.40. Other reasons included:

- Ease of onward travel; Oban was seen as preferable for access to the central belt or south; as noted above, the roads from Mallaig cannot accommodate all types of lorry; the longer drive through Skye can lead to issues with driver hours.
- Reliability; both for getting goods to and from market (especially when transporting livestock or shellfish); and to avoid the need to factor in the cost of unplanned overnight stays.

**Reliability**

4.41. The online survey asked whether reliability had an effect on the choice of route; respondents were asked to say to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I prefer to use the Oban - Castlebay - Lochboisdale service as it is more reliable than the Mallaig to Lochboisdale service’. Of the 166 respondents who replied, more disagreed (40%) than agreed (31%):

**Chart 4.6 Reliability**



Source: Q9. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

4.42. Some respondents commented further with reasons for disagreement including:

- That they would prefer the Lochmaddy – Uig service
- That the service chosen would depend on their destination
- That they would rather see a reliable Mallaig service than choose the Oban route

### Carrying data

4.43. Using data provided by CalMac we looked at carrying figures and vehicle capacity, during the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 operating period of the winter pilot service, for both the Mallaig – Lochboisdale route and the Oban – Castlebay - Lochboisdale route (and a small number of Oban - Lochboisdale direct sailings). As distinct data for those travelling right through from Lochboisdale to Oban (i.e. travelling on both legs of the triangular route) was not available, we used data on services leaving and returning to Lochboisdale as an approximation.

4.44. As can be seen from the table below, average passenger numbers and vehicle capacity used on the Mallaig route has decreased and the Castlebay / Oban route has also seen a slight decrease.

**Table 4.2 Carrying and capacity**

<b>Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Mallaig</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Completed sailings	69	58	127
Average foot passengers per sailing	21	14	18
Average vehicle capacity used	18.3%	14.6%	16.6%
<b>Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Castlebay or Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Oban</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Completed sailings	148	134	282
Average foot passengers per sailing	6	9	7
Average vehicle capacity used	8.1%	7.3%	7.2%

Source: CalMac carryings data to 31/03/15

## **Summary**

Over three-quarters of respondents had used or tried to use the pilot service over the past two winters; almost all of these respondents had experienced delays or cancellations and this has led to a decrease in those planning to use the service, both individuals and businesses.

Respondents use the service primarily to visit family or friends, to go on short breaks or holidays or to go shopping. Over half of respondents say they use, or would use, the service once a month or more; this compares to under a third who say they use the Oban service once a month or more.

The majority of those who have used the service say that their trips have only been made because of the availability of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service.

The majority of individuals would prefer to use the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service rather than other services.

Amongst business users, and businesses transporting goods or livestock in particular, both Oban and Mallaig were seen as preferable to Uig for a variety of reasons.

Carrying data for passengers indicates a downward trend in use for the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service alongside a smaller downward trend in use for the Lochboisdale – Castlebay/Oban service over the same period.

## 5. Key project issues

- 5.1. Since the beginning of the pilot there has been concern from residents of South Uist that running the service over only the winter months may not give an accurate reflection of potential use, not least due to the number of cancellations that have occurred. Indeed, since the beginning of the pilot, the service has been subject to a high number of cancellations; this included a delay to the start of the pilot with the first planned sailing cancelled due to adverse weather.
- 5.2. Cancellations emerged as the key issue in both online surveys and in face-to-face interviews, with a number of respondents commenting that they felt the pilot had been “set up to fail” by being held over the winter months. As noted in the previous chapter, 71% of online survey respondents reported that they had tried to use the service on one or more occasions but had not as it had been cancelled or delayed.
- 5.3. It is acknowledged that there had been awareness from the start that the pilot was likely to be subject to delays and cancellations due to possible bad weather and the infrastructure at Mallaig. However, in order to meet the requirements of the Ferries Plan the pilot service was undertaken. Indeed there was recognition from some respondents that trialling the service over the winter months was actually beneficial as it showed whether the service could run during the worst conditions.

### Completed sailings

- 5.4. Data supplied by CalMac covering the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 operating period of the winter pilot service shows that fewer than half of scheduled sailings on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale route have been completed since the start of the pilot (45%) while over three-quarters (76%) of the sailings to and from Lochboisdale to Castlebay or direct to Oban were completed.
- 5.5. As respondents also commented that they felt the Lochboisdale – Castlebay leg of the triangular route was cancelled more often than the Castlebay – Oban leg this data is also included in the table below. This shows that slightly fewer of the Lochboisdale – Castlebay sailings were completed compared with the Castlebay – Oban sailings, over the operating period of the winter pilot.

**Table 5.1 Completed sailings**

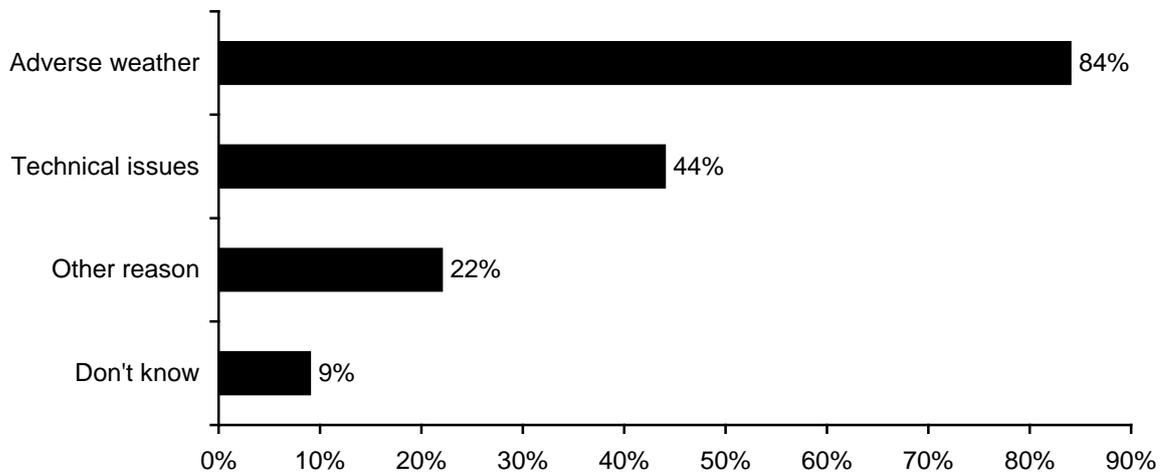
<b>Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Mallaig</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Scheduled sailings	136	144	280
% completed	51%	40%	45%
<b>Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Castlebay or Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Oban direct</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Scheduled sailings	189	183	372
% completed	78%	73%	76%
<b>Castlebay &lt;-&gt; Oban</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Scheduled sailings	184	161	345
% completed	82%	78%	80%

Source: CalMac carryings data to 31/03/15

### **Perceived reasons for cancellations**

- 5.6. The online survey respondents who had experienced delays or cancellations were asked why they thought their sailing had been affected. The majority (84%) said they had been advised that the sailing had been affected due to adverse weather.
- 5.7. 44% said they had been advised that there had been technical issues while 22% said they understood there had been another reason and cited the ferry being used on another route or that there had been a knock-on effect from other delayed services. Several commented that adverse weather had been cited but queried whether this had, in fact, been the reason, making comments similar to those raised in interviews and reported below.

**Chart 5.1 Reasons given by respondents for ferry cancellation / disruption**



Source: Q6d: When you tried to use the ferry but the sailing was cancelled or disrupted, what was the reason for this? If your sailing was cancelled or disrupted on more than one occasion, please tick all of the reasons. Base = 124 \* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

Adverse weather

5.8. This question over the adverse weather status was raised in many of the interviews, with respondents commenting that they did not receive specific or detailed information on where and why the adverse weather was causing issues and that there was speculation, especially amongst South Uist residents, on what other issues might, in combination with adverse weather, be leading to cancellations.

5.9. These included: queries over wind speed, the breakwater, linkspan and size of Mallaig Harbour; comments that wind from a particular direction could cause issues at Lochboisdale Harbour; and comments that the Lord of the Isles is too small or too old to handle rough open seas. Feedback from CalMac was quite clear in stating that this speculation was unfounded.

5.10. The following perceptions were identified in conversations with a number of different stakeholders:

- Issues at Mallaig Harbour: the size, location and layout of the harbour coupled with the size of the Lord of the Isles means that wind gusts have the potential to interfere with docking.
- There are some wind-related issues at Lochboisdale Harbour and sometimes problems caused by tidal conditions as the harbour is shallow; although issues at Lochboisdale are encountered less frequently than at Mallaig. One respondent commented that once current work being undertaken at Lochboisdale is completed, this should mean that these issues will not continue to impact on sailings into Lochboisdale in the future.

- That while the Lord of the Isles is one of the largest ships in the CalMac fleet able to berth reliably in Mallaig, it is one of the smaller major vessels and its size may mean that it cannot sail in seas as rough as other, larger vessels.
- 5.11. There are, therefore, three potential areas where, respondents speculated, adverse weather could interfere with sailing: at Mallaig, at Lochboisdale; or at sea.
- 5.12. However, respondents commented that the only official information they are given is that the ferry is delayed or cancelled due to adverse weather.
- 5.13. This perception of limited information has given rise to additional speculations. These speculations have included, among other things: whether CalMac is committed to the service; possible alternative reasons for captains' decisions; that the route is not seen as important as other routes; or that requests from some major service users for additional capacity on alternative routes takes precedence. The following are some examples of the many comments on this issue:

*"This service has the potential to be extremely successful. If CalMac explained genuinely and truthfully to its customers why they cancel this ferry so often when the weather isn't that bad. It is nothing but a waste of time trying this winter service if there are such difficulties".*

(Lochaber resident)

*"More effort from CalMac to provide a decent service. CalMac is far too quick to cancel sailings and there have been days when the ferry has been lying in Lochboisdale all day even though the weather is fine. On some days it is the only route on the network where there is a cancellation, on other days the ferry is elsewhere and little effort is made to get it to Lochboisdale in time to carry out the sailing".*

(Western Isles resident)

*"The Lochboisdale to Mallaig service is not only a shorter ferry crossing but the road connection between Mallaig to Fort William is far superior and greatly reduces our journey time from Dunkeld. Last year's ferry service seemed to be run on a half-hearted way almost as if the operator did want the service to continue. Many people we know didn't use the service because they couldn't depend on it".* (Perth resident)

*"Service needs to be more reliable and treated with the same importance as the Oban sailing. If a sailing can't be done due to weather wait until the weather improves then provide the service to/from Mallaig - just as happens with the Oban sailing. Stop treating the Mallaig sailing and therefore the Lochboisdale Community as an option".* (South Uist resident)

- 5.14. Respondents cited examples of adverse weather warnings when the sea appeared calm and weather sites and/or local residents were reporting no adverse conditions at either harbour.
- 5.15. Respondents also said they were aware that on other routes, CalMac made efforts to be flexible and sail at later times or on an alternative route. CalMac representatives stressed that, while the captain of the vessel decides whether it is safe to sail, conditions are kept under review and CalMac do look at any possible alternatives such as sailing at a later time or rerouting the vessel.
- 5.16. There was acknowledgement from CalMac that there are limitations to the harbour at Mallaig in terms of infrastructure. A representative commented, however, that this was not seen as a reason not to run the trial as, from their point of view, one objective was to discover whether the service could be delivered.
- 5.17. Representatives from Mallaig Harbour, however, commented that issues related to the harbour should not have a major impact as the Lord of the Isles has previously worked out of the harbour; they also mentioned that they had not anticipated any issues and that no discussions had been had about potential issues before the start of the pilot.
- 5.18. CalMac representatives also stressed the importance of travellers making full use of all of the information sources that CalMac currently provide including information and status updates which are regularly updated on their website and on Twitter, use of text alerts and the service status app for smart phones.

#### Technical issues

- 5.19. Although the majority of respondents commented on the adverse weather status, some also commented on cancellations caused by technical issues and many of these comments centred around speculation about the Lord of the Isles.
- 5.20. Again, there was speculation that the Lord of the Isles is not equipped to berth in Mallaig as it has limited bow thrusters; other respondents however said they had heard that work had been done to improve these but that it had made little difference. CalMac commented that they are looking at the Lord of the Isles to see if there are any further improvements that could be made, for example to the propellers or the control system.
- 5.21. Online respondents were asked whether they thought that the Lord of the Isles was the most appropriate vessel for the route. Almost half of the 166 respondents who replied did not give an answer. Many of the comments made in relation to this question were that this was not a question that could be answered as CalMac has said the Lord of the Isles is the only vessel that can be used on the route. Other respondents commented that while they had heard speculation they had no actual knowledge.

5.22. Most of those who did reply said they felt that the MV Lord of the Isles is the most appropriate vessel for the route. There were comments that respondents understood that the Lord of the Isles had been used successfully on the route in previous years and so they did not understand why problems had arisen with the trial (and this had led to speculation about the experience of the captains).

5.23. A small number disagreed and comments included the following:

- That the service has been tried twice before and has failed; respondents who made this comment said they did not understand why it was being tried again.
- Some asked whether the Hebridean Isles would be a more suitable vessel.
- There were calls for a new, dedicated vessel for South Uist and a suggestion that a catamaran could be developed and used.

5.24. A number of steps have already been taken to address some of the issues raised and other, longer term, improvements are planned.

5.25. CalMac pointed out that the vessel's thrusters have been improved and that the vessel is regularly reviewed to see if anything further can be done, perhaps to propellers or control systems, to help it cope better with the open seas and the manoeuvres required to berth at Mallaig.

5.26. The Mallaig Harbour Authority has recently announced that a masterplan to develop the harbour will be produced, including an outer breakwater which would help with berthing and manoeuvring issues; this development is expected to take place over the next 10 years.

### **Cancellation data**

5.27. Data supplied by CalMac shows that the majority of sailings in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 were cancelled due to adverse weather (88%).

**Table 5.2 Reasons for cancellations**

<b>Lochboisdale &lt;-&gt; Mallaig</b>	<b>2013/2014</b>	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Scheduled sailings	136	144	280
Cancelled sailings	67	86	153
<b>Reasons for cancellations</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Adverse weather	91	86	88
Ship out of position	6	-	3
Mechanical problems (ship)*	3	9	7
Very low tide	-	5	3

Source: CalMac carryings data to 31/03/15

### **Impact of cancellations**

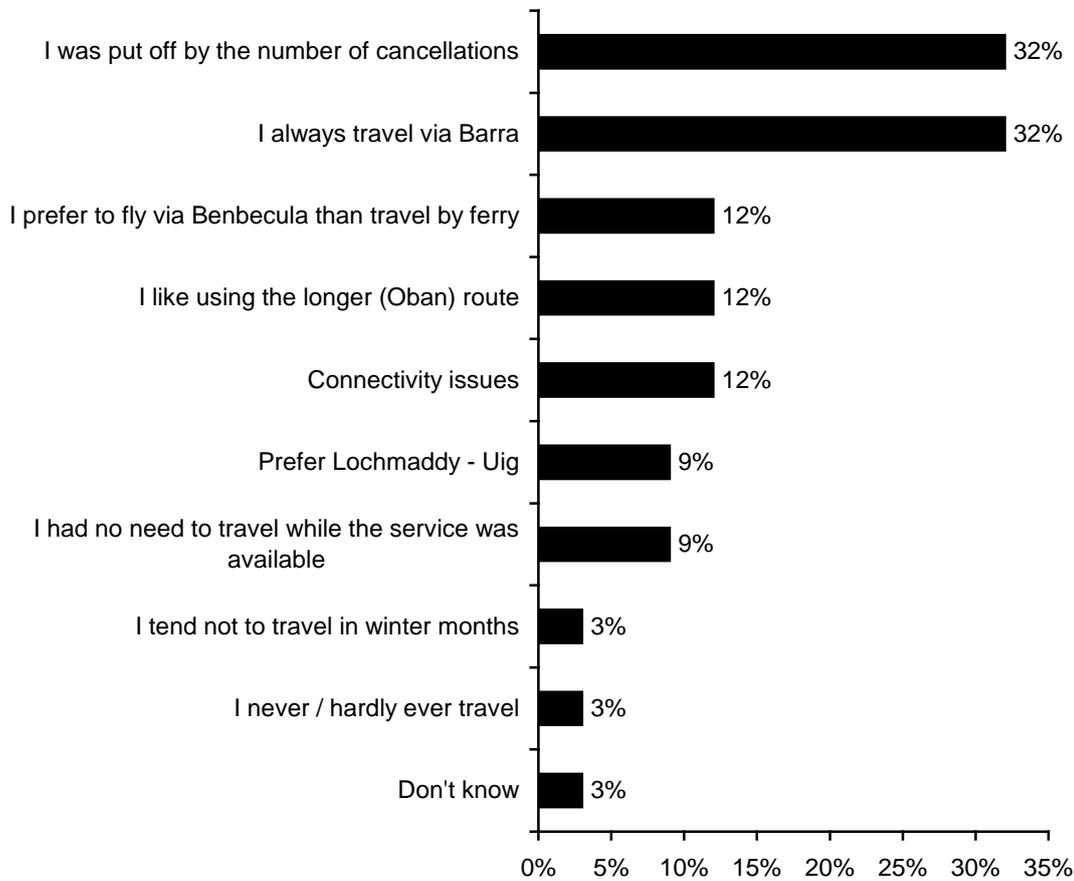
5.28. The main impact of the large number of cancellations reported by respondents has been a loss of confidence in the service with respondents commenting that

they no longer book on the service as they expect that it will be cancelled. Typical comments included the following from a South Uist resident:

*“Travel to the mainland is not something most people do on a whim. The days/times we travel are generally dictated by necessity, and the routes we travel are dictated by the available timetables, and our ultimate destination. People who plan to travel on Tuesday or Saturday, \*need\* to travel on those days. If they can't trust that the Mallaig service will actually run, they'll simply book the Lochmaddy ferry instead. That's not a matter of preference-- no one in their right mind \*wants\* to drive hundreds of miles out of their way, and add several extra hours to their trip - it's a matter of necessity.”*

- 5.29. The small number of respondents who said they had never tried to use the pilot service were asked why; in reading the figures quoted here the small base sizes should be noted.
- 5.30. The majority of Barra residents, not surprisingly, said that they use the Castlebay – Oban service. The main reason from those living outwith Barra, however, was that they had been put off by the high number of cancellations; this figure rose to 71% of South Uist residents.

**Chart 5.3 Reasons for never trying to use Mallaig-Lochboisdale winter ferry service**



Source: Q6e: Why have you never tried to use the Mallaig to Lochboisdale service? Base = 34  
 \* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

### Communication and information provision

5.31. During interviews, respondents reported a feeling of disappointment and some anger, especially after starting the pilot with high hopes of success. Respondents speculated that incorrect or delayed information from CalMac exacerbates the situation for travellers facing cancellations, reporting that the website is not updated frequently or that it displays incorrect information. One South Uist resident commented:

*"The level of cancellations on this route and the lack of information and clarity given to the community and intending passengers is appalling. It is understandable that the ferry is cancelled when the weather is rough and that the skippers have the final say on whether it is safe to sail or not, but the constant 'adverse weather' cancellation of the LB-Mallaig service on days when the weather is calm at Lochboisdale and Mallaig needs to be addressed."*

5.32. Local staff are acknowledged to provide a service over and above that offered by CalMac head office including phoning people with updates and helping to

rearrange travel; this information and assistance is often needed late at night if the service is cancelled after CalMac's office has shut for the night. Better local access to text messaging services or the ability for local staff to update the website could help. However, respondents commented that while CalMac provides web-based or smart phone based updates, this is not suitable for all islanders as internet is patchy, slow and expensive and not all residents have access and that many islanders still use landlines rather than mobiles.

5.33. It does appear, though, that more detailed and timely information could go some way to restoring confidence. There were comments that if residents were given more information as to the actual issue this would both start to rebuild confidence and put an end to speculation. Respondents would like to see:

- More precise information on the cause of cancellations.
- More up-to-date information and updates on whether the service might sail at a different time.
- More flexibility in rescheduling or rerouting the service; for example, if the Lochboisdale-Mallaig ferry is cancelled and unlikely to run at a later hour, respondents would like to see a connecting ferry via Eriskay in order to travel via Oban instead, or for the ferry to run directly to Oban rather than tying up at Lochboisdale.

5.34. CalMac commented:

- That they provide a great deal of information as soon as it becomes available and in a wide range of formats including information and status updates which are regularly updated on their website and on Twitter, use of text alerts and the service status app for smart phones. If they can provide more information then they will do so.
- That all services are reviewed regularly but there is a challenge as some travellers would like the cancellation notification as early as possible, while for others any notification will be seen as too early.
- That rerouting and rescheduling are always considered and used wherever possible given conditions and other service requirements.
- That the central and local teams work to ensure that customers receive the correct information.

## **Summary**

The main issue experienced during the pilot has been a high number of cancellations; 71% of respondents reported that a service they had tried to use had been cancelled. Data supplied by CalMac indicates that fewer than half of scheduled sailings on the Mallaig – Lochboisdale route have been completed since the start of the pilot.

The majority of respondents reported that their service had been cancelled due to adverse weather and data supplied by CalMac indicates that 85% of cancellations over the pilot period were due to adverse weather.

Respondents speculated on a number of other issues which, they felt, might affect sailings.

The main impact of the large number of cancellations has been a loss of confidence in the service with respondents commenting that they no longer book on the service as they expect that it will be cancelled.

Many of those who have never tried to use the service say they have been put off by the number of cancellations.

The initial announcement of the pilot service was welcomed, particularly by South Uist residents; however the number of cancellations has led to disappointment.

A perceived lack of detailed information and consultation has led to speculation over the reasons for the high number of cancellations.

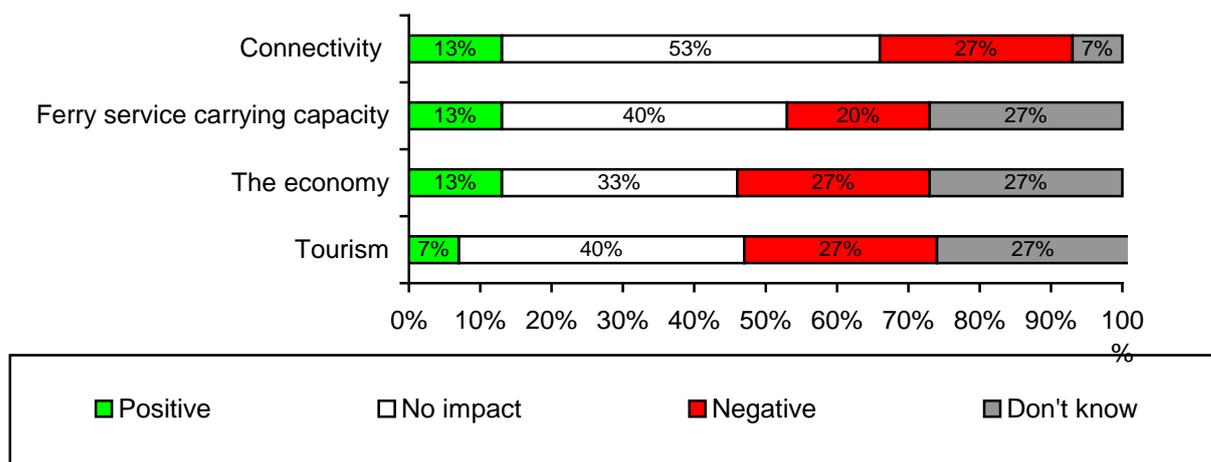
## 6. Other impacts of the winter pilot service

6.1. The objectives of the Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service include enhancing travel choices and links not only for South Uist but also for Barra, Benbecula, North Uist and Mallaig. The pilot also aimed to increase visitors and enhance the local economy of South Uist and also the Western Isles more broadly.

### Impact on Barra

6.2. The 15 residents of Barra who completed the online survey were asked a series of question on the impact of the service on connectivity, carrying capacity, the local economy and tourism. As can be seen in the chart below, most respondents felt that there had been no impact or said that they did not know; however, the very small base size should be noted.

**Chart 6.1 Impact on Barra**



Source: Q10: Please say how you feel the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service has affected the following aspects for Barra. Base = 15

6.3. Interviews with residents, representatives and other stakeholders from Barra raised the following points:

- Some concern that Barra had lost part of their service in order to deliver the pilot to South Uist; respondents pointed out that Barra has only one service to the mainland whereas South Uist has access to the Lochmaddy – Uig service.
- The need for a daily, dedicated service for Barra that runs at times suitable for residents and businesses and that integrates well with public transport on the mainland.
- The need to ensure that services from and to Barra are not subject to cancellation; this is particularly important because of the reliance of their economy on the fishing sector. Fish needs to be processed and then sent straight out to markets and so the economy cannot afford cancellations or delays.

- One business owner supplying Barra commented: *“We may need to use it to collect propane cylinders from the mainland due to the Clansman being removed from the barrage run and being replaced with the older and closed deck Isle of Lewis .... We did consider using the Mallaig service but the timings are useless as they do not meet with the Eriskay ferry”.*

### Impact on Mallaig

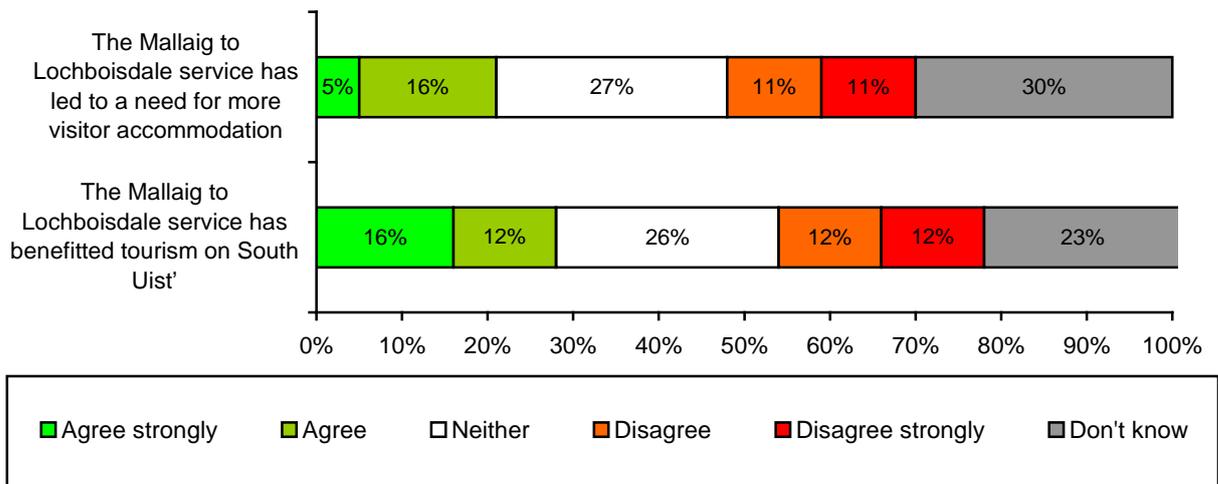
- 6.4. Representatives and residents from Mallaig reported similar feelings of anticipation to those on South Uist when the pilot was first announced. Again however, respondents said that little notice was given and that there had been no consultation with local representatives, residents or businesses over the service or over the days and timings of the service.
- 6.5. There was a feeling that Mallaig businesses could have benefitted greatly from the pilot if it had operated on more occasions as it would encourage more visitors and business passing through Mallaig. Respondents felt that more people would have travelled from South Uist either to visit family or to shop and this could have led to far more business for the area and improvements to the local economy.
- 6.6. Respondents also felt that more reliable sailings could have meant restaurants and hotels opening for a longer season rather than closing during winter. This, they felt, could have resulted in benefits for the Mallaig area including increased employment and more money spent in the town.
- 6.7. There are many family links between South Uist and Mallaig and the service was seen as ideal in giving families and friends more opportunities to connect.
- 6.8. There was also a feeling that the service had not been sufficiently advertised (during interviews on-board the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service researchers met several people who were unaware of the Mallaig service).
- 6.9. There were also calls for improved public transport from and to Mallaig; this was seen as particularly important given the planned summer sailings.
- 6.10. There was also concern about possible changes to summer sailings which could have a negative impact on Mallaig. Respondents had heard that the first ferry to Armadale will no longer accommodate coaches. There was concern that this will damage accommodation businesses as there will be fewer guests staying overnight before travelling on to Skye in the morning.
- 6.11. A small number felt that the sailings that had taken place have already proved beneficial, one resident commented: *“It has provided a tremendous boost to the Mallaig/Lochaber economy and gives more choice to tourists”.*

## Impact on tourism and the local economy

6.12. Respondents to the online survey were asked whether they agree or disagree that 'The Mallaig to Lochboisdale service has benefitted tourism on South Uist'. Of the 165 who replied similar numbers agreed as disagreed.

6.13. Respondents were also asked to what extent they agree that 'The Mallaig to Lochboisdale service has led to a need for more visitor accommodation'. Of the 167 who replied, again, similar numbers agreed as disagreed:

**Chart 6.2 Impact on tourism**

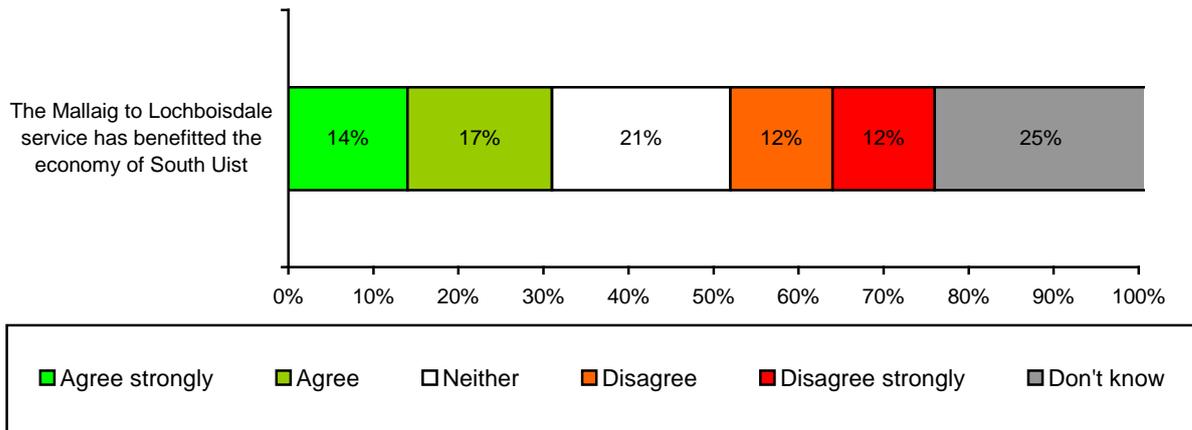


Source: Q9. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

6.14. There were comments from respondents that a more reliable service could have led to more business for accommodation providers and others in both South Uist and Mallaig. One elected member commented: *“A reliable, regular daily winter service would give local hotels the opportunity to return to winter opening as they previously did when winter services to Stornoway and the Uists were the norm.”*

6.15. When asked to what extent they agree that 'The Mallaig to Lochboisdale service has benefitted the economy of South Uist', slightly higher proportions of the 167 who replied agreed (31%) than disagreed (24%). However, most neither agreed nor disagreed (21%) or said that they do not know (25%).

**Chart 6.3 Views on impact on South Uist economy**



Source: Q9. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

**6.16. Typical comments on the impact or potential impact of the service included:**

*“Everything is expensive and there is a lack of variety – we thought a shorter ferry would make things easier to get and make them cheaper but ...”* (Young person, South Uist)

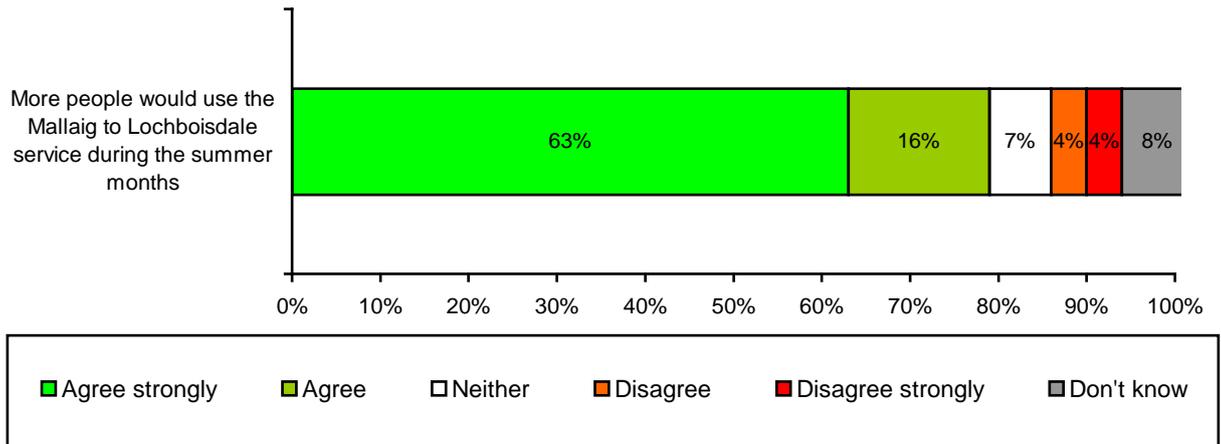
*“This service should be an asset to us BUT reliability and cost are big disappointments. .... I cannot depend on the current service and certainly cannot afford to have thousands of pounds worth of [stock] lying in Mallaig waiting for a ferry that only runs spasmodically. We also have poor weather in summer. Oban has much better backup for my needs and I am horrified at the thought of the suggested total removal of Oban from next summer’s timetable. I am also shocked about the suggested summer timetable for tourism in that departure and arrival times are so outlandish. Those times do nothing for local businesses in Lochboisdale. What shops, hotels, B and Bs, hire drive companies etc. wish to be operating at 5am and 10pm at night!!!!!!”* (Business owner, mainland)

*“Had there been more sailings in the winter time, I believe it would have benefited the economic community of both Mallaig and Lochboisdale but as it is so unreliable, people don't trust that it will sail.”* (Glasgow resident)

**Summer services**

6.17. Respondents were also asked their views about summer sailings and the extent to which they agree that ‘More people would use the Mallaig to Lochboisdale service during the summer months’. Of the 169 who replied a large majority (79%) agreed.

**Chart 6.4 Views on whether more people would use the service in summer**



Source: Q9. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

6.18. In addition, when asked which of a series of features would be most important to respondents in considering their use of the service, many identified features related to summer sailings:

- 21% said 'sailings during summer months'.
- 36% said 'sailings all year round'.

6.19. However, the lack of confidence in the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service has also led to concern over the future of the South Uist ferry routes. Some respondents noted concerns that the planned summer service will also suffer cancellations which will lead to a decrease in tourism and therefore impact upon the economy of the island; especially as the service to Oban will no longer call at Lochboisdale. Respondents pointed out that the Lochmaddy – Uig service will be the only alternative (and, as mentioned previously, respondents report that in summer months this service is always booked up several weeks in advance).

6.20. Respondents also commented on a lack of integration between the Barra – Oban summer timetable and the Eriskay – Barra timetable, meaning that if the Mallaig service is cancelled, the Eriskay ferry timetable does not offer the opportunity to travel to Barra to catch the ferry onwards to Oban.

## **Summary**

Residents of Barra feel that the service has had little impact on Barra, although there was some concern that Barra had lost part of its lifeline service in order to provide the Lochboisdale – Mallaig service.

Respondents from Mallaig feel that the service could have proved beneficial to the area, however the high number of cancellations has meant that this benefit has not materialised.

Respondents felt that the service has had little effect on either tourism or the local economies. Some disappointment and frustration was evident as benefits to tourism and the local economy had been expected both on South Uist and in Mallaig as higher numbers of visitors had been expected.

A large number of respondents felt that more travellers would use the service in the summer months.

There was concern over the summer service in the light of the summer timetable not including the Oban service; respondents worried that any similar issues with cancellations over the summer months could have a serious negative impact on tourism and the economy on South Uist, as there will be no alternative sailing available.

## 7. Timetabling

7.1. The Mallaig – Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service operates over five months of the year (November to late March / early April inclusive) with two sailings per day on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

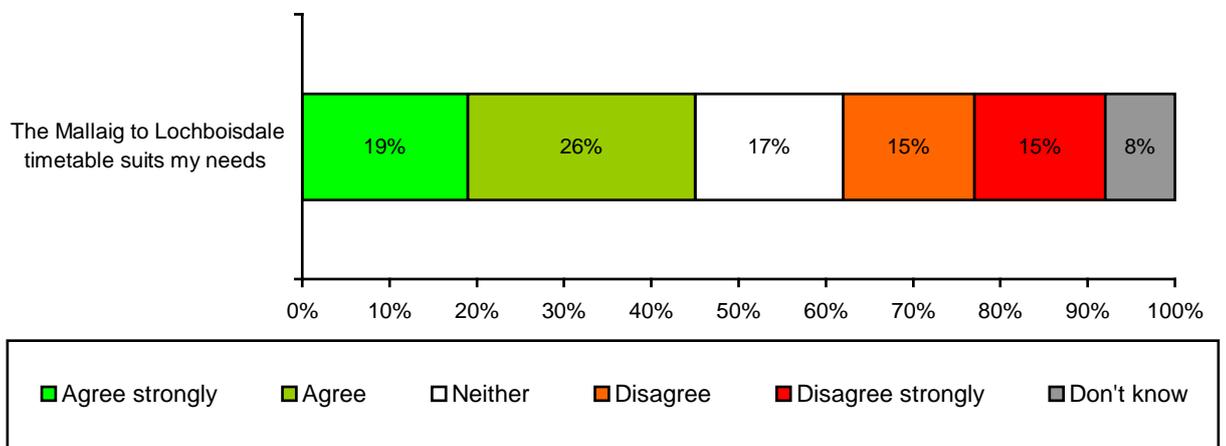
7.2. The 2015 / 2016 service operates from 15<sup>th</sup> November 2015 until 22 March 2016 with the following timetable:

- Leaving Lochboisdale 06:00 - Arriving Mallaig 09:30
- Leaving Mallaig 09:45 - Arriving Lochboisdale 13:15
- Leaving Lochboisdale 14:00 - Arriving Mallaig 17:30
- Leaving Mallaig 18:15 - Arriving Lochboisdale 21:45

### Suitability of timetable

7.3. Respondents to the online survey were asked whether they agree or disagree that ‘The Mallaig to Lochboisdale timetable suits my needs’. Of the 168 who replied almost half agreed (45%) with around a third (30%) disagreeing:

**Chart 7.1 Views on suitability of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale timetable**



Source: Q9. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

7.4. When asked which of a series of features would be most important to respondents in considering their use of the service, around a quarter identified features related to timetabling and the operating period:

- 24% said ‘days of the week when the ferry operates’
- 27% said ‘times of day when the ferry operates’

7.5. However, the following timetabling issues were raised during interviews with respondents.

7.6. Comments that the times of the sailings are not suitable for tourists:

- Respondents commented that the times are too late for arrivals and too early for those leaving the island. This impacts on hotels and B&Bs.
- Respondents felt that travellers should be able to arrive in time for dinner and depart after breakfast.
- There was a feeling, particularly from accommodation providers that earlier arrivals and later departures could benefit tourism on South Uist.

7.7. Comments that the timetable does not suit all residents:

- That the timings and days of operation are not suitable for family visits.
- That sailings on Fridays and Mondays would make it possible for people to visit either the mainland or South Uist for the weekend.
- Respondents, and especially young people studying on South Uist, would like the opportunity to either visit family or to have family come to visit, but the current timetable and days of sailings do not facilitate visits.
- That daily sailings would benefit residents and give the opportunity to sail the next day if a service is cancelled.

7.8. There were also a small number of comments that there is no need for two sailings per day during winter, and there were associated comments that one daylight crossing might lead to greater reliability.

7.9. There were also many comments on the need for better integration with other ferry routes and with public transport. These included:

- The need for better integration between the Eriskay ferry and ferries leaving Barra for the mainland in order to improve connectivity in the event of the service from Lochboisdale being cancelled.
- The need for better integration with trains arriving at Mallaig; respondents reported that there is little time between the train arriving from Fort William at Mallaig and the ferry leaving; given the need to check-in prior to sailing this does not provide enough time for travellers to get from the train to the ferry in time.
- There were also similar comments in relation to integration with train services at Oban and the Oban – Castlebay – Lochboisdale service.

- The need for better connectivity between Mallaig and Glasgow and especially between Mallaig and Glasgow airport.

7.10. While some respondents reported that there had been no consultation with South Uist residents over the timetabling of the service, others said they understood there had been some consultation with local groups but that this had not involved consultation with residents or businesses.

### **Summary**

More agreed than disagreed that the timetable suits their needs.

A number of respondents would like to see the service leave South Uist later and arrive earlier; they felt that this would be beneficial for tourism and the local economy.

There were calls for sailings on Fridays and Mondays to allow weekend visits both off and on South Uist; respondents felt that this would benefit both tourists and residents.

There were calls for better integration across all transport options.

## 8. Other comments

### Important features for the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service

8.1. Respondents were asked which one of a series of features they felt would be most important to potential users and which of the features would be most useful to themselves. As can be seen in the table below, respondents highlighted the shorter crossing as the most important feature in both cases. On a personal basis, respondents also identified improved access to the mainland and fewer cancellations as important features (each cited by 40% of respondents).

**Table 8.1 Important features for the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service**

	Potential users % (Base: 174)	Respondent personally % (Base: 174)
A shorter crossing	41	50
A more sheltered crossing	2	16
Lower emissions	-	5
Lower fares	1	20
Improved access to the mainland	15	40
Days of the week when the ferry operates	2	24
Times of day when the ferry operates	2	27
Facilities on-board	-	1
Sailings during summer months	6	21
Sailings all year round	10	36
Fewer cancellations	13	40
Better integration with other transport services	2	17
Don't know	1	1
None of the above	6	9

Sources:

Q10a Which of these features, or potential features, of a Mallaig to Lochboisdale ferry service do you feel would be the most important to any potential users? Base = 174

Q10b: And which would be most important to you in considering your use of the service? Base = 173

\* Does not add to 100% as respondents could choose more than one option.

8.2. At the end of the online survey, respondents were asked what one change they would make to encourage more use of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service and invited to provide any further feedback in relation to the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter ferry service. Similar comments emerged in responses to both of these questions and so have been analysed together.

8.3. The main comments made by respondents echo many of the issues already raised in previous chapters of this report.

8.4. Most comments related to the number of cancellations and the need for reliability, with respondents commenting that problems with reliability mean people no longer book the service. Respondents wanted to see more flexibility in the service so that it could be rescheduled or rerouted following any cancellation.

8.5. Other comments included:

- Queries over the use of the 'adverse weather' status and requests for more detailed information on why services are cancelled.
- Comments that skippers and/or CalMac are too quick to cancel the service; that there needs to be more commitment from CalMac to the service or more priority given to the service; and comments that there is a perception that the service was set up to fail.
- Comments on the need for improvements to Mallaig Harbour; a smaller number commented on the need for improvements to Lochboisdale Harbour.
- Comments on the need for better integration with other ferry routes or with public transport.
- Negative comments on the perceived priority given to large businesses.
- The need for the service to be better advertised.
- Respondents commented that the service had the potential to give a huge boost to South Uist and/or Mallaig if it was reliable.
- There was welcome for the shorter sea crossing but respondents put forward a number of requests including:
  - a dedicated boat
  - a better / more suitable vessel
  - more sailings / daily sailings
  - a more suitable timetable

8.6. Respondents also expressed concern over the loss of the Oban route from the summer timetable.

8.7. Other comments raised by respondents during interviews included:

- The need for wifi on-board the ferries (this was especially important to younger respondents).
- Comments on the high cost of shipping goods to South Uist.

### **Summary**

Respondents identified the shorter crossing as the most important feature of the pilot service.

The main comments raised by respondents to the online survey related to the need for reliability and concern over the number of cancellations.

## 9. Lessons learned and conclusions

### Lessons learned

- 9.1. The objectives of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service were:
- to enhance transport choices and links for residents and businesses in South Uist, and to a lesser extent in Barra, Benbecula, North Uist and Mallaig;
  - to increase visitors to South Uist, and the Western Isles more broadly; and to support existing tourism markets;
  - to enhance the local economy of South Uist, and the Western Isles more broadly.
- 9.2. Respondents felt the pilot could have achieved these objectives but failed to do so to any great extent as the pilot ran in the winter months when fewer visitors might wish to travel to the island and because of the high number of cancellations due to winter weather.

### What has worked well during the project and what has worked less well?

- 9.3. Respondents identified the main benefit of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale service as the shorter ferry trip.
- 9.4. The service was seen as potentially of greatest benefit to residents and businesses on South Uist and those in Mallaig and the surrounding area, along with those wishing to visit South Uist specifically. The service was not seen as adding greatly to the choices of those on Barra, Benbecula and North Uist as most would continue to use the Oban or the Uig – Lochmaddy service. There was, however, some acknowledgement that the Uig – Lochmaddy service is often fully booked and the Mallaig service could, therefore, either reduce pressure on that service or provide an alternative when there is no space on the Uig – Lochmaddy service.
- 9.5. While some respondents pointed to other benefits that, they felt, could have been delivered by the pilot, such as potentially higher numbers of visitors and a positive impact on the local economy, the high number of cancellations has meant that these benefits did not materialise. The service has had little effect on either tourism or the local economies and while some expressed disappointment over what they saw as a lost opportunity, other respondents had not expected a trial in winter months to provide any benefits.
- 9.6. The main issue experienced during the pilot has been the high number of cancellations.
- 9.7. The main impact of the large number of cancellations has been a loss of confidence in the service with respondents commenting that they no longer book on the service as they expect that it will be cancelled. Many of those who have never tried to use the service say they have been put off by the number of cancellations.

If the project were to be repeated, how might it be improved or refined?

- 9.8. As little can be done about the weather, any improvements to a future winter pilot could include more of a focus on communication to ensure that expectations are managed from the start and that, when cancellations happen, the reasons for these are as communicated as quickly and clearly as possible.
- 9.9. Addressing negative perceptions and ensuring that the information provided is full and clear could help dispel any potential speculation and raise confidence in the service.

What would have to change to encourage more use of the service?

- 9.10. Over half (53%) of respondents said that they use, or would use, the service once a month or more and 61% would use the service in preference to other services. This indicates that if the service were able to operate more reliably it would be better used.
- 9.11. However, since fewer than half (45%) agreed that the timetable meets their needs, some changes to timetabling might also need to be considered. Consultation with residents and businesses would be useful to establish the most appropriate timetabling. From this research it appears that there is some support for the service leaving South Uist later and arriving earlier; this was seen as particularly important for tourists. There were also calls for sailings on Fridays and Mondays to allow weekend visits both off and on South Uist; this was seen as beneficial to both tourists and residents.

## **Conclusions**

- 9.12. Over 250 respondents took part in the research to support the process evaluation of the Mallaig to Lochboisdale winter pilot ferry service.
- 9.13. While the pilot service was initially welcomed, subsequent high numbers of cancellations combined with a lack of detailed information about the reasons for cancellations has led to disappointment and speculation. During the interviews a number of questions were raised by residents, businesses and other stakeholders, particularly:
- Whether the service was 'designed to fail'?
  - Whether the 'adverse weather' status is being used in place of other reasons for cancellations?
  - What the 'adverse weather' status actually means?
  - Why there is an apparent lack of flexibility and priority shown to the service that is not seen in relation other services?
- 9.14. While in-depth information is not generally given for any ferry services, given the high number of cancellations on this service it may be that this is something

that could be considered. It appears that more detailed information could help to address negative perceptions, dispel speculation and help to restore confidence in the service. In particular, consideration could be given to providing information on: where the problems with adverse weather are; what issues these cause for the ferry; when and how often the situation is reviewed; and what other alternatives such as rerouting have been considered.

9.15. Other issues which respondents would like to see addressed include:

- Better integration with other ferries, in particular the Eriskay to Barra service.
- Better integration with public transport at Mallaig.
- More direct consultation with residents and businesses over timetabling to ensure sailing times meet the needs of residents, businesses and tourists.

9.16. Some respondents did not want to see the Oban route removed completely and concerns were expressed that the removal of this service in the summer months could have a serious effect on tourism and the local economy should the Mallaig service suffer cancellations in the summer and given that the Lochmaddy ferry is usually booked up well in advance.

9.17. Respondents felt that the Mallaig – Lochboisdale service had the potential to deliver social benefits to local residents (in enabling easier, less expensive and more frequent visits to and from family and friends along with better access to shopping and services on the mainland) and to deliver increased economic benefits (through encouraging more visitors both to South Uist and to Mallaig).

9.18. However, the pilot service appears to have had little impact on South Uist or Mallaig, apart from a negative emotional impact caused by the cancellations and a feeling of opportunities missed and unrealised potential.



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