

GOUROCK-DUNOON FERRY SERVICE STEERING GROUP

Deployment of the MV Coruisk – December 2013 to March 2014

Background

1. The AFL service suffered significant weather disruption during Winter 2012-13. The AFL service with a significant deterioration on the previous winter. Bad weather affected reliability during the winter season (November 2012 to March 2013) with only 86% of sailings taking place (and only 68% in March 2013).

2. A limited number of options were available to AFL and to the Scottish Ministers to improve the resilience of the service in the winter 2013-14. A search for short-term replacement vessels had been initiated early in 2012 but this had not resulted in any suitable vessels offering significant performance improvements being found. The only vessel available for deployment on the service in 2013-14 was the MV Coruisk¹.

3. Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP announced to Parliament on 19 September 2013 her decision to deploy the MV Coruisk as an additional vessel, stating that:

“The weather reliability statistics, particularly for last winter, tell a clear story. However, I stress that the situation is in no way the fault of the crews of Argyll Ferries’ vessels, who strive to provide the best possible service under the understandably very close scrutiny of the users of the service. The hard fact is that the vessels – in particular the MV AliCat – have failed to perform reliably in poor weather.”

4. She went on to say that:

“I have been considering the options for the coming winter based on the vessels that are available in the wider CalMac fleet. Following consultation with Argyll Ferries and very careful consideration of the issues, I announce to Parliament today that I intend to approve the deployment of the MV Coruisk, when she becomes available this winter, to carry passengers on key peak sailings and to be on stand-by at other times.”

Deployment details

5. The MV Coruisk is deployed on the Mallaig-Armadale service during CalMac’s summer season and provides overhaul cover to the MV Argyle and the MV Bute on the Wemyss Bay-Rothesay service for part of the winter season. This left a period of just over 3 months available from 20 December 2013 to 31 March 2014.

¹ Advice from AFL on the deployment of the MV Coruisk has been published on the Transport Scotland website in response to an Freedom of Information request. See <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/water/ferries/gourock-dunoon>

6. Following consultation with user representatives, AFL deployed the MV Coruisk on the following sailings:

Gourock departures	0645	0750	1650	1750
Dunoon departures	0715	0820	1720	1820

7. The deployment at peak times ensured that key commuter services were strengthened and also addressed the concern raised by AFL that the MV Coruisk would struggle to maintain the hourly return timetable over an extended period. Keeping the deployment to 2 return sailings morning and evening gave confidence that any delays would not have significant knock-on effects on to later services. At other times the MV Coruisk remained on stand-by to step in the other vessels were unable to operate due to the weather conditions.

8. The MV Coruisk was redeployed to the Wemyss Bay—Rothesay route between for a few days to cover for unscheduled repairs to the MV Bute. The MV Coruisk’s deployment came to a premature end following a collision with the pier at Dunoon.

Performance

Sailings

9. There were 479 sailings scheduled for the MV Coruisk during her period of deployment. 444 of these sailings took place, 32 were cancelled due to adverse weather conditions, 1 for technical reasons and 2 due to the unavailability of Gourock pier. The MV Coruisk provided an additional 133 sailings when one or both of the other 2 vessels were unable to sail. 28 of these sailings were made by the MV Coruisk when both the MV AliCat and the MV Argyll Flyer were unable to operate. On these occasions, the MV Coruisk was able to provide continuity of service for passengers which led to an increase in the reliability of the service as a whole during the period of her deployment. The MV Coruisk also undertook a further 105 sailings for operational effectiveness, essentially to maintain the 2 vessel service to timetable when one or other of the other vessels could not sail either for weather or technical reasons.

Passengers

10. The MV Coruisk carried 9,514 passengers during the period of her deployment. The most popular sailings were those from Dunoon to Gourock in the morning and from Gourock to Dunoon in the evening, reflecting the service’s importance to commuters. The MV Coruisk carried roughly one in six of the passengers carried by AFL during the period.

11. During the same period, the MV Argyll Flyer carried 33,949 passengers and the MV AliCat carried 14,934. Table 1 below shows the number of passengers carried by AFL during the period, broken down by vessel.

	MV Argyll	MV AliCat	MV Coruisk	Total
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	Flyer			
Number of completed sailings	2725	1733	577	5,035
Number of passengers	33,949	14,934	9,514	58,397
Ave no of pax per sailing	12.5	8.6	16.5	11.6

Reliability

12. The purpose of deploying the MV Coruisk was to improve the reliability of the service during adverse winter weather. Table 2 below shows reliability information for the 3 vessels (MV Coruisk, MV Argyll Flyer and MV AliCat) during the period of the MV Coruisk's deployment. These figures have not been adjusted to take account of relief events as defined in the contract

	MV Argyll Flyer	MV AliCat	MV Coruisk	Total
Scheduled sailings	2982	1894	479	5355
Sailings cancelled	257	161	35	453
- weather	239	159	32	430
- technical	18	0	1	19
- other	0	2	2	4
% schedules sailings completed	92%	91.5%	92.7%	91.6%
Additional sailings	-	-	133	133
Total sailings	2982	1894	612	5488
% total sailings completed	92%	91.5%	94.3%	91.8%

Punctuality

13. Table 3 below gives punctuality information for the 3 vessels during the period of the MV Coruisk's deployment. These figures have not been adjusted to take account of relief events as defined in the contract:

	MV Argyll Flyer	MV AliCat	MV Coruisk	Total
Scheduled sailings	2982	1894	479	5355
Scheduled sailings late	117	109	91	317
% scheduled sailings late	3.9%	5.8%	19%	5.9%

Cost

14. The main cost to AFL of deploying the MV Coruisk was the charter of the vessel, with crew, from CalMac Ferries Ltd. This generates a financial benefit to CalMac and, through the clawback mechanism in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract, to Transport Scotland. The cost to AFL of providing the additional services with the MV Coruisk is provisionally estimated as £658,000. The net cost to Transport Scotland of the deployment of the MV Coruisk is provisionally estimated as £142,000

15. The cost, per completed sailing and per passenger, of the deployment of the MV Coruisk to Argyll Ferries and to Transport Scotland is set out in Table 4 overleaf.

The final column is added to provide some context (figures from the last full contract year, 2012-13²):

	AFL	TS	<i>AFL 2012-13</i>
Per sailing	£1,075	£232	<i>£73</i>
Per passenger	£69.16	£14.92	<i>£4.14</i>

Conclusions

16. A trial of the MV Coruisk on the route had been proposed and, although this year's deployment was not presented as such, it does provide useful information to inform future decision making.

17. Given the severity of the previous winter's disruption, it was appropriate to use the MV Coruisk, as the only suitable vessel available, to seek to improve the resilience and reliability of the service this winter. This has been achieved. The MV Coruisk's reliability was higher than the other vessels, albeit not substantially; however her ability to step in when no other vessels were running added significantly to the resilience of the ferry service. This was complemented by the additional resilience provided by the replacement bus service.

18. Anecdotally, the presence of the MV Coruisk on key commuter sailings gave frequent travellers greater confidence in the service and in their daily travel plans. A postcard campaign organised by DGFAG prompted 157 people to write to the DFM requesting the deployment of the vessel again next winter.

19. However, the cost of the deployment per sailing and per passenger was high. Punctuality was relatively poor although this has not given rise to a large number of complaints; restricting the scheduled deployment to 2 return sailings morning and evening prevented delays from having a knock-on effect to the remainder of the timetable.

Transport Scotland
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² This is for illustrative rather than comparative purposes. A comparison with contract year 3 once final figures are available will be more meaningful as a number of other additional costs have been added to the contract since contract year 2.