

MINUTES OF EXPERT FERRY GROUP MEETING – 15 NOVEMBER 2018

Attendees

Alf Baird (AB)
Allan Comrie (AC)
Brian Fulton (BF)
Gordon Ross (GR)
Kevin Hobbs (KH)
Roy Pedersen (RP)
Ranald Robertson (RR) – by phone
Michael Craigie (MC) – by phone
Fran Pacitti (FP)
Richard Hadfield (RH)
Brian Gordon (BG)
Paul Flynn (PF)
Nicole Currie (NC)

Apologies

None received

Note of Meeting

Introductions

1. FP welcomed the attendees and introduced herself as the new Director of Aviation, Maritime, Freight and Canals (AMFC), and so new chair of the group. FP advised the group that she was very appreciative of the time that the members give to attend these meetings.
2. FP shared her observations since taking up her post, noting that connectivity to islands and international connectivity is of vital importance. There are a number of challenges associated with delivery, including finance, both capital and resource, which is expected to be extremely challenging for at least the next two to three years. There are existing operational challenges and a need to work through these before we can move on to the more esoteric thinking and debate, in the context of future policy development.
3. FP then sought the views of the group.

Reflections on EFG to date

4. The group welcomed FP's approach. This group has now been meeting for three years and when it was initially set up the understanding was that 'nothing would be off the agenda' in terms of policy discussions, but that this hasn't always been the case and over the course of previous meetings "red lines" with respect to certain policy areas have crept in and these had been documented in the minutes of previous meetings.

5. FP asked for an example of “red lines”. RH said that an example of this is that the previous Minister had not been keen to discuss building ships outside of Scotland, given the Scottish Government’s desire to support the shipbuilding industry in Scotland. RP commented that up until now the tendency of the group was to focus mainly on the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) network. He suggested that the agenda be widened and that the group also discuss the Northern Isles Ferry Service (NIFS) network.

6. The point was made that the group has also not discussed international ferry routes to and from Scotland and he felt that this should be welcomed as a topic, especially within a Brexit context.

7. PF reiterated that ferries policy did not exist in a vacuum and so cognisance of wider Scottish Government policy had to be taken into account.

8. There was acknowledgement that Transport Scotland operates in a challenging financial environment and that demand for ferry services is increasing exponentially. The collective view was that the group was here to help advise Transport Scotland and that they would then come to the group with a specific issue or questions and the group would in turn advise Transport Scotland on options for moving forward.

9. It was suggested that having a specific timeline for the meetings and setting them ahead of time would be helpful. The group discussed the frequency of the meetings and concluded that there should be three or four meetings each year.

Remit of EFG

10. KH intimated that it was quite clear that this group was not a decision making group and said that he agreed with the general consensus that the group needs to know what is ‘on the table’ for discussion and what is not.

FP summarised the discussion so far and reiterated to the group Transport Scotland’s commitment to transparency. FP said she recognises the frustration of the group and wants to know what they think the group could help with. She said that Transport Scotland would provide more visibility on future agenda items, bring what is coming up in the next twelve months, but stressed that it would not be possible or indeed appropriate to bring every issue or potential substantive decision to the group and there are issues that Ministers may not wish to seek the group’s advice on.

EFG Membership

11. Some of the group felt that the current membership of the group was well balanced, whilst others countered that he felt that there are some gaps and provided an example of an operator to the Northern Isles not being included at this time.

12. RH proposed Stuart Garret, Managing Director of Serco Northlink, as a possible member to add to the group.

13. RH added that we should consider trade unions representation at this group and that we don't have representation for the end users of the services.

14. PF raised the gender diversity of the group including age and ethnic diversity. BF said this is an issue that CalMac had also tried to address when recruiting for their CalMac Community Board and he said that it had been challenging and was something that they were mindful of.

15. FP summarised the discussion so far:

- Meeting dates will be fixed. Accepted that attendees may not wish to attend all meetings if the agenda is not considered relevant to them. Non-attendance will not prejudice future participation in the group.
- Transport Scotland will provide an update on activity as a standing agenda item at the beginning of every meeting.
- Agreement that membership should be extended to include NIFS.
- Agreement that EFG is not a decision making body.
- Agreement that only those matters where think EFG input would be beneficial will be brought to EFG – we will not bring all aspects of policy development to the group for input.
- Transport Scotland may continue to refine the group.

16. FP updated the group on the recent Cabinet reshuffle and resulting portfolio allocation, advising the group that Mr Wheelhouse will be leading on Ferries, and that he is linking this portfolio very strongly to his islands responsibilities. She added that due to diary commitments it is unlikely that Ministers will regularly attend these meetings.

Policy Update – Ferries Plan 2013 - 2022

17. PF and BG provided an update on Ferries Plan progress and an open discussion followed.

18. PF explained that both the National Transport Strategy and Strategic Transport Projects Review are currently taking place and we need to make sure that the next ferries plan feeds in to this and that future ferries policy is taken forward and delivered within the context of this work.

ACTION - FP proposed that demand, capacity and needs based assessment be the topic for discussion at the next meeting.

19. The point was made that there is a difference between aspiration and need and this should also be considered. Some communities know there are constraints and acknowledge this.

Policy update – Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan (VRDP)

20. RH provided a presentation on VRDP and the early plans for the next Ferries Plan. He said he will share information at the next meeting on demand modelling but the VRDP doesn't currently include NIFS.

21. RR and MC both raised concerns that NIFS isn't currently included within in the VRDP. GR noted that Gourock - Dunoon is not included either.

ACTION - TS to circulate the flow charts from RH's presentation.

AOB / Next Meeting

22. The group agreed that ferries emissions could be a topic for future discussion.

ACTION - Emissions to be added to a future agenda.

23. Next meeting to be held around February 2019 – arrangements to follow.

Ferries Unit
Transport Scotland
20 December 2018