



The Clerk to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

28 March 2008

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Ferry Services in Scotland

I am writing on behalf of the Mobility & Access Committee for Scotland, of which I am acting Convener. MACS is an Advisory NDPB whose principle job is to advise Scottish Ministers on improvements to transport for people with disabilities. MACS *"believes in a Scotland where anyone with a mobility problem can go when and where everyone else can and have the information and opportunities to do so."*

MACS has had a strong interest in ferry transport since it was founded in 2002. MACS works closely with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) on matters which fall within the remit of the Department for Transport, such as the design of passenger ships working in UK waters. In particular it was represented on a working group hosted by DPTAC which has been creating new guidance - **Designing and Operating Passenger Vessels and Passenger Shore Infrastructure: Guidance on Meeting the Needs of Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRM)**.

DPTAC has been consulting on a draft version of this new guidance, and MACS has responded to the effect that whilst it welcomes the guidance it has serious reservations about the lack of detailed guidance on the important issue of getting on and off ferries. It is MACS view that for many disabled people this can be the most challenging part of a ferry journey. So, although the guidance is full and thorough on the design of ferries, and on the design of ferry terminals, it devotes little attention to the interface between them.

MACS has embarked on producing such guidance particularly in respect of smaller ferries, and DPTAC has indicated that it will be willing to make reference to the additional guidance in its publication.

However present Government policy is to amalgamate MACS with the Passenger Transport Users' Committee, and the future of this additional guidance is uncertain.

MACS is particularly concerned about access to **small** ferries. The group which produced the DPTAC guidance was dominated by people who are conversant with large ferries such as cross channel ferries, for which passenger access is invariably by sophisticated, covered, walkways which are designed to cope with the tidal range experienced at the ports used. Some ferries in Scotland are equipped with such walkways – eg all the terminals used by Northlink Ferries between the Scottish Mainland and Orkney and Shetland have such walkways and provide excellent access for PRM.

However many smaller ferries in Scotland do not provide such convenient access and present major problems for PRM. MACS concern is that even if the new DPTAC guidance is followed in detail for new ferry developments in Scotland then the problems experienced by PRM will not necessarily be resolved. Apart from new developments, there is the issue of the existing ferries and port infrastructure, much of which cannot realistically be upgraded for many years.

MACS would like the inquiry to consider the following practical issues:

- The vital role of some ferries. For example, most CalMac ferries and those operating within Orkney and Shetland provide the sole link between a community and essential services such as hospitals.
- The use of hard ramps for many smaller ferries. Access for foot passengers to these ferries involves walking down a steep, often wet, concrete slope with no handrail.
- The use of traditional gangways with a slope dependent on the state of the tide. These can be challenging for people with walking difficulties and impossible for wheelchair users.
- The use of steps to access some passenger ferries. Again these are often wet and have limited handrails, and are impossible for wheelchair users.
- The limited staff available to assist passengers. Inevitably, small ferries are operated by small crews. Because the safety of the vessel is paramount, there may be no-one available to assist disabled passengers when boarding and disembarking.
- The tidal range and swell at some piers makes boarding and disembarking a challenge for all passengers, let alone those who have mobility problems.
- Once on board many existing smaller ferries, access to facilities for PRM can be prevented by very steep stairs, and by high sills at doors.

Conclusions

MACS is concerned that many existing small ferries provide very limited accessibility for PRM. Further, it is often impossible for PRM to get around once on board many existing vessels, for example to access the passenger accommodation or toilets.

MACS is concerned that while the new DPTAC Guidance, referred to above, provides good advice on designing accessible terminals and accessible ferries it fails to address the extremely difficult design issues around providing safe and convenient transfer between the two.

MACS is concerned that the lack of clear guidance on getting on and off vessels will delay the introduction of truly accessible small ferry services to provide vital transport to many of Scotland's smaller island communities.

MACS is strongly of the view that although physical issues are important, staff who are well trained to assist disabled passengers, and good quality information are vital aspects of providing inclusive ferry services.

Yours faithfully

Roderick McLeod

Acting Convener – Mobility & Access Committee for Scotland