



**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Islands Connectivity Plan – Strategic Approach

- draft for public consultation

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Ministerial foreword

The islands of Scotland are at the heart of our sense of ourselves as a country. For people who live on each and every unique Scottish island, there is a profound sense of belonging, resilience and identity. Island life has always brought with it great opportunities and experience but also the challenge of transport and connectivity.

In my meetings and visits with islanders, they have made clear to me that they have, and deserve to have, high expectations of transport services to meet their connectivity needs. Those needs may change and need to be understood and responded to by a system that can deliver reliability and resilience in challenging and, as we have seen through recent storms, worsening weather environments as a result of the changing climate.

We need to learn from the adaptability of islanders at the same time as providing confidence, certainty and regularity of transport provision as they plan their daily lives and as communities and businesses plan for the future.

The Islands Connectivity Plan contains a draft Strategic Approach for public consultation and an updated draft of the Vessels and Ports Plan. We are inviting comments on both, supported by a series of consultation questions. In parallel, Transport Scotland officials will be holding a series of engagement events with communities and stakeholders in the coming months.

The Vision proposed in this draft Strategic Approach is that Scotland's ferry services, supported by other transport modes, should be:

Safe, reliable, affordable and inclusive for residents, businesses and visitors enabling transport connectivity, sustainability and growth of island and peninsula communities and populations.

This will not happen overnight. It will take time and sustained focus and effort by Governments, operators, asset owners and other stakeholders to get it right and to reach these goals. Progress will depend on operational, technical and financial solutions in the context of a challenging fiscal environment.

This Islands Connectivity Plan sets out to capture what the transport connectivity needs are for islanders and ferry users on mainland peninsulas. It recognises that we must ensure our islands remain attractive places to live, to visit and to relocate to. Sustainable population growth is needed to meet the labour demand of public services and enable workforces to explore new opportunities, for example in renewable energy.

I believe our islands are hugely important in helping us reach net zero and this Plan is rightly ambitious when it comes to reducing emissions. However, we must also address the here and now and both the short and longer term demands of transport connectivity. We need to rethink what reducing emissions from island travel means, and consider the specific needs of islanders as part of a just transition which recognises that those needs and solutions will vary between locations. This is not simply in terms of mode of transport, which is primarily ferries, but a future that sees smart low carbon aviation, potential new fixed links of bridges, tunnels and causeways and a more connected end to end transport system enabling increased use of public transport and active travel. Greater self-sufficiency of islands may reduce the need for frequent visits to the mainland, and therefore carbon miles. We can also envisage a future of increasing freight traffic reflecting the growth of quality food, drink and other exports off islands. Future island population growth may also increase demand for the transport of goods and services to our islands.

It is clear that the most immediate issue is to ensure we have resilient ferry fleets to serve island and peninsula communities. The Scottish Government, through Transport Scotland, supports lifeline services to the Clyde and Hebrides and from mainland Scotland to the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland. As such, the “Small Vessel Replacement Programme” which will shortly move to procurement and then to vessel delivery is central to the Vessels and Ports Plan published alongside this document. Further vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) and Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS) Ferry Services are already in the design stage and progressing towards procurement. Feedback from key stakeholders has been incorporated into the Vessels and Ports Plan following publication of the initial consultation in December 2022. Plans for specific projects have been subject to consultation with ferry communities over the last year.

The six new major vessels for the CHFS network being built for delivery in 2024 and 2025 and the seven small vessels along with the supporting port and harbour works, including electric connectivity, will be significant steps towards replacing the CalMac Fleet, increasing reliability, resilience and capacity as well as contributing to our low carbon journey.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the individuals and ferry communities who have helped shape this Plan and the Small Vessel Replacement Programme. In particular, the Government also benefitted from the timely, comprehensive Report into “A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland” by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee of the Scottish Parliament and responded positively at the time to recommendations which have helped inform this and the next CHFS contract development work of Transport Scotland.

A key message throughout has been the need for continuous, regular and meaningful engagement with islanders. This has been recognised with the

engagement of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) and Transport Scotland in their port, harbours and ferry replacement works in this document and remains a firm commitment going forward.

Looking ahead, we will be completing reviews of the transport connectivity needs of each community served by Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles Ferry services. We will continue to support local authorities who have responsibility for their own internal ferry services as they develop plans for the future. In addition, our work to reform ferry fares policy, develop plans for reducing carbon emissions and improve connections with onward and connecting travel as part of a single integrated transport system is all ongoing.

I welcome your input into this consultation.

Fiona Hyslop

Minister for Transport

Islands Connectivity Plan

Scope and Purpose

The purpose of the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) is to set out how ferry services, supported by other transport modes, will be delivered, and strengthened, working towards a long-term vision, and supported by clear priorities and defined outcomes for people and places.

The Islands Connectivity Plan will build on the Ferries Plan 2013-2022. The Figure 1 sets out the structure of the ICP that is informed by current Scottish Government and Transport Scotland policies set out in the:

- SG Purpose and Outcomes (National Planning Framework 4, Climate Change Update Plan)
- National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2)
- National Islands Plan (NIP)
- Second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2).

A summary of these documents can be found in Annex A.

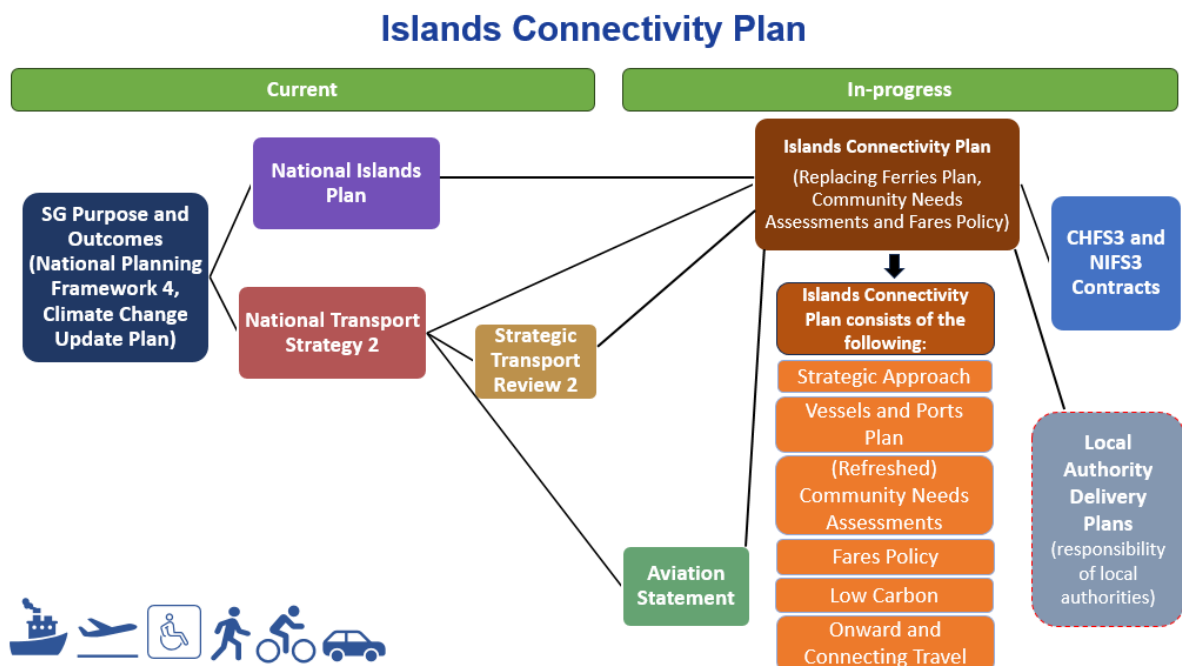


Figure 1 – the Islands Connectivity Plan structure.

This Strategic Approach paper is one part of the Islands Connectivity Plan and proposes our overall Strategic Approach to island transport connectivity including ferries, aviation, fixed links and, especially, addressing the strategic challenges

facing CHFS and NIFS services. The Strategic Approach paper can be applied to all domestic ferry services while respecting the autonomy of local authorities to develop their own standards and their accountability to local electorates for the design and delivery of ferry services for which they are responsible.

The ICP includes a series of delivery plans being developed in parallel to ensure that there is coherence between them and will include the following elements, that are already in progress, for CHFS and the NIFS and the CMAL fleet:

- Vessels and Ports Plan
- (Refreshed) Community Needs Assessments
- Ferry Fares Policy
- Low Carbon
- Onwards and Connecting Travel

Alongside this draft paper, we are publishing the first of these delivery plans: a draft Vessels and Ports Plan (VPP) for the CHFS and NIFS networks. We welcome views on both of these draft documents as part of the public consultation exercise.

In 2024, we will be working on other key elements of the Islands Connectivity Plan, in particular:

- Refreshed needs assessments for communities and routes served by CHFS and NIFS. This work will identify options to address issues and opportunities for service changes, engaging with communities and other stakeholders.
- Follow-up work on ferry fares policy, building on the Fair Fares Review.
- Better integration of ferries with other public transport and active travel modes to offer more and better onward and connecting travel options.
- Further work on pathways to reducing carbon emissions from ferries.

Island Transport Connectivity

Island transport connectivity is, at its simplest, the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people, goods and services to support sustainable communities and populations. This Islands Connectivity Plan seeks to address existing challenges, in particular the reliability and resilience of ferry services and will also look to identify and consider future transport connectivity challenges and opportunities.

The future is predicted to see poorer weather and an increased number of severe weather events – this will mean an increased risk of disruption to transport networks everywhere including to, from and on islands. Vessel and port design can seek to mitigate these impacts but will never remove them entirely. Therefore, resilience planning for island communities will be essential going forward as will service planning by transport operators to include the restoration of essential services and supplies, whether by air or sea or fixed links.

Scotland's first ever National Islands Plan was published in 2019 and provides a framework for action in order to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan sets out 13 strategic objectives to address population decline; improve and promote sustainable economic development; and improve outcomes in areas such as housing, health, education, environment, climate change and energy.

The National Islands Plan is now going through its first review which may lead to the publication of a new Plan but it is likely that transport will remain a critical issue for island communities. This Islands Connectivity Plan will contribute to the delivery of the current National Islands Plan and any likely new Plan but will also aim to anticipate its success and respond to any new challenges and opportunities it may bring.

The level of future island transport demand will depend on several factors – in particular it will be impacted by future development planning and by the availability of goods and services on islands. Sustainable island communities will be able to access more goods and services, such as healthcare, without the need for personal travel to and from the mainland and, in some cases, other islands. The same, as well as opportunities created by improved digital connectivity, will apply to work, education and training, particularly where this currently requires regular and frequent commuting to and from an island.

This would see a successful island generating less demand for travel off-island rather than more. However, growing islands' economies may require adapting transport connectivity to the particular economic growth sectors on each island.

How people travel will also change. Planning for the future of island transport connectivity should reflect those changes as well as be consistent with the Vision set out in the National Transport Strategy.

In particular, the implementation of this ICP will aim to improve opportunities for people to travel to and from islands without their own vehicle. This could be through public transport, active travel or car clubs, or other forms of car-sharing in anticipation of the rise of "mobility as a service" across the transport system as well as the delivery of the Government's commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20%.

This means that more people will be able to travel on the existing public transport services without the need to increase vehicle deck capacity, bringing economic, social and environmental benefits to islands and reducing public spending on ferries. While many people will choose to continue using their own car to access ferry services, transport connectivity will be available to all, including those without access to a car or those who prefer to travel without one.

Future island transport connectivity will consider all options. Aviation has the potential to play an increased role, offering rapid personal travel and good onward connectivity to the rest of Scotland and also to the rest of the world. It can provide lower carbon travel when new technologies and fuels are certified for use on scheduled flights. In the longer-term, additional fixed links could offer a high level of transport connectivity, albeit at a substantial upfront cost. There could also be opportunities for more freight ferries (or freight-only services) and passenger only ferries alongside vehicle ferries, providing alternative services which better reflect the transport needs of some people and businesses.

Whilst island transport connectivity will change, the importance of putting people and place at the heart of decision-making will not. Communities will be listened to and decision-making will be clear. Decisions by government, private companies and the wider public sector should be transparent and be informed by a wide range of voices.

Ferries

Ferry services provide the main transport connection for most of our island communities and are, therefore, the main focus of this paper. This paper proposes a draft Vision supported by four Priorities for the future of ferry services in Scotland. The Vision describes where we want to get to in the future and will guide long-term planning and decision-making and, with the Priorities, will provide high-level targets for us to monitor and review progress against.

Some local authorities and private operators are responsible for their own ferry services and are encouraged to adopt the Vision and Priorities, when finalised, as an example of our shared desire for ferry services across Scotland.

The priorities are based on listening to communities that use the services as well as the views of the ferry operators and other stakeholders. In this paper we also set out actions and proposals related to the key issues which communities have told us about. Crucially we were told by ferry-dependent communities that, of these issues, **reliability and resilience** of ferry services matters most.

To achieve this, our draft Vessels and Ports Plan focuses on improving technical and weather reliability by modernising the CMAL fleet and building the resilience of the network by increasing standardisation of vessels and ports.

A substantial modernisation of the fleet, and accompanying port upgrades, will improve reliability and resilience, giving our ferry-dependent communities more certainty with planning their travel, on how long a journey will take, and that it will be a simple and comfortable experience. The confidence we will have in our journey will enable us to plan our lives, to access education and health services, to get to work on time, to deliver goods and services efficiently and to keep households, communities and businesses running smoothly.

Vision and Priorities

The Vision and Priorities for ferries below are a result of collaboration between Transport Scotland and key stakeholders. They were informed by the communities who have provided feedback during a number of engagements and consultations with Transport Scotland and the resulting key themes set out later in this Paper as well as relevant Scottish Government strategies.

Vision: Scotland's ferry services, supported by other transport services, will be safe, reliable, affordable and inclusive for residents, businesses and visitors enabling transport connectivity, sustainability and growth of island and peninsula communities and populations.

Ferry services, supported by other transport services, play an important part in providing transport connectivity to Scottish islands as well as delivering the National Transport Strategy and the National Islands Plan.

Our Vision is underpinned by the four Priorities below.

Priority 1: Reliable and Resilient

Reliable and resilient ferry services that meet the needs of communities and businesses and support the transition to a well-being economy which is fair, green and growing.

Priority 2: Accessible

Ferry services that are accessible and provide easy to use and affordable transport connectivity for all users.

Priority 3: Integrated

Ferry services that enable sustainable and active travel choices which support our health and well-being and make our island and other ferry-dependent communities great places to live, work and visit.

Priority 4: Low Carbon

Ferry services that take actions to reduce the negative environmental impact of their operations and help to achieve Scotland's net-zero targets.

Community Needs Assessments

To work towards our Vision and Priorities, we need to know the transport connectivity needed by each community and whether these needs are being met by ferries and other transport connections.

Central to the Ferries Plan was a series of Community Needs Assessments (CNAs) carried out using a consistent methodology. Following feedback, we have reviewed and updated the methodology. Local authorities and others who are responsible for the design and operation of their own services will be able, but not required, to use the same methodology when considering their own services.

We will carry out refreshed needs assessments for island and peninsula communities served by CHFS and NIFS ferries.

These assessments will look at how and why people use ferries as well as fixed links, air services and onward and connecting travel. The options identified to address transport connectivity problems for each island or peninsula community could include aviation, fixed links and onward and connecting travel as well as ferries. This will recognise whether responsibility for these services rests with private operators or local authorities, who would then be responsible for considering service changes as appropriate. Community Needs Assessments also provide the opportunity for considering future options for the number and size of vessels and will form part of our consideration of the Value for Money of options for ferry services and, in the longer-term, fixed link proposals (see below), whilst recognising that many of the wider benefits of ferry services cannot easily be quantified or monetised.

We will publish the Community Needs Assessments for Cowal and Rosneath in 2024.

Transport Scotland commissioned Stantec UK Ltd to undertake our first Community Needs Assessment for Cowal and Rosneath. This has recently been finalised and is intended for publication in the coming months.

In 2024, we will publish key baseline data on island connectivity including reliability, capacity and integration.

This exercise will analyse data from the CHFS and NIFS ferry operators and other sources. For each existing CHFS or NIFS route, this study will:

- categorise the current timetabled route service level
- identify the route connectivity provided by the service in both summer and winter and integration with onward and connecting travel
- analyse service performance, including consideration of reliability, punctuality, carryings, capacity utilisation.

We will use this information as the starting point for transport needs assessments for each community. This work will identify options to address issues and opportunities for changes to current services by engaging with communities and other stakeholders. We will commission these studies during 2024.

Funding and Financial Sustainability

The costs of providing ferry services are high and rising – this is creating an affordability challenge for both the Scottish Government and local authorities. We are in a period of sustained financial challenge, and it will be unsustainable to continue to increase funding of ferry services at the same rate as has been done in recent years. The successful implementation of this Islands Connectivity Plan can only be achieved by establishing a secure and sustainable long-term financial foundation for our ferry networks.

The Islands Connectivity Plan will contribute to that by providing robust and up-to-date community needs assessments. These studies will enable consideration of a range of service and investment options for each community and will provide evidence to support what are expected to be difficult decisions on prioritisation. These decisions will be based on Value for Money analyses that take properly into account the wider societal value of transport connectivity.

As set out in this draft paper, we will also be considering how different modes, such as aviation, and different approaches, such as freight services, passenger services and improved integration with onward and connecting travel, can help the financial sustainability of our ferry networks. Financial sustainability will enable confident

forward planning – not just by government, operators and asset-owners but by communities and island businesses.

The total annual operating cost for providing CHFS and NIFS services has increased by around 65% over the last decade. These costs are met from fares paid by users, other revenue (e.g., from on-board retail sales) and by grants from Transport Scotland. The majority of these costs are paid by the Government to ferry operators and to vessel and port owners. Additionally, the Scottish Government has provided more than £178 million between 2018-19 and 2023-24 to the four local authorities that have responsibility for ferries. In the Scottish Budget for 2023-24, £440 million was allocated for the operation of ferry services of which £210.8 million was allocated to Transport Scotland for capital spending, mainly on vessels and ports.

The annual deficit between CHFS and NIFS operational costs and income from ferry fares has increased by almost 100% over the last 10 years. Meaning that for every £1 paid by users towards covering the annual operating cost, another £2 of public funds are required.

With public spending to remain constrained, decision-makers in both national and local government will need to make transparent and objective spending and investment decisions. These decisions will need to be based on agreed priorities and affordability. For the CHFS and NIFS networks, we propose, in line with our first Priority, to ensure that the ferry services which communities depend on are reliable and resilient so that residents, businesses and visitors can have confidence in these.

Our proposed approach to the prioritisation of investment in these services is set out in the draft Vessels and Ports Plan.

Aviation

We will set out our wider action on aviation for all of Scotland, including Highlands and Islands air travel, in an aviation document to be published in the Spring of 2024.

Air travel is the quickest and often the most convenient way to travel to and from our island communities and it can also be more environmentally friendly than travelling by ferry and car. For many, particularly in the Northern Isles and the Hebrides, the air service is vital as it enables travel for healthcare, education, business, and other essential services. For some islands, air travel is the only means of ensuring a single day trip to the mainland and it can also reduce the overall cost of travel by not requiring overnight stays as ferry trips often do. Aviation also opens up onward

connections to other domestic and international destinations, which provides a vital contribution to local economies through tourism and trade. Air travel can also offer greater resilience in bad weather.

Air services connecting islands to the Scottish mainland are provided by commercial operators but some services, including many inter-island services, are supported by Transport Scotland or local authorities. Services are also supported by airports that are publicly owned by Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) or by local authorities. Scottish Government funding means that HIAL's airport charges are kept lower than they would otherwise be, enabling the operation of commercial air services to the islands. Islanders' personal travel is supported through the Highlands and Islands Air Discount Scheme, which offers a significant reduction in the core air fare on eligible routes. Scottish Government funding also means that eligible residents of Barra, Tiree and Coll pay 'islander fares' - which are lower than those paid by non-residents – for the air services between Glasgow and Barra and Tiree.

In 2021 we commissioned a comparative study of air and ferry services on the CHFS and NIFS networks. This found that:

- For those travelling alone, using the ferry and public transport is generally slower but cheaper than using ferry and car or air and public transport.
- For those travelling as a group, using the ferry and a car becomes more competitive.
- Flying tends to be a more popular choice for longer journeys.
- Ferry travel is more seasonal than air travel probably reflecting the choices of tourist visitors for car and ferry travel.

The Scottish Government is committed to working to decarbonise scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040. Aviation manufacturers are developing low/zero emission hydrogen and electric aircraft, which are most likely to be used initially on shorter routes. This opens up the potential for flights to and between islands to become more frequent, lower cost and to emit far fewer emissions. When these new aviation technologies are in use on scheduled services there could also be a significant impact on future demand for ferry services. When this happens, changes to the supply of air services will be taken account of by future community needs assessments.

The Scottish Government recently undertook a public consultation on developing an aviation strategy that included various questions on air travel and connectivity within the Highlands and Islands. We will publish our further actions on aviation soon and will ensure that all measures relating to the Highlands and Islands are complementary to the ICP. Furthermore, the Community Needs Assessments that

we will undertake will take into account the vital role that aviation plays in providing island connectivity.

Fixed Links

We will carry out detailed appraisals for the fixed link proposals for Sound of Harris, Sound of Barra and Mull.

Where fixed links (bridges, tunnels and causeways to islands and roads to peninsulas) are already in place in Scotland they provide a very high level of road transport connectivity. There are also other locations where new fixed links are either proposed or being considered.

Transport Scotland's second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) considered a large number of proposals for new fixed links to communities served by existing CHFS and NIFS services. It concluded that replacing ferry services with fixed links can improve reliability, connectivity, capacity and travel times, and allow for the wider reconfiguration of ferry services. It recommended further work to look at 3 potential links to replace current CHFS services:

- Sound of Harris - linking the Uists and Harris/Lewis
- Sound of Barra - linking Barra and the Uists
- Mull and the Scottish mainland

However, island communities have expressed mixed views about the potential fixed links noted in the STPR2 with some concerned about a loss of island identity, increased road traffic and subsequent environmental impact and a reduction in local services due to the connection being both on and off the island.

We will now undertake a more detailed appraisal to study the benefits, costs, and challenges of these proposals and will include engagement with the directly affected communities to understand if the fixed link proposals are supported by the communities themselves. Part of the ICP Community Needs Assessment work set out earlier in this paper will support these studies by setting out community travel needs.

Due consideration will be given to bridges, tunnels and causeways before selecting the most suitable option for each of these routes. The focus will be on providing a resilient connection for our island communities who wish to be connected.

Until fixed links are operational, ferries will remain a crucial link in islands connectivity. Therefore, as set out in our draft Vessels and Ports Plan, we will

maintain existing ferry services and plan for the introduction of replacement vessels when these are due.

Proposals have been presented for fixed links across other key routes by local authorities, communities and action groups. While these remain the responsibility of local councils and authorities, we will continue to support and engage with them on these proposals.

Onward and Connecting Travel

Most passenger journeys to or from our islands or peninsular communities will combine an air or ferry trip with public transport (such as train or bus), active travel (walking, wheeling, or cycling), car hire, or lifts/taxis for drop off and/or pick up. Encouraging use of the transport network in this way – without the need to take a private vehicle – has multiple benefits:

- for users (improves accessibility including for those who have no access to a vehicle).
- for wider populations (cleaner air, lower noise levels and less congestion).
- for connecting services and businesses (creates more commercially viable services as well as need for additional services and businesses such as bike hire, car hire/clubs, taxi).
- for the ferries network itself (supports efficient use of the deck space, enables more freight capacity, allows faster turnarounds with less vehicles to load/unload, reduces the need for larger future vessels enabling associated carbon reduction benefit).

For all these reasons, we are keen to support activities to encourage an increase in the percentage of non-vehicle ferry passengers and will do so as part of the Onwards and Connecting Travel element of the ICP. Well-integrated onward and connecting travel was highlighted by ferry-dependent communities as a key enabler for more sustainable island transport connectivity. This was raised by ferry stakeholders as being of particular importance for people with disabilities to enable them to make the journey in the first place.

Ferries - Challenges and opportunities

This section focuses on the CHFS and NIFS networks; the ferry services which Transport Scotland, on behalf of Scottish Ministers, is responsible for. The implementation of the Ferries Plan, published in 2012, has seen significant achievements in ferry services including:

- More routes. Over the period of the Ferries Plan we have introduced two new routes, Ardrossan – Campbeltown and Mallaig – Lochboisdale, as well as bringing two routes Kerrera – Gallanach and Gourock – Kilcreggan under the responsibility of Scottish Government.
- More services. Service frequencies, particularly in summer, have increased to a number of islands including Arran, Islay, Mull, Skye (Mallaig-Armadale), Coll, Tiree, Colonsay and the Uists.
- Lower fares. Following a series of pilots, the roll out of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) on the CHFS network was completed in 2015. It is estimated that the introduction of RET resulted in the average fare paid per passenger and car dropping by 34% and 40% respectively. Additionally following a 20% reduction in 2018 for all passengers and car fares on the NIFS routes between Aberdeen-Kirkwall-Lerwick, islanders have also benefited from a 20% reduction in cabin fares along with the fares freeze for islander fares in place on these routes since 2020. All ferry fares for CHFS and NIFS were frozen for one year in 2023.
- More people travelling. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, passenger numbers travelling on CHFS and NIFS networks increased by 16% and 23% respectively, compared to 2013. As for other modes of transport the pandemic also had an impact on ferry travel. The number of passengers travelling on the CHFS network dropped significantly with the pandemic. By 2022, numbers were almost at the 2013 level but with numbers increasing since. The NIFS network recovered earlier than CHFS with 2022 figures showing an increase of 20% compared to 2013.

However, some challenges have also arisen:

- Higher operating cost. Annual operating costs on CHFS and NIFS has increased by 75% and 46% respectively, with the corresponding increases in farebox revenue being 18% on CHFS and 43% on NIFS. The annual deficit between CHFS and NIFS operational costs and income from ferry fares has almost doubled over the last 10 years – this deficit has been met by increasing Government grant payments.
- More people taking their cars on ferries. In the last year before the Covid-19 pandemic there was almost a 40% increase in car carryings since 2013 for both CHFS and NIFS. Although some of the change on CHFS may be due to the reclassification of some commercial vehicles to cars with the introduction of RET (6m rule). By 2022 car carryings on CHFS and NIFS increased by 33% and 47% respectively compared to 2013.
- Shortages of vehicle space on some key routes, meaning people cannot travel by ferry with their car at short notice. Routes such as Ardrossan-Brodick, Kennacraig-Islay, Oban-Craignure, Mallaig-Armadale and Ullapool-Stornoway are often highlighted by ferry-dependent communities and key stakeholders as experiencing under-provision of vehicle deck capacity at peak times. Other

popular day-trip routes such as Largs-Cumbrae are reported as experiencing demand spikes. Similar constraints on cabin spaces are reported by NIFS stakeholders, particularly when travelling to and from Shetland.

- A lack of spare vessels to cover for breakdowns. The CHFS major vessel fleet (the 10 larger vessels generally deployed on longer routes to larger islands) has been fully deployed since 2016 affecting resilience across the network. NIFS fleet is also fully deployed at peak times.
- An increase in cancellations and delays on the CHFS network. This has been linked to worsening weather and an overstretched fleet. On CHFS actual reliability (rather than contractual reliability which excludes factors outside operator control, such as weather) has fallen from 97% in 2012/13 to 93% in 2021/22. NIFS actual reliability was 92% in 2012/13 but has remained above 96% since. Weather accounts for the majority of cancellations reported by the operators. On CHFS in 2021/22, 1.2% of services were cancelled because of mechanical issues and 3.2% due to weather. For 2021/22 on NIFS no services were cancelled due to mechanical issues and 2.9% were cancelled due to weather.

Key themes

We have also reviewed existing feedback from communities provided during a number of engagement events and public consultations carried out by Transport Scotland and Scottish Government Islands Team, the delivery of the Ferries Plan and other recent evidence, in particular the Scottish Parliament's NZET Committee report and a consultation report on "[Project Neptune](#)". Through this work, and the strategic context of the National Transport Strategy and the National Islands Plan, we have identified the following key themes needing to be addressed through future ferries policy:

- Community voice and transparency
- Reliability and resilience
- Accessibility
- Timetables, unplanned and essential travel
- Integration of services
- Capacity and demand
- Freight services
- Vessels and ports
- Low carbon and environmental impact
- Ferry fares
- Local authority services

We discussed each of these themes and related options with ferry key stakeholders. We have structured the remainder of this paper around the 11 key themes, set out in

the table below, where we set out work already underway and proposals, informed by ferry stakeholders, which enable progress towards the Vision and Priorities meaning overall improvements to our ferry services.

Community voice and transparency

We have heard from communities that they are not being heard when it comes to decisions on ferry services and that there is a lack of clarity on how said decisions were made. We have also heard that there is “consultation fatigue”, mainly around lack of understanding on how the responses from consultations and engagements influence decisions being made.

We fully agree that it is important to hear from a wide range of voices, and Ministers and Transport Scotland officials regularly engage with a range of users and stakeholders. There are a range of opinions on ferry issues and not a consensus.

We will work to improve the quality of communication with communities on ferries issues – policy, services, vessels, and ports – so that people are included, listened to and receive explanations for decisions being made.

We have:

- Reflected on past feedback received from communities and key stakeholders to identify key issues related to delivery of ferry services in Scotland and used those issues to inform the strategic approach set out in this paper.
- Established standard approaches with CMAL for community engagement on vessel and port projects – see the draft Vessels and Ports Plan for details.
- Engaged positively with the Ferries Community Board since its creation by CalMac in 2017.

We will:

Establish and publish agreed protocols for communication for Transport Scotland, CMAL and the operators, including the role of communities and their representatives.

- This should include how and when engagement or consultation with communities and their representatives should take part when formulating decisions affecting people’s lives, including a post engagement/consultation statement on how the proposals were considered.
- Work to ensure that ferry committees, or equivalent bodies, are in place to speak on behalf of all communities served by CHFS and NIFS ferries.

- An Islands Communities Impact Assessment is being carried out to inform the development of the overall Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure that the impacts on island communities are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan.

The above actions will ensure our ferry services will be transparent: communities will be listened to and decision making will be clear.

Reliability and resilience

Ferry users and island communities have told us that the most important thing about ferries is that they are reliable. Figures 2 and 3 show that over the last decade reliability of services has been decreasing which is particularly seen on the CHFS network. The actual reliability has also been lower than the contractual reliability on both CHFS and NIFS networks. There has been an increasing number of cancellations and delays caused by weather and breakdowns. Reducing breakdowns, improving weather reliability, and increasing network resilience is, therefore, the first Priority and will support the overall island transport connectivity.

A recent [Met Office report](#) quoted in Parliament’s Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee provided evidence on whether the climate of Scotland has been getting stormier and noted that “a perception that it has become stormier in recent years (2011-2020) is a valid belief, and the period 1981-2020 is stormier than the mid-20th century.”

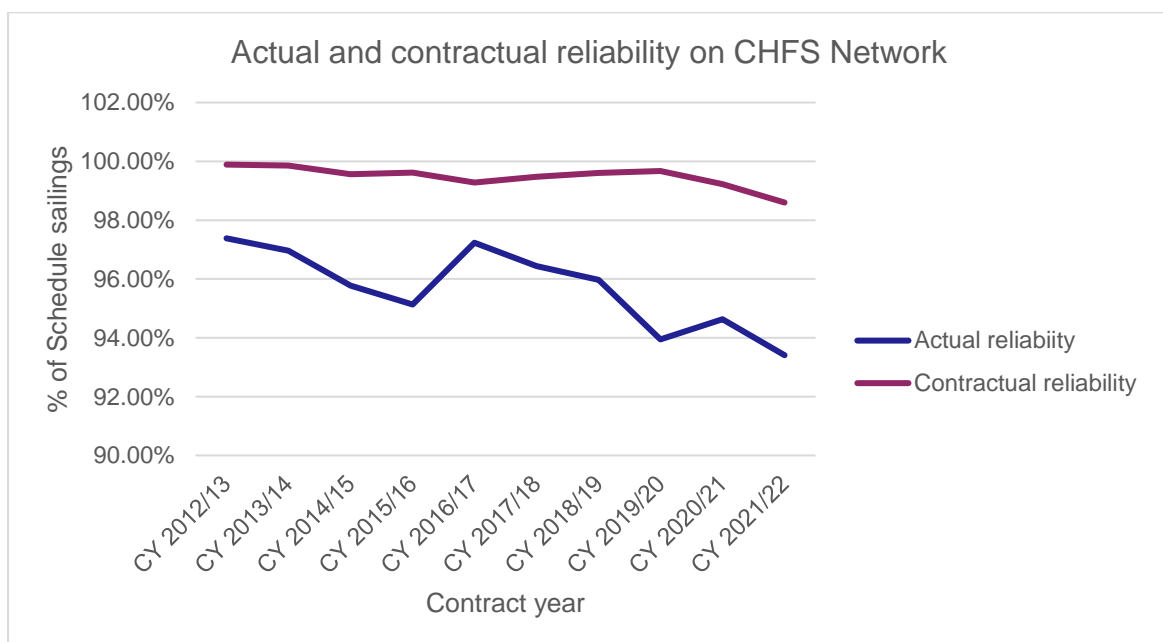


Figure 2 - actual and contractual reliability on CHFS Network.

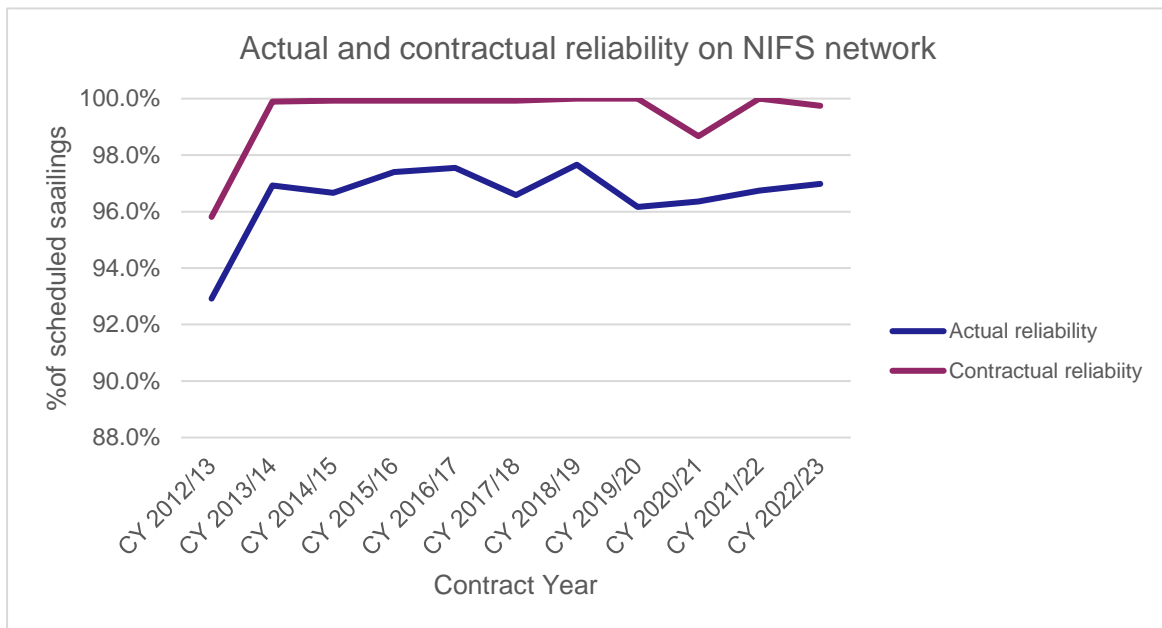


Figure 3 - actual and contractual reliability on NIFS network.

Reliability can be improved through changes to vessels and ports. When buying replacement vessels, designs that will reduce the risk of disruption, in particular from weather, will be the first priority.

Resilience of services can be improved by having spare ferries available in case of breakdowns and by increasing the number of vessels that can work from different ports (“interoperability”) including by having the same, or similar, designs (“standardisation”).

Our detailed plans for the CHFS and NIFS services are set out in the draft Vessels and Ports Plan.

In addition, we have:

- Supported the maintenance of the CHFS and NIFS fleets through the Resilience Fund. Between financial years 2018/19 and 2021/22, £10.5 million was invested, with a further up to £8m made available during financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- Relunched the Islands Transport Forum for the Minister for Transport to work with islands councils on transport resilience issues.
- Worked on a Weather Monitoring Systems project to assist ferry operations. CMAL is advising on the installation and servicing of tide and weather monitoring systems. Under this scheme, port owners will install the system and meet the low annual electricity costs with technical support from CMAL.

- Researched and reviewed changing climate and wave climate when undertaking both vessel and infrastructure projects. This is undertaken by CMAL as part of each of the individual project working groups during the design and planning stage.
- Committed to awarding the next CHFS contract as a single bundle: this will provide resilience through the operator's ability to move vessels and crew around the network.

We will:

Work with operators and communities to develop performance measures for reliability that reflect lived experience.

- These would be in addition to contractual measures which reflect the impact of weather, the responsibilities of operators and the overriding priority of safety.
- This will recognise the importance of reliability of ferry services in our Vision and set Reliability and Resilience as the top Priority in this Strategic Approach Paper and in our Vessels and Ports Plan.
- This will also help ensure Transport Scotland, CMAL and operators have good information on disruption and long-term reliability issues and trends so that public money can be spent where it is most needed, and where it will have the greatest impact.

The above actions, and the commitments which are set out in more detail in the draft Vessels and Ports Plan, will ensure our ferry services are reliable and resilient.

Accessibility

We aim to improve accessibility to ferry services for all users.

Our ferry services should be easy to use for all and recognise that people have different needs and capabilities, and we will work to ensure that everyone can use the services with as few barriers as possible.

We have:

- Improved accessibility through vessel and port design: improving accessibility is a feature of CMAL vessel and port projects based on statutory requirements, industry guidelines and best practice.
- Supported improvements through the Ferries Accessibility Fund – set up as an outcome of the Ferries Plan, has delivered approaching £1 million in targeted improvements.

We will:

Develop an Accessibility Standard.

An Accessibility Standard would be in addition to legal requirements for physical and mental accessibility and could act as guidance for all ferry services.

- Work to develop an Accessibility Standard in partnership with user group representatives including the Mobility and Access Committee Scotland (MACS), ferry and port operators and welcome the involvement of councils and other ferry and port operators. A Standard could include such things as inclusive and disability awareness training to be carried out frequently, and an accessibility review done periodically on ferry services, ports and vessels.
- Use this Standard as the basis for measuring current levels of accessibility at locations on the ferry networks and measuring improvements over time.
- Targeting future spending, including through the Ferries Accessibility Fund, where improvements are most needed and can be delivered most efficiently.

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out on the overall Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure that the impacts on people with the protected characteristics are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan.

Delivery of the above actions will ensure that our disadvantaged communities and individuals have fair access to ferry services they need. This will include reducing inequalities and advancing opportunities for equality, including the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Timetables; unplanned and essential travel

The Ferries Plan set out proposals for changes to service levels based on assessments of needs. Further assessments have been carried out since the publication of the Ferries Plan: mainly by councils for their own services but also by Transport Scotland for the Northern Isles Ferry Services and the Outer Hebrides.

As part of the ICP, we intend to carry out further assessments using an updated methodology as discussed above on Community Needs Assessments.

Ferry travel has become more popular and there are now, in particular, more people who want to take their car on a ferry. This means that some services cannot accommodate short notice demand for essential vehicle travel by island residents

and key workers. At the same time, for some islands, travel demand in the winter is very low and transport connections are noticeably reduced as a result.

We have:

- Ensured CalMac has a medical protocol in place which guarantees islanders a booking on the ferry and a taxi, should they have an urgent medical appointment, on the mainland, if the ferry sailing does not have the capacity available for their vehicle.
- CalMac has introduced a procedure for “Advanced Standby” for vehicles which has replaced the previous waiting list. There are set criteria that passengers need to meet in order to be placed on the list.

We will:

Ensure future ferry service contracts are flexible and can respond to short and long-term changes during the contract, including responding to disruption to services.

- Consider, based on evidence from the current Deck Space Reservation pilot project, whether a different approach to releasing vehicle space for booking on some CalMac routes will better facilitate island essential travel. This should allow greater opportunity for island communities and those who require travelling at shorter notice. If the pilot is successful, then Transport Scotland and CalMac will discuss rolling this out further with individual communities.
- Explore whether, and how, the current frequency of sailings to an island could be distributed differently between seasons or during the week – or, where applicable, between routes – in response to community requests. This would reflect the principle of the “bank” system used in the Scottish Government’s Aviation Public Service Obligations for Barra, Tiree and Campbeltown. The “bank” system was introduced in 2019 by removing a number of little used flights to create a “bank” of flights that can be deployed at the discretion of these communities.

The confidence we will have in our journey will enable us to plan our lives, access medical services, to get to work on time, access education, to deliver goods efficiently and keep businesses running smoothly.

Integration of services

Ferry services, supported by other transport services, play an important part in providing transport connectivity to Scottish islands. We have heard that ferry

services could sometimes be better integrated with public transport on islands and on the mainland in terms of timetables, ticketing, and fares, as well as information about services being more easily available.

There are particular problems when one mode is disrupted by weather or breakdown. This makes travel by ferry more difficult for people who do not have access to a private vehicle, or who would prefer to travel without one. Better integration of ferries with public transport, active travel, and other more sustainable alternatives like car clubs, should offer more and better onward and connecting travel options – creating a more efficient transport network.

This would bring additional patronage and thus sustainability to bus and train connections, give increased choice for travellers, enable more sustainable or “greener” travel and, potentially, ease the growing pressure on ferry vehicle deck space.

Our ferry services will support integrated travel choices: better integration between our ferries’ networks and other modes of transport will be the key when delivering the Strategy – in particular, active and sustainable modes - both on the mainland and those islands or rural communities to which they connect.

By promoting active travel choices, we will encourage walking, cycling and public transport usage. This will deliver more social interaction, support local businesses and services, and create more vibrant communities.

We have:

- Included in the second Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) a recommendation on “Supporting Integrated Journeys at Ferry Terminals”. This work is intended to be taken forward as part of the ICP in 2024-25.
- Supported Mobility as a Service (MaaS) options through the “GoHi” system covering our ferries areas. Tying in our ferries networks to MaaS systems enables users to access integrated journey planning information and ticketing.

We will:

Assess current levels of integration through a baseline study. This will enable options to be considered to tackle identified problems.

- In 2024, we will build on initial preparatory work to engage with communities and other stakeholders in a programme of work on Onward and Connecting Travel.

This will include investigating smart ticketing, with more integration across modes and how travel information can be improved.

- Use the outputs of the baseline study to inform discussions with communities, transport operators, local authorities, and other stakeholders on improvements.

The delivery of above actions will help us provide ferry services that will support people making sustainable and active travel choices, which can have a significant positive effect on an individual's health as well as physical and mental wellbeing, and for the benefit of our environment.

Capacity and demand

We have heard that the space for vehicles on busy ferry routes fills up quickly at popular times, especially in summer. This makes it difficult for residents of those islands, and visiting key workers, to travel with a vehicle at short notice. People in Shetland and Orkney have reported the same problem securing cabins on overnight sailings.

At other times, and on other routes, there is space available for more vehicles to be carried and there is almost always space for people on any sailing at any time. These empty spaces are an opportunity for more people and freight to be carried, making better use of the ships, and bringing more people and trade to the islands.

As set out in the National Transport Strategy, decisions will reflect the [Sustainable Transport Hierarchy](#). This means that priority will be given in decision-making to more sustainable modes such as active travel and public transport.

We have:

- Increased carrying capacities through vessel size, service frequency and vessel charters.
- As set out in the Timetables section in this Paper, worked with operators and communities to explore new ways to manage capacity when this is scarce.

We will:

Work with operators and other stakeholders to develop updated forecasts that are informed by known future developments and the ambitions and policies set out in the various elements of the Islands Connectivity Plan as well as the refreshed National Islands Plan and the National Transport Strategy.

- Use refreshed Community Needs Assessments to identify different options for service frequencies and vessel size.
- In collaboration with operators and communities identify ways of using existing and planned capacity better – see separate sections on Integration, Freight and Fares in this Paper.
- Identify the key “pinch points” on the CHFS and NIFS networks and consider options for additional vehicle capacity where this is practical, beneficial and affordable. The best time to do this is when plans are being made for replacement vessels – noting that in some locations vessel size and vehicle carrying capacities will be constrained by the capacity of ports and roads.

Delivery of our proposals above will allow for ferry services to provide certainty on how long a journey will take, and that it will be a simple and comfortable experience. The confidence we will have in our journey will enable us to plan our lives, access medical services, to get to work on time, access education, to deliver goods efficiently and keep businesses running smoothly.

Freight

A key role of ferries is to move goods and service vehicles to and from islands. This supports local businesses especially those exporting products to the Scottish mainland and beyond. Most freight travels in goods vehicles which share the ferries with people and cars.

We have:

- Ensured Serco NorthLink have 2 freight vessels which serve Shetland and Orkney from Aberdeen because of the high volume of freight travelling to and from the Northern Isles.
- CalMac Ferries operate a Stornoway-Ullapool overnight sailing for freight using the regular passenger vessel: the MV Loch Seaforth.
- Chartered vessels are used to provide more capacity or to deliver bulk or specialist cargos. For example, the Islay distilleries arrange for delivery of grain by bulk freighter.
- There are also small volumes of freight moved by air and growing interest in new options such as using drones to deliver small but vital loads such as medical supplies.

We will:

Explore freight issues in more detail by re-visiting the Freight Fares Review.

- Encourage collaboration between operators, hauliers and businesses for greater forward planning and management of current and future capacity and current and forecast demand.
- Consider whether the costs of sea freight transport could be shared differently between users, developers, and public funding and, alongside this, how financial support to island businesses could be more effectively targeted.
- Revisit the Freight Fares Review (see Fares section in this Paper).

A Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment will be carried out on the overall Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure that the impacts on business are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan.

In delivering the above proposals we will get people and goods where they need to get to: ferry networks and services will be integrated effectively with other transport modes, helping economic development, and adapting to changing requirements of island communities, businesses and visitors while supporting opportunities for developing and new industries.

Vessels and ports

Many Scottish ferries – CHFS, NIFS and local authority ferries – are ageing and some are overdue for replacement. This makes them more likely to break down and it can take longer to repair them when specialist parts are needed. Many ferry ports are also in need of major renewal or replacement works.

We have:

- Ordered six new major vessels for CalMac scheduled for delivery in 2024-2025.
- Committed to introducing a second summer vessel to the “Little Minch” routes, further increasing route and network resilience.
- Funded port upgrades at Tarbert (Harris), Lochmaddy and Uig which are complete or well underway.
- Through CMAL we have been actively monitoring the effects of climate change on rising sea levels to inform the design or improvements to port infrastructure.

We will:

Reduce the average age of the fleet to around 15 years by the end of the decade.

- Retain a major CHFS vessel to provide resilience.

- Increase “standardisation” across both CHFS and NIFS fleets and increase “interoperability” of vessels and ports across network. There is already a level of interoperability within the CHFS major and small vessel fleets, and within the NIFS fleet. Increased standardisation, such as the procurement of the four “Islay Class” vessels and ongoing development of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme, will contribute to improved efficiency, resilience, and overall network performance. Given the wide variety of communities and routes served by these fleets, increased standardisation does not need to mean identical vessels but should allow for increased interoperability of vessels and ports.
- Interoperability and standardised ports also opens up possibilities for new or different routes between islands and the mainland or between islands.

The above actions, and the commitments set out in more detail in the draft Vessels and Ports Plan, will ensure our ferry services are reliable and resilient.

Low carbon and environmental impact

Most Scottish ferries run on Marine Gas Oil, a fossil fuel. This produces carbon emissions that contribute to climate change as well as local air pollutants and noise.

Our long-term goal is to reduce carbon emissions very substantially by 2045 and, ideally, to eliminate them. However, this is dependent on alternative fuels becoming commercially available. This is a challenge facing the whole shipping industry. For islands, there is an opportunity to provide future ferries with cost-effective fuels using the abundant renewable energy sources available.

We have set a target in the Scottish Government’s Climate Change Plan that 30% of the Government (CMAL) owned fleet should be low or zero emission vessels by 2032. The successful delivery of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme will enable that goal to be met.

In the short-term, there are actions that can be taken by ferry operators:

- Review operations to improve fuel efficiency. For example, ensuring operational vessel capacity is maximised, monitoring of fuel consumption on a monthly basis and upgrading vessels and equipment during scheduled maintenance helps both vessel resilience and prevents unnecessary fuel wastage. This also reduces costs.
- Design vessels that are more fuel-efficient. This is achieved by optimising the hull form design on all new vessels and utilising low emission technologies where possible, as is the case for the all-electric vessel designs in the Small Vessel Replacement Programme. Vessel design options, propulsion options and fuel

efficiencies are key in new vessel projects and are considered by CMAL and independently progressed and verified via Naval Architect consultant studies.

- Use electric power supplied from the shore when in port, especially overnight. This also reduces noise which benefits local residents and crew living on board and improves fuel efficiency.
- Explore the use of batteries for small ferries either on their own or alongside normal engines (as a “hybrid”).

We will:

Work towards further lowering emissions of ferry services to support the delivery of our net-zero target.

- In 2024, we will build on initial preparatory work to work with operators, CMAL and other stakeholders on options and opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from ferries. This work will feed into the next Scottish Government Climate Change Plan.
- Adopt the principle that all new ferries should be designed with future zero emission propulsion where possible. Local authorities are encouraged to consider this principle for their own ferry fleets.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment is being carried out on the overall Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure environmental and sustainability aspects of the Plan are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan.

These proposals will contribute towards achievement of our climate action ambitions. We will set out further information in the next Scottish Government Climate Change Plan due for publication in 2024.

Fares

The Ferries Plan established Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) as the basis for the Scottish Government’s ferry fares policy for passengers and their vehicles. It is now in place across the CHFS network for passengers, cars, coaches, and small commercial vehicles (under 6 metres). The basic intent of the system is for ferry users to pay the same rate per mile, regardless of where they are travelling from and to, and a fixed element to contribute to infrastructure costs. This resolved many previous issues of comparability and consistency within the CHFS fare structure.

The 3 key principles of RET are:

- Simplicity and Transparency - the basis for fares must have an established rationale and simple for a user to understand.
- Comparability and Consistency - the basis for fares should be the same for each community.
- Public Sector Affordability versus Community Sustainability - fare-setting needs to balance the different requirements of public sector affordability with community sustainability.

Fares Policy is a key element of ICP. Some initiatives on fares are currently being taken forward through Transport Scotland's Fair Fares Review (FFR) which will report shortly. The direction of future ferry fares policy will be established through the FFR and through consultation with stakeholders and communities. After that, further work will be required with operators and stakeholders to develop implementation plans and timescales. Additionally, detailed policy development on ferry fares will be taken forward beyond the FFR while recognising the importance of building confidence in our island businesses and supporting inclusive, sustainable economic development and growth.

We have previously responded to proposals from some island communities to increase fares for motorhomes and from the Ferries Community Board to pilot discounted fares for school buses.

We are also committed to giving our young people the very best chances to succeed in life. Young people rightly challenge us to invest in a sustainable future for them and free bus travel for all under 22s, including islanders, will help to deliver that. Ahead of the full report, we have recently announced the extension of free travel vouchers for young islanders to under 22s.

Building on the Fair Fares Review, we will take forward detailed consideration of proposals to:

Short-term:

- Retain RET for island residents and consider fares for non-islanders, particularly vehicle fares during the summer timetable period.
- Review and update the RET formulae as a key element of the above work.
- Provide free foot passenger travel on inter-island ferries for under 22-year-old island residents within the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland Island groups.
- Extend the existing National Ferry Concessionary Scheme to under-22-year-old island residents.

Medium to longer term:

- Revisit the Freight Fares Review.
- Consider, based on evidence from the current Deck Space Reservation pilot project, whether a different approach to releasing vehicle space for booking will better facilitate island-essential travel. This should allow greater opportunity for island communities and those who require to travel at shorter notice. If the pilot is successful then Transport Scotland and CalMac will discuss rolling this out further with individual communities.
- Undertake work to consider how to utilise dynamic pricing, within agreed parameters, in order to better manage demand and utilise capacity.
- Deliver improved collaborative working between CalMac and Scotrail, especially during disruption, timetable development and a future digital solution for Rail & Sail tickets.

By delivering the proposals outlined above we will ensure that our ferry services will be affordable and sustainable with costs more fairly shared across government, businesses and society.

Local authority ferry services

Four local authorities – Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, the Highland Council and Argyll & Bute Council – are responsible for operating a number of ferry services within their areas and also various aviation services and existing fixed links. They do so effectively and are best placed to respond to their local communities' needs. Local authorities have a role to play in achieving a well-integrated onward and connecting travel for their local communities. A collaborative approach between all local authorities and Transport Scotland will be essential going forward to enable for more sustainable island transport connectivity.

Councils face the same challenges as the Scottish Government of meeting transport connectivity needs with ageing vessels and ports with limited public money. Future connectivity could include the consideration of fixed links and increased aviation schedules, in place of or as well as renewing ferry fleets. We recognise that each island's needs will be different and there is no one size fits all solution. These 4 local authorities are encouraged to adopt the agreed Vision and Priorities as an example of the desired standard for our ferry services across Scotland.

The Scottish Government has provided more than £178 million between 2018/19 and 2023-24 to support the running of these services. Councils are now working on vessel replacement and port renewal plans with support from the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government remains committed to the Orkney and Shetland Internal Ferry Replacement Task Forces and working with the councils to ensure robust business cases are in place.

CMAL is keen to provide any advice and learning from the Small Vessel Replacement Programme to local authorities to help with planning new vessels and infrastructure and have already engaged with all the four local authorities.

As part of the Islands Forum Connectivity Task and Finish Group, announced by the UK Government in Stornoway in October 2023, procurement, transport integration and fixed links will be discussed with a view to sharing best practice and experience from all UK islands. Scottish Government and local authority officials are part of this Group and will continue to meet to progress tasks and to present at the next Islands Forum in Anglesey in Spring 2024.

Performance measures

The Islands Connectivity Plan supports the National Transport Strategy and overall progress will be measured through Transport Scotland's Monitoring and Evaluation of the NTS2 Indicators.

To support improvements in reliability and resilience, which is our priority, accurate data is needed so that investment can be targeted and the most effective use made of funding that will continue to be under pressure, following cuts to our capital budget from the UK Government.

To measure progress with respect to ferry services, we will be developing a series of performance measures as part of work on the ICP which go beyond the measures applied to the ferry operators through the CHFS and NIFS contracts – and so capture a wider range of essential activity and better reflect the lived experience of users and communities. These could include:

- Customer and community satisfaction.
- Average fleet age of 15 from the end of the decade.
- Service reliability – reflecting user experience in addition to operator performance.
- Progress against the proposed Accessibility Standard, by vessel and port.
- Indicator on Timetables linked to Deck Space Reservation pilot.
- Ratio of passengers to vehicles as an indicator of better “integration” and increased foot passenger usage; Measure of progress against a proposed “integration baseline”.
- Carryings, capacity, and capacity utilisation (passengers, cabins, and vehicles) by route.
- Volume of freight moved to/from islands.
- Number of zero/low emission vessels in the CMAL fleet.
- Fares indicator: e.g., ratio of fares to subsidy as an indicator of cost to Government; changes in fares vs inflation as an indicator of cost to users.

Next steps

This draft Strategic Approach paper was developed based on previous relevant consultations and engagements with communities and stakeholders and is being published with a series of questions. These questions are seeking to confirm whether this paper has captured the key strategic ferry and transport connectivity related issues and to invite feedback on the proposed options to address those issues. All responses are welcome.

This Strategic Approach paper will be finalised in response to public consultation and engagement and informed by relevant policy developments in other areas of Government. This Strategic Approach paper, alongside the other elements set out in the Scope and Purpose section above, will form the overall Islands Connectivity Plan.

Annex A: Strategic policy background

National Transport Strategy

The National Transport Strategy for Scotland sets out the Vision for Scotland’s transport system for the next 20 years stating that: “We will have a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.”

The Vision is underpinned by four priorities to reduce inequalities, take climate action, help deliver inclusive economic growth and improve our health and wellbeing, each supported by three associated outcomes.

Our Vision

We will have a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.

	<h4>Reduces inequalities</h4>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Will provide fair access to services we need ■ Will be easy to use for all ■ Will be affordable for all
	<h4>Takes climate action</h4>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Will help deliver our net-zero target ■ Will adapt to the effects of climate change ■ Will promote greener, cleaner choices
	<h4>Helps deliver inclusive economic growth</h4>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Will get people and goods where they need to get to ■ Will be reliable, efficient and high quality ■ Will use beneficial innovation
	<h4>Improves our health and wellbeing</h4>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Will be safe and secure for all ■ Will enable us to make healthy travel choices ■ Will help make our communities great places to live

National Plan for Scottish Islands

The National Plan for Scotland's Islands, published in 2019, provides a framework for action in order to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan sets out 13 strategic objectives. Strategic Objective 3 relates to improving transport services for island communities. Strategic Objective 3 includes a number of commitments, with the following being most pertinent to the ICP Vessels and Ports Plan:

- Develop a new Ferries Plan that will meaningfully contribute to delivering the outcomes of wider Scottish Government strategies as set out in the National Transport Strategy and this National Plan for Scottish Islands.
- Produce a long-term plan and investment programme for new ferries and development at ports to improve resilience, reliability, capacity and reduce emissions to give confidence to island communities on our ongoing commitment.

The National Planning Framework 4 - sets out our spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments, and national planning policy.

Strategic Transport Projects Review 2

Transport Scotland's second [Strategic Transport Projects Review](#) (STPR2) will be used to inform transport infrastructure investment in Scotland over the next 20 years. The STPR2 has identified recommendations focusing on the strategic transport network in Scotland. The case for sustained investment in ferries and ports is supported by a number of recommendations in the final report of the STPR2, in particular:

Recommendation 18: Supporting integrated journeys at ferry terminals.

- A detailed review of key ferry terminals to consider physical integration and accessibility.

Recommendation 24: Ferry vessel renewal and replacement and progressive decarbonisation.

- Renewal and replacement of the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) and Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS) vessels including progressive decarbonisation by 2045.

Recommendation 41: Potential Sound of Harris, Sound of Barra fixed link and fixed link between Mull and Scottish mainland.

- Undertake further work on business cases to better understand the benefits, costs and challenges associated with these options.

Recommendation 42: Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement and progressive decarbonisation.

- an investment programme in port infrastructure, including power supplies, to support STPR2 recommendation 24.

Rural Delivery Plan

- The First Minister's 2023 Policy Prospectus committed the Scottish Government to publishing a Rural Delivery Plan setting out how all parts of the Scottish Government are delivering for Scotland's rural and island communities.
- To deliver on that promise, we will publish a Plan by the end of this Parliament.
- The Islands Connectivity Plan will contribute to the Rural Delivery Plan.



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