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SCOTLAND**  
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

# **Analysis of responses to the public consultation for the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services Contract**

## **Summary findings**

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## Executive Summary

This summary presents key findings from the analysis of responses to a public consultation on a new Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract (CHFS3). The consultation ran from 15 December 2023 to 8 March 2024 and asked 19 questions. The [consultation documents](#) are available on the Scottish Government's website.

## Profile of Responses

A total of 434 responses were available for analysis, with most of these submitted through the Scottish Government's Citizen Space consultation analysis platform. In addition to undertaking the online consultation, Transport Scotland held a number of engagement events between November 2023 and February 2024, on Arran, Bute, Cumbrae, Islay, Colonsay, Mull, Tiree, Skye, Lewis and North and South Uist. The feedback from these events is also included in the analysis.

Most of the 434 standard consultation responses were submitted by individual members of the public. There were 41 responses from organisations, with Ferry Board, Committee or Groups and Community Council or Development Trusts the two largest groups (with eight and seven respondents respectively).

Respondents were most likely to say that they mainly use CHFS services for personal/leisure use or for all of the possible reasons given: use CHFS services once a month followed or once every other week; and are aged 65 years or over.

A majority – 79% of those who answered the question – identified themselves as CHFS network residents on islands and peninsulas. In terms of a single island or peninsula, the largest number of responses came from residents of the Isle of Arran, followed by Islay and then Lewis and Harris. With respect to local authority area, the largest number of respondents were resident in Argyll and Bute.

## General Themes

In addition to answering the specific consultation questions, many respondents raised general issues about the ferry services in the Clyde and Hebrides area. A consistent theme was the unreliability of recent and current services, with particular reference to timetable changes and reduced services, as well as short notice or last-minute delays or cancellations of scheduled sailings. These concerns were raised in relation to many routes and locations, with some referring to the service being at crisis point.

Poor communication was also seen as an issue, with references to not knowing services had been cancelled until the last minute. In terms of the problems caused, there were references to being unable to rely on ferries as a means of commuting and difficulties getting to medical or other important appointments. The problems created for businesses were also highlighted, including in terms of the movement of goods (both acquiring necessary supplies and distributing products) and staff.

Despite concerns about the overall service, vessel crew and port staff were often highly regarded, especially by those attending engagement events. For example, they were described as resourceful, resilient, and responsive and everything the whole system needs to be.

## Performance Measures

A majority of all respondents – 77% of those who answered the question – did not think that the current performance measures are the right ones, while 23% thought that they are. Organisations were less likely than individuals to think the performance measures are the right ones (at 84% and 76% respectively).

Among respondents who did not think the current performance measures are the right ones, many highlighted the general themes outlined above. In addition to impacts on residents and existing businesses, there were concerns that growth opportunities may be affected, and it was argued that the viability of some island communities is being put at risk. A frequent view among individual respondents in particular was that the performance figures for reliability presented on CalMac's website do not reflect their own experience of the frequency of cancellations and disruption.

With respect to punctuality, comparisons were drawn with what were seen as more demanding performance measures set for other forms of public transport where, it was argued, published data on late running services more closely reflects passenger experience.

A majority of all respondents – 80% of those who answered the question – thought that there are additional or alternative performance measures that could be introduced. It was argued that there needs to be greater transparency in reporting of performance data, most frequently that there should be regular reporting of detailed reasons for all delays and cancellations with separate reporting of operational and weather-related issues, on a regular basis, against published timetables, and by individual routes.

With respect to operational delays and cancellations, it was suggested that reporting should include both details of the nature of the problem and the time it will take to

resolve. There were also suggestions around documenting the impacts of amended services, delays, and cancellations on passengers, rather than simply reporting the frequency of such events.

## Capacity and Demand

A majority of respondents – 84% of those who answered the question – said they had suggestions connected to reducing vehicle space demand. A general point was that increased capacity, rather than managed, and by extension potentially reduced demand, needs to be the focus. There was also a recognition that each community has different needs and an associated view that a one size fits all approach to managing vehicle space would not be advisable.

The most frequently made point, and one most likely to have been made by individual respondents, was that some form of demand-based pricing is required, with a premium paid on higher demand services and/or for larger vehicles. There were also calls for Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) fares to be for residents only.

Although the potential to manage freight traffic at busy times was noted, the more frequently made point was that freight traffic is key to supporting the local economy and that it needs to be given a degree of priority. Other suggestions included providing additional freight only services, possibly sailing overnight or in the early morning, with price incentives to use them.

Respondents tended to make similar points relating to managing tourism traffic as they did regarding freight; the importance of tourism to the local economy of a number of island communities was noted, and again it was suggested that the primary focus needs to be on increased overall capacity, and, in particular, increased capacity during the busiest periods.

A majority of respondents – 68% of those who answered the question – said they would not be willing to travel to and from a port using public transport in order to reduce the number of cars on deck at peak times. A frequently made point was that it would not be possible or practical to use public transport because of the type of journey being made including, for example, the need to transport luggage or shopping. The other frequently referenced barrier was the reach and reliability of existing public transport services.

A majority of respondents – 81% of those who answered the question – said they would not be willing to travel to and from a port using active travel modes in order to reduce the number of cars on deck at peak times. The majority of comments addressed the various barriers, both personal and geographical, that would make active travel an impractical option for many people. Reflecting some of the

comments about viability of public transport options for remote locations, some respondents noted the considerable distance they travel to or from the port and noted that walking or cycling would simply not be an option.

A majority of respondents – 88% of those who answered the question – thought Operators should be required to hold dedicated vehicle deck spaces on busy routes for the use of island residents and key worker personnel required to travel at short notice. The most frequently made point was that island residents should be prioritised as ferries represent a lifeline service for them including, for example, when needing to attend hospital appointments.

## Accountability

In relation to how communities could be provided with a stronger role in providing input on ferries related decisions, it was noted that there are already a number of routes through which people can be involved, including Ferry Committees and User Groups. However, there were also some concerns, including that the current Ferry Committees appear to be having limited impact.

More generally, it was thought that community views are not given sufficient weight, and that previous engagement or consultation does not appear to have led to change or to have affected outcomes, with no genuine attempt to take account of service user views. A frequently made point was that the Operator and other key stakeholders need to both listen to the views of communities and also act on their suggestions. There were also calls for greater transparency, including through an improved communication style, along with a willingness to listen to, and make changes in response to, community concerns.

A majority of respondents – 63% of those who answered the question – did not think the Ferries Community Board is representative of island populations. However, a small majority of organisations (54% of those who answered) thought it is representative. Although the challenges inherent in representing such a diverse range of communities and interests were recognised, there were nevertheless concerns that the geographical spread of communities represented is uneven.

A majority of respondents – 70% of those who answered the question – did not think the Ferries Community Board reflects their interest for the next contract. The Ferries Community Board was seen as having limited influence on ferry services, while some simply noted that they did not know enough about the Board and its workings to make a judgement about whether it would reflect their interests.

A majority of respondents – 92% of those who answered the question – thought communities should have greater say in the development of timetables so they suit

the needs of ferry users. A stronger say for communities was seen as crucial to ensuring that timetables better meet the needs of residents and businesses, with respondents suggesting that working together and maintaining an open dialogue would benefit both communities and the Operator, helping to ensure that timetable development is more transparent.

## Carbon Reduction and Environmental Impact

In addition to general support for the importance of reducing carbon emissions associated with ferry services, it was noted that the objective is consistent with national and local policy priorities around decarbonisation and sustainable economic growth. However, questions were raised about the extent to which carbon emissions associated with ferry services can be reduced sufficiently to meet Net Zero targets. It was suggested that decarbonisation of ferry services will be challenging in the context of currently available technologies.

In terms of the ways in which ferry-related carbon emissions can be reduced, comments around ferry design included that the current, 'ageing fleet' should be replaced to reduce carbon emissions, with delays in delivery of new vessels and in harbour improvement works seen as having contributed to increased carbon emissions.

Discussion of the potential role of fuel type and use in reducing carbon emissions included calls for the Operator to prioritise use of alternative fuels from sustainable sources wherever possible. Maximising efficiency and use of available ferry capacity was also seen as a means of reducing carbon impacts.

## Onward and Connecting Travel

In relation to what could be introduced to improve public transport connectivity between ferries, rail and bus operators, the most frequently made point was the need for a joined-up, integrated transport system, with better coordination and linking up of the timetables for different modes of transport. Another frequently made suggestion was that there needs to be improved communication and joint working between different transport organisations and companies.

In terms of the travelling public, it was suggested that when changes to timetables are unavoidable, clear, and effective communication by operators is important to minimise disruption to connectivity.

## Accessibility

A majority of respondents – 89% of those who answered the question – would support a regular accessibility audit taking place with accessibility groups such as Mobility Access Committee Scotland (MACS), with the aim of improving accessibility at ports and onboard vessels.

Most comments focused on what could be done to improve accessibility, with the most frequently made suggestions related to boarding arrangements and the design of ports. They included considering the movement of luggage and installing better gangways, ramps and lifts. There were also references to repairs to lifts being an urgent action and appropriate accessibility as a condition of service for vessels.

## Freight Services

The importance of providing the right and sufficient services for freight was highlighted, including because of the vital role freight traffic plays in supporting island economies. However, it was also suggested that services are not meeting need and demand currently.

The most frequent suggestion was that freight only ferries should be considered. There were also calls for:

- nighttime/off peak freight services;
- offering an incentive for non-perishable freight (whisky, malt, machinery, etc) to be transported on lower demand sailings; and
- more affordable freight tariffs, including making commercial hauliers eligible for RET fares.

There were suggestions relating to improving day-to-day collaboration, including operators having a member of staff dedicated specifically to dealing with freight issues.

## Monitoring and Review

A majority of respondents – 88% of those who answered the question – would like to be able to give feedback to improve services, with annually or quarterly the most frequent suggestions as to how often this should happen. Rather than at a particular time intervals, some respondents suggested that opportunities to provide feedback should be triggered by events, most frequently at each booking or each journey. New timetables or fare changes were also suggested as possible opportunities to provide feedback.



With respect to how feedback from individual customers should be collected, the most frequent suggestion was that this should be online via a website or using an app, with email, telephone, and paper-based options also proposed.



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