Medial Statement-Sleat Transport Forum

Sleat Transport Forum is concerned and disappointed at the timetable and vessel deployment now published by CalMac Ferries Ltd for the Mallaig-Armadale service for summer 2017. This does not bode well for the season. By the Company’s own admission, there will be disruption for the first two weeks due to the unsuitability of the 'MV Loch Fyne' for the tidal conditions during that period and tidal amendments to the schedule are expected on at least 79 days throughout the summer. This will mean disruption to travel for almost 40% of the 206 sailing days during the period, and takes no account of adverse weather, unforeseen low tides and technical issues on the two deployed vessels that are respectively 26 and 28 years old. The crossings on the ‘MV Loch Fyne’ are timetabled to take 45 minutes with no customer facilities. Customer, local and travel industry confidence in the route is at an all-time low.

A Forum spokesman said:

“Despite representations at the highest level, the Scottish Government have not provided the means to provide a robust and reliable service on this route. The Minister for Transport and Islands, Humza Yousaf MSP, has publicly stated that the service during the summer of 2016 was ‘unacceptable’ and the Company have admitted that their service provision was far from adequate. Despite these acknowledgements of failure on their part, they are now proposing a re-run of the same ‘not fit-for purpose’ service during the forthcoming season. The ‘Loch Fyne’ was commissioned for the sheltered waters of the 450m/5 minute Kyle-Kyleakin crossing in 1991 and does not meet current expectations of speed, safety, passenger comfort and reliability.

The Forum has been seeking the return of the ‘MV Coruisk’ from Mull to the Mallaig-Armadale route for which it was specifically commissioned. The Company now state that while extra sailings could be provided with the 'Isle of Mull' at the beginning and the end of the day this would not address demand at peak times. This is at variance with previous statements which claimed that the additional capacity was required to provide a commuter service morning and evening between Mull and Oban and these contradictory statements require to be clarified.

It is also claimed that travel trade bookings appear positive. It is difficult to understand how the Company can make this claim when the timetable has only just been published.

The Forum will continue to seek a lasting solution to the problems which have been created directly by the decisions of Transport Scotland and CalMac. **The procurement of a dedicated vessel with sufficient capacity and able to operate the Mallaig-Armadale route year-round remains essential** if the full benefits of RET are to be achieved on this service, the fifth busiest summer operation on the CHFS network. A downturn in tourism will lead to a loss of jobs and slow economic growth in both Sleat, Skye and Lochaber and every effort must be made to avoid this.”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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