

Aviation, Maritime, Freight & Canals

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CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Mr Chris Atkins
Arran Ferry Action Group

Our ref:
2020/0002531

By email: secretary@arranferries.scot

Date:
1 July 2020

Dear Mr Atkins,

Thank you for your email of 24 June to Scottish Ministers containing a video regarding ferry provision for Arran. As a member of the Ferries Unit within Transport Scotland, I have been asked to reply.

The Scottish Government understands the acute challenges that Covid-19 has presented and continues to present for our island communities. As the First Minister confirmed on 18 June, and subsequently on 24 June 2020, Scotland as a whole, including islands, is now moving at the same pace carefully through Phase 2 of the Route Map. The latest update to the Route Map and indicative dates for the resumption of various activities are available on the Scottish Government website. Transport Scotland has also published specific travel guidance in the [Transport Transition Plan](#).

Despite the significant mitigation measures that are being put in place, there are likely to remain capacity limitations on our ferry services as a result of the physical distancing requirements on vessels that are necessary to protect public health and to ensure compliance with Maritime & Coastguard Agency regulations.

The First Minister has announced a review into the matter of the physical distancing standard to be applied. However, we cannot make any assumption on the outcome of that review, and operators must continue to adhere and plan to the current health advice until advised otherwise. However CalMac have undertaken preparatory assessments of the impact of any change to scientific advice, so that we can prepare for any future change in policy that might arise. The requirement for 2 metres physical distancing is not at the discretion of CalMac or Transport Scotland and is a clear requirement across Scotland, in line with current scientific advice.

CalMac and Transport Scotland have worked hard to enhance the initial proposals for restarting services for Arran from essential lifeline timetable and to explore all options to maximise the capacity that can be delivered safely and, importantly, to ensure that the available capacity is utilised as effectively as possible. There has been extensive engagement with our key stakeholders and communities to develop transition plans. It is important to note that there are a range of views on moving out of lockdown within communities. We have to balance the

understandable desire to restart island economies with the wellbeing of islanders and visitors, as well as the staff who operate our ferry services.

A number of actions have been taken to increase capacity. Timetables are being scaled up, initially on 1 July and then on 15 July, to align with the easing of travel restrictions, and we have been able to accelerate these plans. Timetables are available on the CalMac website. We have taken the difficult decision to not introduce the Campbeltown service in order to provide additional capacity to Arran, where there are particular capacity pressures. CalMac has engaged with the Maritime Coastguard Agency to secure permission for passengers to remain in cars on shorter routes with open deck ferries, including Claonaig - Lochranza, increasing the number of passengers that can be carried.

CalMac have now assumed an element of group travel in their calculations which has increased capacity from the initial estimates, and this will be closely monitored and adjusted accordingly. CalMac are also working to provide outside-only tickets on the Ardrossan – Brodick service, which would be available on a turn up and go basis.

In terms of managing demand, Transport Scotland has worked with CalMac to make changes to the booking arrangements following stakeholder consultation. This seeks to balance the needs of islanders travelling to the mainland, often at short notice, and supporting tourist travel for the benefit of island economies. Bookings for foot passengers and vehicles on a number of routes, including Ardrossan – Brodick, will be available initially on a 2 week rolling basis, with 20% of capacity also held for turn up and go travel. Islanders with urgent medical appointments will be able to contact CalMac, who will try to accommodate them within the 20% capacity reserved for turn up and go travel.

There is capacity available to book across the summer when the CalMac booking system opens, initially on 30 June, and all passengers are encouraged to book travel in advance, where there is a possibility of doing so, although the provision of turn up and go tickets will assist local customers for whom it was not possible to predict their travel needs. As in normal circumstances, there are particular pinch points in demand and we would encourage passengers to utilise all available sailings and recognise there will be particular pressure on the supply of tickets for sailings at peak times.

I am sure you appreciate the challenges in balancing the different needs of island communities, particularly in this unprecedented situation, and I hope this reply illustrates that we are doing everything possible to provide the best ferry services for our islands in the circumstances.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Kind Regards

Ferries Policy Officer