

PE1853/A

Scottish Government submission of 19 March 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute views to the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of PE1853.

As part of the Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services contract, CalMac Ferries Limited on behalf of Transport Scotland delivers a seasonal ferry service between Campbeltown and the Ayrshire coast.

In response to the Covid challenges, following engagement with local stakeholders including Argyll & Bute Council and Councillor John Armour, the difficult decision was taken to suspend the 2020 service, due to the need to deal with significantly reduced capacity to Arran, a high demand route which shares the MV Isle of Arran vessel with the Campbeltown service.

Further considerations were the relatively low passenger numbers on the Campbeltown service, combined with the alternative routes to Campbeltown, including alternative ferries across Arran or the Cowal and Dunoon peninsula and by plane. However the Scottish Government absolutely recognises the importance of the Campbeltown ferry service to supporting the tourism sector on Kintyre, and remains committed to the future of service, and would stress that this was a temporary measure in unprecedented circumstances, in order to make most effective use of the vessels available for deployment. A return of the Campbeltown service, in line with government advice at the time, is expected in summer 2021.

Regarding requests to extend the operating period for the service, this matter was discussed with elected members from the Argyll & Bute Council and other stakeholders at the Clyde, Kintyre and Islands Ferry Stakeholder Group meeting 7 December 2020 and through subsequent correspondence.

As stated through that engagement, it is not currently operationally possible to extend the current operating period of the Ardrossan – Campbeltown service as there are no available vessels. The vessel used to deliver the service, MV Isle of Arran, is needed to cover annual maintenance across the network.

The Scottish Government does however remain committed to securing the two new ferries currently under construction, with the delivery of MV Glen Sannox expected in April-June 2022. As noted in the Ferries Plan 2013-22, the new vessel may provide the opportunity to consider a year round Campbeltown service, subject to a robust business case and funding. The wider connectivity issues around the A83 resilience will be taken into consideration in that process and we will engage with local stakeholders.

Background

The Scottish Government is also committed to improving the resilience of the A83, as demonstrated by the £82m which has been invested in the maintenance of the A83 since 2007, over £13.6m has been invested in landslide mitigation works at the

Rest and Be Thankful, to help keep Argyll open for business by reducing the impact of landslides on the A83.

Since their construction from 2013, these landslide measures have already proven successful, helping to keep the A83 open for 48 days when it would otherwise have closed.

We have now announced the preferred corridor for a long term resilient improvement at the Rest and be Thankful. Identifying the preferred route corridor is a major step forward for this vital work and we are now pushing forward to look at five alternative options within that online corridor and starting the process shortly to appoint design consultants for this work.

As with other projects to improve the trunk road network, there will be a need to complete the necessary environmental assessments and statutory process to allow the project to be constructed. We recognise that the timescales for developing an alternative to the current route and finding a long-term solution to the challenges created by the Rest and Be Thankful section of the A83 are frustrating for the local community and we will look to expedite the programme where possible. However, we must ensure that we follow the correct statutory process to ensure a fair and transparent assessment of options and impacts on local communities and road users.

The safety of the travelling public and operating company staff remains a key priority, so we are committed to looking at further short and medium term measures to improve the resilience of the A83 in tandem with the work to identify a permanent solution.

We are now progressing substantial short term investment in the existing A83 including installing a debris cage and new culvert, construction of an additional catchpit, debris fencing and flood mitigation measures at the River Croe crossing.

We have also announced that we have appointed consultants to progress work to look at a medium term resilient route through Glen Croe including consideration of the Forestry Track, the Old Military Road and other options on land already owned by Scottish Ministers. Depending on the statutory consents required, this work will seek to develop finalised proposals within 18 months.

We hope this contribution is helpful and Transport Scotland officials are happy to continue to engage with stakeholders as these issues progress.