



Update on island of Arran Ferry and Bus Connections

Date of meeting 26 January 2024

Date of report 10 January 2024

Report by Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery

1. Object of report

To update the Committee on the local bus services on the island of Arran and the impact of pending changes to the Ardrossan to Brodick ferry timetable.

2. Background to report

All registered local bus services on the island of Arran are commissioned by SPT and are operated by Stagecoach Western. The services are scheduled to serve the local communities on the island, connecting with ferry departures and arrivals at Brodick where possible, and providing a Home to School Transport (HST) service for the island. The latter is funded by North Ayrshire Council (NAC) providing HST to around 200 pupils on the island serving five primary schools and one secondary school, respectively. Further details on the Arran local bus services can be found at the following link; <https://www.spt.co.uk/travel-with-spt/bus/bus-timetables/>

The contract(s) for the Arran bus services noted above commenced in 2019, with the current contract(s) due to end on 31 March 2024. The total annual contract cost of the Arran services to SPT and NAC is £924,000. In addition, SPT purchased 12 diesel buses in 2015 for use on the Arran services at a total cost of £1.5M, which are leased to Stagecoach Western on a full repair and maintenance lease basis.

Members may recall, that SPT previously provided £1M support to Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) through the Capital Programme (split across 2016/2017 and 2017/2018) to support the redevelopment of Brodick harbour, including a new bus interchange. To support the introduction of a new vessel on the route to Brodick, the MV Glen Sannox - scheduled for introduction in summer 2024, further improvement works are now required at Ardrossan harbour, which are anticipated by Transport Scotland to take up to two years to complete. During the Ardrossan harbour improvement works, ferry services to Brodick will instead depart from Troon harbour, resulting in revised ferry departure and arrival times at Brodick.

Notwithstanding the above, members will be aware of SPT's recent bid to the ScotZEB2 scheme, which included proposals to decarbonise all local bus services on the island of Arran. Unfortunately, this application was rejected by the Energy Savings Trust on behalf of Transport Scotland. The SPT buses operating on Arran are now approaching nine years old and are due for replacement / redeployment, given the scheduled daily mileage and operating conditions.

3. Outline of proposals

Noting the pending changes to the Arran ferry service, outlined above, SPT understands there are two main factors which are likely to impact on the ferry timetable, namely:

- Length of route - the revised sailing from Troon to Brodick is longer than the current sailing between Ardrossan and Brodick, resulting in revised arrivals and departures at Brodick and;
- Vessel turnaround - the new vessel, the MV Glen Sannox, is larger than the vessel currently utilised on the route, resulting in revised arrivals and departures at Brodick.

The combined impact of the above on the ferry timetable (which is yet to be finalised) means that a significant proportion of local bus trips on Arran will no longer match ferry departures and arrivals at Brodick. This therefore requires a full recast of the bus services on the island of Arran, noting there are currently three separate local services operating on the island servicing local communities and providing HTS services for school pupils on the island.

As a starting point to any recast of the local bus services on the island, SPT require clarity from CalMac on the final revised ferry timetable due to commence in June 2024.

Given the importance of this matter, SPT wrote to Transport Scotland Ferries division in February 2023 to highlight our concerns over the lack of clarity on the revised ferry timetable and the significant risks to the local bus and school services on the island of Arran. A copy of this letter is included in Appendix 1 for reference.

On receipt of Transport Scotland's response to the above letter, further discussions were held with SPT, CalMac and TS officials where it was explained:

- Transport Scotland and CalMac were in discussion with the Arran Ferry Committee (AFC) on potential ferry timetable options;
- An initial suite of six ferry timetable options developed by CalMac, has now been reduced to two;
- The Arran Ferry Committee were seeking further assurances on Sunday sailings and Winter timetable provision, that are yet to be resolved; and
- The final revised Arran ferry timetable would be subject to Ministerial approval.

During the above discussions SPT highlighted the following key points:

- The urgent need for clarity on the final revised Arran ferry timetable in order to undertake a full recast of the local bus services on the island;
- The importance of the local bus service to the communities, school pupils, local businesses, and tourist trade on the island;
- That it had been reported by the bus operator that the local bus services had already been impacted by reliability issues relating to the ferry service on Arran;
- That increasing cost pressures on the operation of local bus services as a result of less patronage and increasing costs remained significant, alongside a shortage of bus drivers;
- Highlighted the contract(s) for the Arran local bus services are due to end on 31 March 2024;
- That a tendering exercise for the renewal of this contract(s) was undertaken during September/October 2023 and no tender returns were received from this exercise, given the uncertainty of the above;
- Consequentially a temporary contract arrangement will be required. The changes described above will require to be incorporated within any temporary contract; and

- SPT offered to attend any meetings with the Arran Ferry Committee should that be required and to discuss the knock-on impacts to the local bus network.

Details of the two draft shortlisted ferry timetable options were shared with SPT in December 2023 in order to commence an assessment of the local bus services to support a recast of the timetables and any temporary contract. This is a detailed and complex task which cannot be completed until there is certainty on the ferry timetable and agreement with the bus operator.

Notwithstanding the above, SPT has also recently had discussion with colleagues from North Ayrshire Council (NAC) to highlight our concerns and to discuss the issues in respect of the revised ferry service and the knock-on impact to the local bus and school transport services on the island.

Further to these discussions, it was agreed with NAC that SPT will continue to work towards arranging a temporary contract arrangement for the local bus services on Arran to commence on 1 April 2024. It was also agreed that SPT continue to work towards a longer-term solution for local bus services on the island of Arran. Finally, it was noted that the decision by the Energy Savings Trust to decline SPT's ScotZEB2 bid, was particularly disappointing in this regard and that it appeared to be a missed opportunity to decarbonise bus services on the island, particularly given the need to replace the current diesel fleet on Arran.

SPT has agreed to keep NAC colleagues updated as this matter as it progresses.

4. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In seeking to recast bus services to ensure alignment with ferry departures and arrivals on Arran, SPT's actions as detailed in this report are supporting RTS policies 18 Integrated Transport System, 21 Bus Quality and Integration and 23 Ferry Quality and Integration.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>The need for temporary contracts in Arran is likely to increase local bus service costs in the short to medium term.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Ensuring effective and integrated transport arrangements supports SPT's RTS objectives to promote Access for All, Public Transport Quality & Integration and Regional Connections.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>Lack of certainty on the Arran Ferry timetable increases risks in respects of operation of the local bus services and associated contracts.</i>

Climate Change, Adaptation &
Carbon consequences

Ensuring effective and integrated transport arrangements supports SPT's RTS objective to reduce carbon emissions.

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22 February 2023

BY EMAIL & POST

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Dear Chris

**Arran Ferry Timetable Proposed Changes
Impact on Supported Local Bus Services & School Transport**

I write regarding the above and to highlight a number of concerns SPT has regarding the forthcoming changes to the Arran Ferry Timetable, which we understand is due to commence in Autumn 2023.

By way of background, SPT subsidise all of the local registered bus services on the island of Arran. The services are currently operated by Stagecoach Western, under contract to SPT, until March 2024. The timings of these local bus services are designed specifically to connect with the Summer and Winter ferry timetables, schools on Arran (providing home to school transport on behalf of North Ayrshire Council) and to meet the needs of both the local community and visiting population.

In addition to the above, SPT is currently assessing a funding application from North Ayrshire Council to support public transport improvements adjacent to Ardrossan terminal.

It is our understanding that a likely change (namely a reduction) to the Arran Ferry Timetable is being considered for commencement in Autumn 2023, and has been consulted upon, which will see the number of sailings diminish and sailings commence at Troon (as opposed to Ardrossan), leading to a longer sailing, and longer operating day, with a lengthened turnaround time on the mainland due to the larger vessel being deployed.

Further to a recent meeting between SPT Network Team and Calmac on this matter, I must bring to your attention that the above changes will have the following impact on the local bus services on Arran;

- Based on the ferry timetable options presented, existing passenger connections between the bus and ferry timetable will be significantly disrupted under all options shared by colleagues from Calmac. This will have a significant impact on both the local community and visiting population. School transport services on Arran are a further consideration.
- Some of the options shared with SPT suggest additional bus services may be required on Arran (or at Troon), I must highlight there is notable and significant difficulties securing this resource, given the ongoing current PCV (bus) driver shortage impacting on bus services across Scotland, and as recently highlighted by Stagecoach (who are the only operator on the island). Clarification is required from Calmac / TS that the bus driver shortages have been fully considered and on how any shuttles would be funded.

- Given the characteristics of the current local bus timetable design on Arran (i.e. connecting with ferries, communities and schools) it is estimated by SPT this would require a minimum of 6-8 weeks resource time to re-plan these services, and a further 3-4 weeks for procurement/bid analysis. Clarification is required on how such issues are being considered in the ferry timetable planning process. There are significant risks around any such procurement exercise given the complexities involved.
- As governed by the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland any variation to current timetables, cancellations and/or new local bus registrations have a lead time of 70 days by law (noting above bullet point, indicating a minimum period of 19-22 weeks for prospective changes). This would need to be considered by Calmac / TS in the planning of any ferry timetable changes.
- Any disconnect with the ferry service will mean revenues on the local bus services will likely be severely reduced, which will impact on the current viability of the subsidised Arran network – as a whole. Clarification is therefore required from Calmac / TS on how the supported bus network on the island will be supported financially during this period.
- Notwithstanding the above, Home to School transport arrangements on Arran (i.e. currently delivered as part of the local bus network on the island) may require to be redesigned and recommissioned, based on the issues noted above. The proposed changes to the ferry timetable by Calmac are likely to make the current arrangements unviable.

To be clear, we don't believe the consultation undertaken on the Arran Ferry Timetable, adequately considers the direct impact on local bus networks affecting local residents, visitors and school pupils. Further to this, there is a lack of clarity over funding / revenue support from TS for the local bus network, required as a result of the proposed changes to the Arran Ferry Timetable. SPT and our local authority partners are simply not a position to fund any such revenue losses, resulting from this development. Our view is a more holistic approach to managing the public transport impacts is required over the life of this development.

Given the importance of this matter to North Ayrshire and the local communities on Arran, I would be grateful for a meeting with you at the earliest opportunity to discuss the issues outlined above.

Please be assured, we are keen to work closely and collaboratively with Transport Scotland and Calmac to find adequate solutions to the issues raised within this letter. However, the risks as highlighted above are significant.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

Gordon Dickson
Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery