

LISMORE ACCESS PRIORITIES – STAG APPRAISAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

MVA Consultancy was appointed by Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) to undertake an appraisal of the future provision of transport access to and from the island of Lismore, in Loch Linnhe. The appraisal was to be carried out in accordance with the 'refreshed' Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG), which was published in May 2008.

All Scottish transport-related studies must conform to STAG, as it provides a robust and consistent methodology for assessing and appraising interventions. Its use is mandatory where any approval or finance from the Scottish Government is sought - a situation which is highly likely in the provision of Scotland's publicly operated lifeline ferry services. While an updated version of STAG was published in May 2008¹, it should be noted that the fundamental approach, philosophy and processes are essentially unchanged. The approach, methodology and techniques adopted in this appraisal were consistent with the new Guidance.

STAG essentially consists of four distinct stages:

- **pre-appraisal;**
- **initial (STAG Part 1) appraisal;**
- **detailed (STAG Part 2) appraisal; and**
- **post appraisal.**

The post appraisal stage is not discussed in this paper but is considered in detail in the STAG papers.

The study provided some interesting features that are not common in STAG studies. The STAG Guidance strongly encourages consultation throughout the various stages of appraisal, as it ensures a transparent process, while also offering opportunities for users and stakeholders to participate and influence the outcomes. Given the number of people who will use, or will be affected by, the option selected for the future provision of transport services to and from the island, it was possible to carry out a comprehensive consultation involving **ALL** residents on the island of Lismore and Port Appin / Appin on the mainland. This captured strong views in support of a range of options and also strong feelings against the same options. These sensitive issues needed to be managed very carefully throughout the appraisal process.

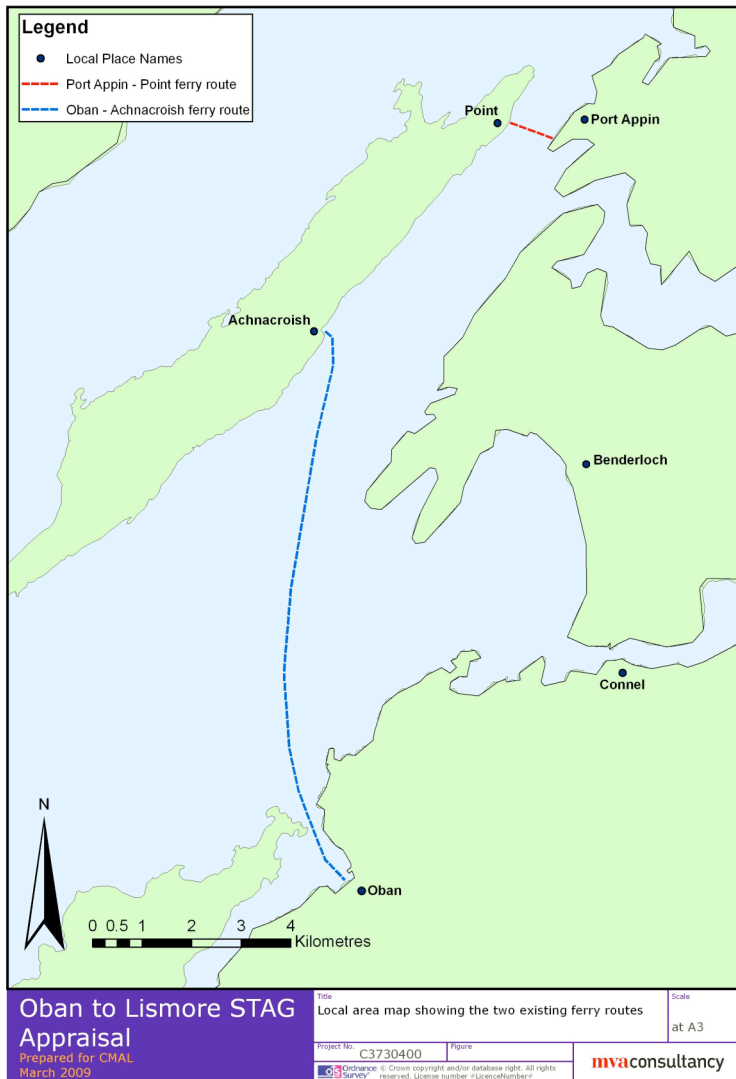
¹ <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/stag/home>

The consultation was felt to play a crucial role in many of the individuals from the communities affected by the outcomes understanding the findings of the STAG Appraisal. While they may not necessarily support a particular option that may perform best against the transport objectives and government criteria, they could understand how the options were arrived at by being involved throughout the process and through following the various stages.

While future transport services will clearly impact on the economic prosperity of the island, the majority of the impacts captured in the appraisal were more of a social (and to a lesser extent environmental) nature and this needed to be assessed in the analysis and reflected in the findings.

The monetised benefits traditionally associated with improvements to transport links and services, such as the value of journey time savings, were therefore less important in this study, with the key benefits associated with improved choice, accessibility and inclusion for the island residents.

2 BACKGROUND



The island of Lismore, in Loch Linnhe, lies of the west coast of Scotland with a population of around 170. At the moment, Lismore is served by two ferry services; a **passenger and vehicle ferry service** operating between Oban and Achnacroish on the south of the island and a **passenger only service** between Port Appin and Point at the north of the island. Both of the ferries serving the island are nearing the end of their expected operational life and, over the next few years, will need to be replaced.

There has been a long-running debate regarding the nature of the ferry services required to serve the island of Lismore. There was a local referendum on the issue in 2004 which failed to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. At present, neither of the two existing services is considered adequate to meet the needs of the island community. The STAG appraisal was therefore seen as a possible means by which to inform conclusively the preferred option for the provision of future transport links between Lismore and the Scottish mainland when the ferries reach the end of their expected operational life. What was required was a comprehensive, unambiguous and objective-led analysis of the options for serving the island. Central to this were:

- **the needs of islanders** – comprehensive and definitive **consultation** was required to build a very clear picture of existing travel patterns and all the issues surrounding the ferry services, including future aspirations and preferences;
- **the finances of providing the service(s)** - operating costs, patronage, revenue and subsidy, landside infrastructure costs, vessel acquisition costs;
- the **economic benefits** brought about by any new service configuration and its associated infrastructure – a key issue here is the number of additional crossings ‘induced’ by improved services;
- the **social benefits** brought about by improved links to the mainland through better accessibility to opportunities on the mainland; and
- the **environmental impacts** of any new transport link and its associated infrastructure.

Carryings

Table 2.1 shows the key figures relating to the use of the current ferry services. The figures are for 2007.

	Port Appin	Oban			
	Passengers	Passengers	Cars	Coaches	CVs
Annual, 2007	40,087	13,653	2,264	3	529
Per Day, 2007	110	44	7	0	2
Per Sailing, 2007	6*	8	1	0	0
Per Summer Day (July/Aug)	182	59	10	0	1
Per Summer Sailing (July/Aug)	9*	10	2	0	0

* - based on 2006 figures

Table 2.1 Lismore Ferry – Patronage

In total there were 53,500 recorded passenger crossings in 2007, or around 26,750 return journeys, and around 75% of all crossings were made at Port Appin. In contrast, only 2,264 cars and 529 commercial vehicles used the Oban ferry in 2007. Assuming an average car occupancy figure of 1.58², this means that around 92% of all travel between Lismore and the mainland is currently undertaken as a foot passenger.

On the Oban crossing, the figures equate to an average of eight passengers and one car per sailing - on a vessel with a carrying capacity of 75 passengers and five cars. These figures rise slightly to 10 passengers and two cars per sailing during the peak summer months of July and August. Utilisation is far higher at Port Appin, where there are typically six passengers per crossing, rising to nine in the summer.

The Port Appin service is currently provided by Argyll and Bute Council and the Oban service by CFL. Neither of these services operates on a commercial basis. CFL reported an estimated route loss of £314,000 for the year ending 30 September 2007³. Data provided by Argyll and Bute Council showed a route loss of £180,000 for year 2007/08. The combined figure in subsidy to serve Lismore is therefore around £500,000 per annum.

3 Pre - Appraisal

In line with the STAG guidance, the appraisal began with a detailed analysis of the problems, issues, opportunities and constraints. These are summarised below.

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Transport-Travel/TrendCarOccupancy>

³ <http://www.calmac.co.uk/Route-losses/Route%20losses%20Yr%20ended%20Sep07.pdf>

Demographics

According to the 2001 Census, the population of Lismore was 146, a figure which has remained broadly constant in censuses since 1961. Locally, the population is put at approximately 180, although there is no perception that population levels are growing. However, within this headline figure, there are some significant demographic issues facing the island. Figure 3.1 below shows the age profile of Lismore according to the 2001 Census, together with similar figures for a basket of broadly comparable islands, the Argyll and Bute Council area and Scotland.

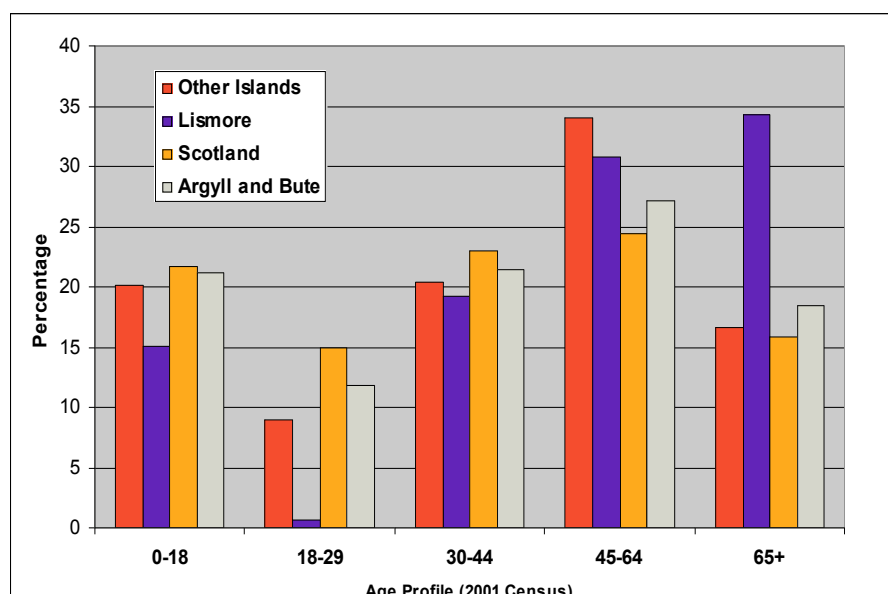


Figure 3.1. Age Profile of Lismore Residents and Comparative Areas

It is immediately clear that Lismore has a much higher proportion of residents aged over 65 than any of the other areas. Particularly significant is that other islands, which might have been expected to show a similar trend, in fact reflect more closely the national picture. Similarly, in 2001, Lismore had virtually nobody in the 18-29 age bracket, and the proportion of under 18s was also low. This trend clearly has alarming longer-term consequences for the sustainability of the island, and is also reflected in the average age – on Lismore, this was 51 against a national average of 39. Although more recent data is not available, it is felt that this picture has in fact deteriorated since 2001.

It is felt locally that the nature of the island's ferry services is a significant contributory factor to these population trends. This was a key message that emerged from both the early stakeholder workshops and the wider consultation, and is one of the key drivers of this study.

Employment

Figure 3 2 below shows a similar comparison for employment status.

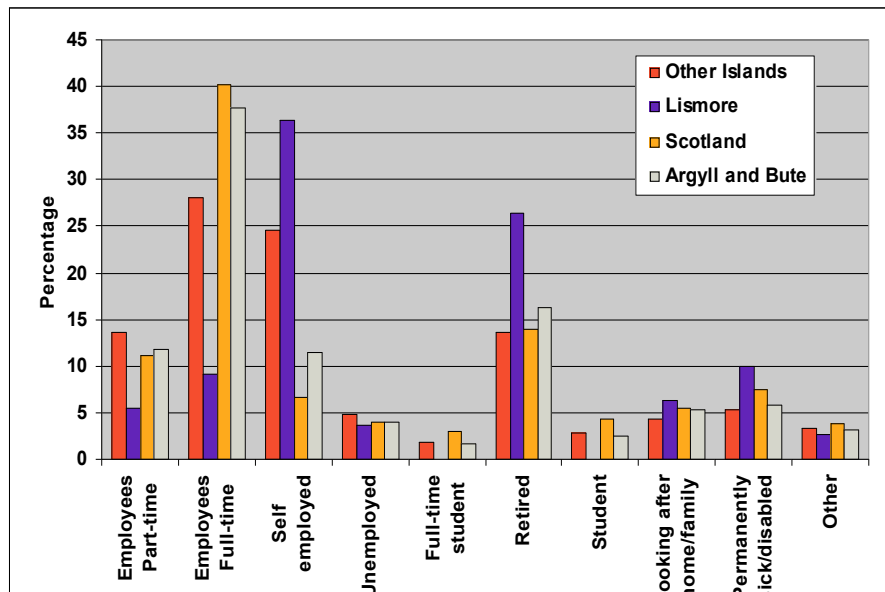


Figure 3 2 Employment Status of Lismore Residents and Other Areas

Again, Lismore displays somewhat unique characteristics here. There is a disproportionately large percentage of people who are self-employed, with many of these people working in the agriculture sector. There is also a relatively small percentage of people whose employment status is classed as “full time employee”. The recent downturn in activity in the agriculture sector has meant that employment opportunities have become scarcer with people having to look for work elsewhere, particularly on the mainland. However, the current transport links make commuting to the mainland for a day’s work difficult, both in terms of timing and monetary cost.

Consultation

The future of the ferry services to the island has been a long-running and somewhat divisive issue locally. This was most recently evidenced in a locally organised referendum in September 2004, where options were put to a public vote. The results were evenly split and inconclusive however, and there were reservations expressed regarding the nature of the vote. In essence, this debate has centred on either (a) keeping the existing arrangements, or (b) reversing the current ferry provision, to provide a vehicle service at Port Appin and a passenger service to Oban.

Given this background, it was recognised at an early stage that extensive consultation was a vital element of this study. Following initial meetings with local stakeholders, an extensive consultation exercise was developed and undertaken, to allow **all** islanders and others to express their views (in confidence) regarding the current ferry services. This exercise was extended to include the Port Appin and Appin areas. It was agreed that residents of these areas are affected by the operation of the current Lismore passenger ferry and could be affected by future proposals.

'Consultation Packs' were sent to all households on Lismore. These packs contained questionnaires (two per household) seeking views on the current ferry services and also a Travel Diary. In the Travel Diary, residents were asked to record details relating to their use of either ferry during a two-week period in late 2008. The purpose of this was to build up a comprehensive picture of actual travel behaviour in order to effectively consider alternative options in this context. A separate consultation questionnaire was sent to residents in the Port Appin and Appin areas.

The Lismore Consultation Pack questionnaire covered the following:

- the nature of the use of the island's ferries in general;
- an assessment of the importance and adequacy of current service attributes – eight key characteristics, graded on a scale with space for comments in each case;
- ways in which the provision of links to the mainland could be improved; and
- new opportunities arising from potential improvements.

The Lismore Travel Diary included the following:

- household characteristics – including car ownership and any mobility impairment issues;
- typical use of cars and parking arrangements accessing ferry services; and
- multiple single A4 'travel diary' sheets to record journey information including: ferry used, mode of travel, origin and destination, journey purpose, ferry access and parking arrangements.

The Appin / Port Appin questionnaire covered the following:

- any use of the Port Appin ferry – frequency and purpose;
- the importance of perceived issues associated with the current ferry – parking and traffic; and
- an overall assessment of the impact of the Lismore ferry locally.

A total of 113 Consultation Packs were posted to all households and businesses on Lismore. Some 120 questionnaires (each pack contained two questionnaires) and 67 completed household travel diaries were returned and analysis shows that 60% of all households and businesses on Lismore returned at least one questionnaire. Around 260 consultation questionnaires were posted to households and businesses in Port Appin and Appin. Some 98 questionnaires were returned, which gives a 38% response rate. In both cases, this level of response was considered very good and a robust basis for analysis.

Lismore Questionnaire – Assessment of Services Key Findings

The responses suggested that around 60% of people primarily use the Port Appin ferry, 25% primarily use the Oban ferry, with the remainder using both ferries about equally. In terms of frequency of use, 70% used the ferries between 0-2 times per typical week (return trips). Only 10% of respondents said they typically used the ferries frequently, ie 5-10 times per week. This suggests that regular commuting from the island is not currently commonplace.

Table 3.1 Summary of Assessment of Current Ferry Services

	Port Appin ferry			Oban ferry		
	% < adeq.	% adeq.	% > adeq.	%<adeq.	% adeq.	%>adeq.
Timetables and Hours.	14	26	61	29	33	38
Reliability and Punctuality.	13	21	66	3	22	75
Cost of Fare (pass).	9	42	49	25	43	22
Cost of Fare (car).				69	23	7
Quality – on board.	34	33	33	60	23	17
Quality – terminals.	71	18	12	39	35	26
Onward Travel (PT).	80	10	10	24	34	42
Terminal Locations – convenience.	12 (Point) 22(P.Appin)	36 (Point) 33(P.Appin)	52 (Point) 45(P.Appin)	6 (Ach) 9 (Oban)	39 (Ach) 45 (Oban)	55 (Ach) 46 (Oban)
Ferry Capacity.	26	25	49	35	24	42
Overall Assessment.	20	30	50	30	31	38

Table 3.1 above shows a summary of the assessment of current ferry services. It can be seen that the ferry characteristics cited most often as 'less than adequate' were:

- **Oban ferry:** cost of fares for cars; on-board quality of service; quality of service at the terminal; and ferry capacity; and
- **Port Appin ferry:** ease of onward travel by public transport and quality of service at the terminals.

Overall satisfaction levels were possibly rather better than anticipated, with 80% stating that the Port Appin ferry was adequate or better and an equivalent figure of 69% for the Oban ferry. Nevertheless, a large number of issues were raised in the survey in connection with the services. The main issues associated with each of these ferry characteristics were as follows:

- *Timetables – hours of operation, frequency etc:* new (October 08) timetable is of benefit to most, but less convenient for some; lack of late and early services on both services, especially in winter (impacting on evening activities, can require an overnight stay in Oban). Even with the new timetable, the last sailing from Oban is at 1700, limiting the scope for daily commuting;
- *Cost of fare:* the cost of car fares on the Oban route was routinely seen as too high to make regular commuting or indeed general use by car feasible. In contrast, passenger fares were generally seen as reasonable; The cost of taking a goods vehicle on the ferry was also seen as a significant issue in terms of eg moving livestock;
- *Quality of service – onboard the ferry, physical access etc:* the main concern here related to the lack of any disabled or medical emergency access on both routes. Neither boat is capable of accommodating a wheelchair, and so with the high average age on Lismore, this is of great concern. The Lismore GP is based in Port Appin and, in the case of emergencies, patients are collected at Point by the Port Appin ferry. The Port Appin ferry is unable to fit wheelchairs or stretchers into the cabin, therefore stretchers are placed on the open deck, exposed to the elements. To a lesser extent, the design of the Appin boat also makes it difficult to access when traveling with young children, prams, shopping and luggage - any baggage has to be relayed from parked cars down the open and exposed pier prior to boarding, and the cabin itself is quite confined. 60% felt that the on-board quality of service on the Oban route was inadequate. This reflects the age of the MV *Eigg*, its poor levels of accessibility, and its rudimentary and uncomfortable on-board passenger accommodation. Around one third also felt the MV *Lismore* was inadequate in this regard;
- *Quality of service – at the ferry terminals (eg parking, waiting environment):* 71% indicated that terminal facilities on the Port Appin route were inadequate. Waiting facilities at all terminals except Oban are very basic indeed and of poor quality, but of greater concern is the issue of parking at both Point and Port Appin. As previously mentioned, many households keep at least one vehicle on the island and another vehicle at Port Appin, resulting in a high number of parked cars at Port Appin. This problem was partially

