

Case study

Lismore access priorities STAG study

Using Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance to assess priorities for lifeline services



The challenge

We were commissioned by Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited to examine the access priorities to the island of Lismore in Loch Linnhe. The two services (car / passenger between Oban and Achnacroish, and passenger only between Port Appin and Point) were considered inadequate to meet the needs of the island community. We were tasked with investigating the transport-related 'problems and opportunities' using the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG).

Why assess access priorities to Lismore?

The ferry services to the island of Lismore in Loch Linnhe are a vital lifeline service to the remote community on Lismore in terms of maintaining and servicing the economy of the island, encouraging social inclusion, promoting access to key services such as health and education and preserving the social, cultural, linguistic and historical legacy of the island community.

There has been a long running debate regarding the nature of the ferry service(s) required to serve the island and it has been apparent that access to the island is the highest priority local issue for the islanders. The strength of feeling was evidenced in a previous 'referendum', held by Lismore Community Council in 2004, although this did not appear to lead to a conclusive resolution. The ongoing debate in recent years resulted in a high-level commitment being made to undertake this STAG led study and appraisal

of access options, which was announced by Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Climate Change, Stewart Stevenson MSP, on 2nd April 2008.

Our approach

We applied STAG to systematically and consistently consider different transport solutions to a set of transport-related 'problems and opportunities'. These options were considered against project-specific objectives, Government objectives and STAG Criteria, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The initial appraisal of options led to a more detailed consideration and appraisal of options which would act to alleviate the identified problems and issues in the context of Lismore. Central to this was:

- Needs of islanders - comprehensive and definitive consultation to build a clear picture of existing travel patterns and all issues surrounding the ferry services, including future aspirations and preferences;
- Finances of providing the service(s) - operating costs, patronage, revenue and subsidy, landside infrastructure costs, vessel acquisition costs;

- Economic benefits brought about by any new service configuration and its associated infrastructure - a key issue was the assessment of additional crossings 'induced' by improved services;
- Social benefits brought about by improving services through better accessibility to opportunities on the mainland; and
- Environmental impacts of any new service configuration and its associated infrastructure.

Socio-economic context

An important issue which was considered throughout this study was the level of commitment from the Local Authority and The Scottish Government to 'sustaining island communities'. With a population of around 180, ferry services to Lismore are always likely to require a subsidy. The unique geographic and socio-economic context for the study dictated that we had to carefully identify the service configuration which best met the needs and aspirations of the Lismore community, at an affordable cost to the public sector and importantly, provided value for money.

Key issues affecting access priorities to Lismore

Having established the unique geographic and socio-economic context for the study, it was essential to assess the issues specifically affecting the access priorities to Lismore. It was recognised early in the study process that existing vessels were ageing and were in need of replacement. The vast majority of crossings were made on the existing passenger ferry by foot passengers and in total there was on average around 75 return passenger crossings per day and only four vehicle crossings, around 90% of all person trips were being made as a passenger. This indicated that the vehicle ferry was perceived as an unattractive service in terms of frequency, cost and journey time, these issues were investigated fully and evidenced during the study.

Importance of effective participation and consultation

It was vital that this appraisal was undertaken on the basis of a thorough understanding of local feeling and a comprehensive knowledge of all the issues and perceived shortcomings associated with the current ferry services. It was also essential that as much local 'buy in' was obtained as possible as the study progressed. The key was to

use STAG to provide clear framework and decision-making process which minimised grievances with the outcome.

During the course of this study, we ensured the local community saw that:

- all local views were heard and given due weight and consideration;
- a systematic and transparent approach was taken;
- there was an understandable 'audit trail' in all decision making and the presentation of findings; and
- they had been treated 'fairly' in terms of the allocation of resources.

Appraisal of options

Each option was assessed against the five STAG criteria of Economy, Environment, Integration, Safety and Accessibility & Social Inclusion. In addition, each option was considered in the context of established policy directives including the Government's Purpose and Strategic Outcomes. A tailored approach to appraisal was adopted to ensure that STAG was applied proportionately with initial appraisal based on qualitative information and the relevant quantitative techniques adopted during detailed appraisal in order to arrive at appropriate STAG outcomes which provided the most appropriate information to decision makers.

STAG outcomes

The STAG process was followed and there was a particularly high level of public engagement in the process. In general, the provision of a new car ferry at Port Appin would (assuming a suitable fare structure can be found) provide the Isle of Lismore with a service that would bring it more into line with other islands, in terms of costs of travel in particular. It is anticipated that this would be positive in terms of the long term sustainability of a vibrant community on the island. Without this, it is possible that the costs and inconveniences associated with the current ferry services will continue to act as a negative factor, and the current demographic and socio-economic trends observed on Lismore will continue to the detriment of the island and the wider area.