

BLUEMULL SOUND STAG STUDY

FIRST STAGE CONSULTATION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1. Introduction

This summary presents the consultation results from the first round of consultation on the Bluemull transport link – connecting the North Isles of Unst, Fetlar and Yell. Specifically, details are provided on the problems identified during consultation and the opportunities that could be considered to improve the link in the future.

The issues raised during the consultation exercise will be further analysed and will provide the foundations for setting objectives that the study will need to address. These objectives will then be used as the basis for the appraisal of the various options considered in the study.

2. Key Findings

1. A good level of response was received from Unst and Fetlar, while there was a lower level of response from Yell.
2. Many believe that the existing ferry service is good and reliable.
3. There are a number of inter-related issues associated with the timetable/vessel/crew. These include weekend timetable problems, the irregularity of the timetable, specific gaps in the timetable during the day, and constraints at peak periods.
4. There was a high level of awareness that the Bluemull terminals and vessels are getting older.
5. The analysis of resident's travel patterns revealed only a limited amount of interaction between Unst and Yell. Fetlar residents had far more interaction with both Unst and Yell.
6. Arguments for fixed links arise mainly from island sustainability, ease of movement and financial efficiency points of view.
7. Overall, there is a need for a cost effective solution for the long term sustainability of the transport link.

3. Methodology

Consultation has been undertaken with a variety of stakeholders, including North Isles residents, various Shetland-wide agencies, elected representatives, local businesses and young people, as follows:

- Initial Public Meetings (on Unst, Fetlar and Yell);
- Resident Questionnaires (issued to all households on Unst and Fetlar, and available for collection from various public locations on Yell);
- Face-to-face discussions, telephone interviews, and letter/email correspondence with a variety of stakeholders;
- Workshops, including discussion sessions with local schools;
- Drop-In Sessions in Unst and Yell;
- Review of previous work, including findings from previous consultation on the Shetland Regional Transport Strategy; and
- Public Feedback Meetings on Unst and Fetlar (Yell cancelled due to poor weather affecting travel).

4. Response

A good level of response was received from Unst and Fetlar. The level of response from Yell was lower. In total, 267 questionnaires were received from Unst residents, 35 questionnaires from Fetlar, and 42 questionnaires from Yell. Approximately 50 telephone and face-to-face interviews were also held with a variety of stakeholders. These have been useful in allowing for a more detailed exploration and understanding of issues raised and problems encountered.

5. Travel Patterns

Only 25% of responses from households indicated they use the ferry more frequently than weekly. The majority (81%) of responses confirmed travel on the ferry as a car driver or car passenger, although 13% also indicated that they also travel on the bus. The results indicated that Unst households primarily travel onto the Mainland. This was not the case for Fetlar residents who travelled equally to both Unst and Yell (and onward to Mainland).

6. Strengths

Generally, feedback on the current ferry service was positive. It was described as good and reasonably reliable, particularly when the weather is good. The frequency is generally good. The removal of fares on the Bluemull Sound service was also frequently stated as a reason for liking the ferry service. The crew are seen to be friendly and helpful.

7. Problems Associated with the Current Link

Following analysis of the consultation results, consultees stated the following problems with the current link.

<i>Terminals</i>	<i>Vessels</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ageing and need upgraded / replaced• Lack of breakwater at Hamars Ness• Facilities at terminals need upgraded• Information boards are not always kept up to date• Signs can be confusing for tourists• Lane markings at Ulsta are confusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ageing• Too small, causing capacity constraints at peak times and in the summer• 0820 from Belmont often fully booked and 0705 can be as well• In contrast, Yell Sound ferries are bigger which causes a bottleneck at Gutcher• The <i>Bigga</i> is a good size but if it is taken off for other commitments capacity is restricted• Poor disabled and child access, steep stairs• Future impact of ongoing fuel price increases on cost of service, but also wider impacts

<p><i>Timetables</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor weekend timetable (single vessel) • Gaps in the timetable (during Fetlar runs/lunch/ferry maintenance) • Not enough early and late sailings • Timetables are difficult to understand • Voicebank not kept up to date • Connections with Yell Sound ferry service and buses • In the morning, Fetlar crew has to travel to Cullivoe to board vessel and begin shift. This wastes time that could be used for an earlier first run from Fetlar 	<p><i>Fares, Ticketing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yell Sound costs are high • No provision for buying tickets with credit / debit cards on the ferry • Expensive for pensioners / senior citizen car drivers • Fares set up causes confusion for visitors – unsure when or if they have to pay a fare • The promotion of the service and fares could be improved to attract more visitors to the North Isles. • Consultees concerned regarding uncertainty over future fares levels.
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In combination it was recognised that these issues affect **accessibility** for those living and working on the islands, the **efficiency** and **ability** to deliver key services, as well as the **efficiency** and **viability** of economic enterprises.

Consultees recognised the wider relationships between transport, and issues of future island vitality and viability, such as housing supply, provision of key services, population dynamics, opportunities for employment, and opportunities for accessing retail, leisure and social opportunities.

8. Future Options for Consideration

A wide range of options to improve the Bluemull transport link were generated through the consultation process. There was a high level of response with regards to the potential for a **fixed link**.

- Tunnel between Unst and Yell (rather than a more weather dependent bridge)
- Fixed links would provide freedom of movement and would be a long term solution. Benefits would be that it could prevent depopulation, allow for living on Unst and working on Mainland, and provide a boost for businesses and tourism.
- Fixed link between Unst and Yell could also be good for Fetlar which would benefit from a dedicated ferry.
 - Fetlar – Gutcher ferry route would still be preferred by a majority of Fetlar residents
 - Provides opportunities to consider options for tailoring the service to the needs of the island.
 - Fetlar residents want to protect existing levels of service.
- However, there was concern over merging of services between Unst and Yell (health care, schools etc), and also the potential impact of loss of ferry jobs

- It was also stated that people like living on an island
- It would need to be demonstrated that investment in a fixed link represented value for money, and also that it represented the best use of this money. It was realised that attracting external funding support could be difficult, due to competition for funding from elsewhere.

Other options, based around ferry operations, were suggested as follows:

<p><i>Terminals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade or replace • General maintenance • Hamars Ness breakwater • Improved information including displaying time and destination of next ferry 	<p><i>Vessels</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger or new ferries with a larger capacity • Fetlar based ferry • Unst based ferry • Water taxi • Better disabled and Child Access
<p><i>Timetables</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve weekend timetable • Lengthen service day on Bluemull Sound / keep ferries running in the middle of the day • Unst / Yell runs every 20 minutes • Earlier and later ferries to enable attendance at events on the Mainland / Yell • Make timetables more user friendly, review connections with Yell Sound 	<p><i>Fares and Ticketing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If fares have to be reintroduced, North Isles residents should have passes, and non-residents should pay fares

9. Next Steps

This study is being progressed in line with Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The future stages that will be undertaken as part of this process are as follows:

- Agree / verify problems / opportunities / constraints / uncertainties, and develop study objectives;
- Confirm the list of options for appraisal;
- Undertake an initial, and then detailed appraisal of the different options.

The results of this appraisal and reporting of the study is anticipated in summer 2008. Regular updates will be provided by ZetTrans, and will be posted on the ZetTrans Bluemull Sound web page

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/transport/bluemull/default.asp>

You can continue to email any comments to bluemullsound@shetland.gov.uk, or contact ZetTrans directly on 01595 744868.