

Executive Summary

Introduction

Zetland Transport Partnership (ZetTrans) commissioned Faber Maunsell to undertake a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG¹) assessment to examine options for the future of the transport links across Bluemull Sound, connecting the North Isles of Unst, Fetlar and Yell. This Executive Summary summarises the STAG process undertaken in order to determine the study options to be taken forward to STAG 2 Appraisal.

Doing nothing is not considered feasible due to the impacts and costs of continuing to operate ageing ferry and terminal infrastructure beyond its lifespan. There would be increased expenditure to maintain the ferry terminals and linkspans and this would be difficult to continue to do whilst simultaneously operating a ferry service. The vessels would be subject to increased problems with scheduled and unscheduled maintenance, and increasing costs. From a passenger perspective, there would be more disruptions and delays. There would be increased journey and wait times as passengers over-compensate for the risk of disruption.

Overall, in the long term, adopting a Do Nothing position would lead to a significant reduction in the vitality and viability of Unst and Fetlar and a significant reduction in the feasibility and attractiveness of living on these islands, raising a family and undertaking any form of economic enterprise.

Consultation

An extensive consultation process was carried out in the North Isles to identify problems with the current Bluemull Sound transport link and future options for the transport links between Unst, Fetlar and Yell. A range of groups, including North Isles residents, local businesses and various Shetland-wide agencies were consulted, and there was an overall consensus among consultees for a cost effective solution for the long term sustainability of the transport link.

Problems and Opportunities

Analysis of the problems and opportunities has been undertaken and found the key problems to be related to:

- Planning for the replacement of existing vessels;
- Changing vessel legislation;
- The renewal and replacement of the Gutcher and Belmont ferry terminals;
- The Hamars Ness ferry terminal;
- The existing timetable;
- Other operational issues;
- Managing vehicle demand;
- Wider network issues;
- Accessibility;
- Affordability; and

¹ STAG is the official appraisal framework developed by the Scottish Government to aid transport planners and decision-makers in the development of transport policies, plans, programmes and projects in Scotland

- Sustaining the socio-economic prospects of the North Isles.

Statutory Context and Planning Objectives

National, regional and local policies have been reviewed as part of this study and a common theme is the emphasis on the importance of efforts to sustain island communities, and accept that local and central funding will be central to the sustaining of these, often isolated, populations.

Following assessment of the problems, opportunities and statutory context for the study a list of planning objectives were developed as follows:

- *Provide a transport link which is economically efficient;*
- *Provide a transport link which is operationally reliable on a day to day basis;*
- *Provide a transport link which is operationally sustainable in the long term;*
- *Provide a transport link which is integrated with the transport network on Unst, Fetlar and Yell, and Shetland Mainland;*
- *Provide a transport link which has a regular and easily understandable pattern of transport opportunities;*
- *Provide a transport link which is considered to be affordable to users;*
- *Provide a transport link which is considered to be affordable for funders and operators.*
- *Provide a transport link which provides sufficient capacity for passengers and vehicles;*
- *Provide a transport link which provides island – focussed accessibility opportunities for Unst, Fetlar and Yell; and*
- *Provide a transport link which promotes wider socio-economic opportunities for North Isles communities.*

Option Generation and Sifting

Based on the consultation results and the analysis of problems and opportunities, a long list of potential options was generated and sifted to produce a list of options for appraisal. The following list shows those that were appraised and the outcome of this appraisal:

- **Option 1 – Do Minimum – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals and *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira***

This option would involve providing two replacement ro-ro vessels which are compliant with legislation and able to cope with forecast vehicle and passenger demand over the appraisal period. This option could also include options for alternative off linkspan berthing at the new terminals.

The Do Minimum acts as a viable option in its own right, and also as a benchmark for comparison against other options.

- **Option 2 – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals, *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira* + development of Fetlar breakwater**

This option is similar to option 1, but also includes the development of a breakwater at Fetlar.

- **Option 3 – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals, *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira* + introduction of a passenger only service**

This option is similar to option 1, but also includes the introduction of a third, passenger only, ferry service.

- **Option 4 – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals, *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira* + introduction of an additional crew (1 x FT)**

This option is similar to option 1, but also includes the introduction of one additional full-time crew, providing a more frequent service.

- **Option 5 – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals, *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira* + introduction of an additional crew (1 x PT)**

This option is similar to option 1, but also includes the introduction of one additional part-time crew, providing a more frequent service.

- **Option 6 – Single Fast Vessel**

This option involves the introduction a single fast vessel, instead of the existing two vessels that operate on the route.

- **Option 7 – Unst-Yell Tunnel with 1 x Fetlar crew**

This option involves the development of a fixed link tunnel between Unst and Yell, in addition to the operation of dedicated Fetlar ferry service, operated by one crew running from Fetlar to either an upgraded terminal at Belmont or Gutcher. This option also assumes the development of a breakwater at Fetlar.

- **Option 8 – Unst-Yell Tunnel with 2 x Fetlar crew**

This option involves the development of a fixed link tunnel between Unst and Yell, in addition to the operation of a dedicated Fetlar ferry service, operated by two crews running from Fetlar to either an upgraded terminal at Belmont or Gutcher. This option also assumes the development of a breakwater at Fetlar.

- **Option 9 – Unst-Yell Tunnel with 3 x Fetlar crew**

This option involves the development of a fixed link tunnel between Unst and Yell, in addition to the operation of dedicated Fetlar ferry service, operated by three crews running from Fetlar to either an upgraded terminal at Belmont or Gutcher. This option also assumes the development of a breakwater at Fetlar.

STAG 1 Appraisal

The results of the appraisal lead to the recommendation that the following options are not taken forward.

- **Option 3 – Replacement of Gutcher and Belmont terminals, *MV Bigga* and *MV Geira* + introduction of a passenger only service**

It is considered that it is unlikely to be cost effective to introduce a third vessel onto the route, and it could be poorly utilised. It may be considered more efficient to use investment to increase the frequency of existing services rather than introduce a new service.

- **Option 6 – Single Fast Vessel**

A single fast vessel would have operational risks, and has not been taken forward to STAG 2 Appraisal.

- **Option 7 – Unst-Yell Tunnel with 1 x Fetlar crew**

This option has not been taken forward because a single Fetlar crew would result in a significant reduction in the levels of service for Fetlar.

The remaining options (Options 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9) are proposed to be retained for further detailed analysis which will be undertaken within a more detailed STAG 2 assessment.

Summary and Conclusions

The STAG analysis examined the benefits and disadvantages associated with each of the option packages. Through careful appraisal against the study objectives and against the five national transport appraisal criteria, Options 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9 are proposed to be retained for

further detailed analysis which will be undertaken within the more detailed STAG 2 assessment framework.