

3 ANALYSIS OF ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Information on the issues, problems and opportunities associated with the Bressay Link was obtained from a consultation exercise carried out with the Bressay community, businesses and services, and from businesses and services operating on Mainland Shetland, as well as from individuals and representatives elsewhere in Shetland. This is outlined in Section 2.2 and the full report at Annex C. Additional information was provided at the 'STAG Strategic Issues and Objectives' Workshop (see Annex D) and work undertaken for STAG 2.

3.1 CURRENT SERVICE

- The service is described as reliable and relatively unaffected by weather. The service is felt to be frequent and the journey short.
- It is centrally located, making it convenient.
- Freight can be easily delivered to Bressay without residents accessing the Mainland.
- It provides a social hub.

3.2 ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CURRENT LINK

Feedback from Tasks 1.1 to 1.7 (the consultation exercise and Strategic Workshop) indicated the following key findings:

3.2.1 Economy

- Lack of economic development opportunities on the Isle and the high costs of accessing employment, services, recreation and learning may be accelerating an ageing and possibly declining population. But to what extent is this a Shetland-wide issue?
- Are there constraints on the economic development of Lerwick at the current time, and/or would opening up Bressay for development have a negative impact on Lerwick? – is more land required, e.g. for harbour developments.
- In terms of potential economic growth, there is a need to consider the impact of fixed links on local marine engineering companies that receive regular work from SIC ferry services.
- Employment based on Bressay is heavily reliant on the ferry – it is biggest employer.

3.2.1.1 Business Constraints

- Loss of time planning and waiting for ferry, with direct and indirect impacts on businesses operating from Bressay and other Shetland businesses using service. Cost of transport of products, plant, vehicles etc on ferry adds to costs.
- Belief that Bressay is not currently conducive to business expansion or new development: e.g. restricts visitors choosing to stay on Bressay.
- Previous debate was detrimental to harbour developments.

3.2.1.2 Housing

- Lack of decision not nature of link means owners of land are not selling land and this is a barrier of development.
- Inadequate space for housing – where is demand for housing from?
- There is a need to take pressure off Lerwick and sustain outer communities.

3.2.1.3 Opportunities

- A fixed link could provide opportunities for economic development:
 - Existing Bressay businesses could expand;
 - New business could become established.
- There is the potential for harbour developments, although there are no immediate requirements to do so.
- Potential knock-on benefits to Mainland businesses of economic growth and house building.
- A fixed link could provide opportunities to sustain the community.
- A fixed link could provide opportunities for housing: the land is seen to be desirable.
- This would have to ensure LPA would be able to continue to 'manage, maintain, and regulate the Port and Harbour of Lerwick, including the undertaking to improve and deepen the harbour area' in interests of industries operating in harbour, and ensure their business potential can be achieved.
- Lerwick Port is a large employer in Shetland and has no public funding.
- Development of fixed dry dock is being considered (may come in future).
- Capacity of Services to cope with further development? What are the capabilities?

3.2.1.4 Tourism

- Bressay has rich heritage/archaeological interests that could support tourism. To what extent would tourism (locals and elsewhere) be improved or disadvantaged by a fixed link: a fixed link could provide greater circulation of people and more convenient access for those with a car, but the novelty of accessing an island could be lost.
- Accommodation take up is low (though enquiries high).

3.2.1.5 Current Fare Levels

- The overall cost to travellers, in general, is high, which has to be paid despite necessity of using the service to access most opportunities.
- Cost of short distance is same as other longer ferry crossings yet don't have all the same facilities.
- Additional business costs (Bressay and Mainland based) particularly freight/machinery, not readily passed on to customers.
- To what extent would reducing fares and amending the timetable alleviate current problems? Would it be sufficient to enable Bressay to be a sustainable community in the long-term?

3.2.2 Environment

- Importance of understanding: for example, how would carbon emissions change? How would sheep and cattle be affected? Importance of retaining remote biologically diverse areas of the island.
- Impacts of climate change on Lerwick/Bressay Harbour.
- Importance of understanding the health impacts of different options (e.g. currently opportunities for walking).

3.2.3 Safety

- A fixed link could lead to a loss of island identity and associated social benefits, such as knowing everyone in the community; feeling and being safe; and using the ferry as a social hub.

- Ferry acts as a buffer to crime and as a means to getting children home on last ferry!

3.2.4 Access

- Heavy reliance of Bressay on Lerwick and Mainland for employment, services, leisure and learning.
- Examples of restricted access to opportunities available on the Mainland.
- Length of daily service restricts early morning and late evening needs and limited Sunday service.
- Lack of accessibility for those residents without access to a vehicle and unable to walk to the ferry, e.g. to health services, some single households not wishing to be housed on Bressay
 - Twice weekly shoppers bus provided but no Dial a Ride
 - Lack of taxi service to and on Bressay
 - Taxi for school run
 - Post bus will take passengers.
- Lack of promotion of ferry service, for example to visitors.
- More people living on Bressay could lead to improved social interaction.
- Emergency – ferry is used, provides very effective service and often it is the ferry that has to wait for the ambulance.
- Would a fixed link improve or exacerbate social exclusion? At the moment people who access the ferry can easily get by foot to central Lerwick, this may not be the case with a fixed link, depending on location and frequency of public transport. Yet the ferry (particularly the cost) currently prohibits access to employment and opportunities. The Isle status of cars means private transport is cheaper now than it would be with a fixed link and people can drive without a full licence: some older people do not have a full licence and may not take a test.

3.2.4.1 Service Delivery

- Ageing population and difficulties in being able to provide adequate services: residents are not getting the service they need or equality of community care as service has to fit with ferry timetable. Problems with recruiting.
- Difficulty of accessing Bressay out-of-hours, unless able to call an emergency.
- People not always available locally to provide services.
- Time lost/inefficiencies/resources for providing services.
- Drop of 20% in school numbers over 10 yrs.
- Future of Bressay Schools – could increase in size ('third school for Lerwick') or close and combine with Lerwick.
- Growth more viable if have fixed link – due to growth in population in Bressay and access from Lerwick residents.
- Health services – emergency appointments not accessible.

3.2.5 Integration

- Lack of integration between the ferry service and bus services on the Mainland.
- Impossible to access early flights from Sumburgh using the ferry. Overnight stay required on Mainland.

3.2.6 Long-term Impacts

- Is the current service sustainable? In terms of Shetland's finances: how sustainable is the inter-island ferry service in the long-term compared to fixed links? What is best use of resources?
- Unresolved decision about a fixed link, resulting in other aspects of the community's development not being addressed and house sites seldom available.
- What would be the impact of doing nothing?

3.2.7 Strategic Direction

- There is a need for robust plans to be in place: for land use (including wildlife protection) and service delivery. At the moment there is a lack of knowledge about the plans of the Council and other services if there is to be a fixed link. For example: land use planning (industrial and/or housing), long-term planning of service delivery, the school estate, and roads, for example.
- There are housing shortages in central areas of Shetland: to what extent could a fixed link to Bressay assist with this? How could it be planned for? To what extent, if any, is it already being addressed through developments outwith Lerwick? What would the impact be on the current population drift to central areas and the Council's commitment to decentralisation?
- If a large amount of capital expenditure is going to be spent on the transport link then it is important all the potential benefits are pursued in terms of savings in delivery of services, and housing, industry and harbour developments.
- Other areas of Shetland may be better suited to have a fixed link/the first fixed link.
- There will be impacts on other areas of Shetland and other projects if funding is used for this project.