



REPORT

To: **Infrastructure Committee**

1 September 2009

From: **Head of Transport
Infrastructure Services Department**

WHALSAY LINK – CHOICE OF SITE FOR WHALSAY FERRY TERMINAL

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report seeks a decision of the Committee on which option for a terminal on Whalsay should be taken forward to detailed design and appropriate consents.

2. Links to Council Priorities

- 2.1. The Council's Corporate Plan states "*Shetland's communities are scattered and have a diverse set of needs. To best address those, we must have sustainable road, sea and air transport systems, both internal and external, that ensure everyone is able to access the places, services and opportunities they need.*"

- 2.2. The Shetland Transport Strategy aims and objectives include: -

Section 6.20 – ZetTrans is committed to the improvement of the Whalsay ferry service and is currently undertaking a STAG Part 2 Study examining future options for the service including consideration of new vessels and terminals.

- 2.3. The Council adopted the recommendations of the STAG Whalsay Link Study on 10 June 2008 (Infrastructure Committee min. ref. 44/08)

3. Background

- 3.1. Report No. TR-17-08-F to the Infrastructure Committee on 10 June 2008 (min. ref 44/08) gave details of the findings and recommendations of the detailed appraisal into options for providing a sustainable transport link between Whalsay and Mainland Shetland. The Committee recommended to the Council that the following be adopted as Council policy for the transport link to Whalsay: -

- Retention and maintenance of MV 'Linga'
- Introduction of one larger-sized ferry vessel (31 vehicle capacity)

- Upgrading of Laxo ferry terminal to accommodate larger-sized ferries
 - Construction of a new North Voe ferry terminal on Whalsay.
 - Upgrade of Vidlin to remain as diversionary port capable of accommodating the larger ferry and MV 'Linga'.
- 3.2. As the Transport Service has carried forward the policy there has been continued views expressed by a sector of the Whalsay Community that the development of a terminal in the North Voe will have unacceptable impacts and that they feel they have not been adequately involved in the process.
- 3.3. Acknowledging the importance of the views being expressed, Report TR-18-09-F on 16 June 2009 (min. ref. 58/09) informed Members of the intention to consult further on the preferred location for the Whalsay terminal and a modified option for a terminal in Symbister that had previously been considered.
- 3.4. The objective of the consultation was to give the opportunity for the Community to offer any new information and/ or views that could be used to further inform the appraisal carried out in the Whalsay STAG study and see if there has been any significant changes that could change the outcome of the appraisal.
- 3.5. For ease of reference I have attached the Executive Summary of the STAG study as Appendix 1 and a copy of the full STAG study is in the Members' Room for reference.
- 3.6. The remainder of this report details: -
- The options;
 - A desktop risk comparison of the two options under consideration from an operational, technical/ construction and planning/ consents perspectives;
 - Summarises the issues raised in the latest round of Community consultation;
 - Identifies the key points from the consultation and any new points that haven't already been raised;
 - Conclusions;
 - Courses of action available to the Committee; and
 - Recommendations.

4. The Options

- 4.1. Appendix 2 contains diagrams of: -
- the preferred option from the STAG study of 2008 (Option 4); and
 - the option that was consulted on in July of this year (A slightly modified version of Option 2 from the STAG study).

5. Operational, Technical/ Construction and Planning/ Consents Risk Comparisons

- 5.1. The report looks at comparative risks from 3 perspectives. These are: -
- Operational
 - Technical
 - Planning/ Consents
- 5.2. The process has not gone through an in-depth risk analysis of each of the options (the original STAG appraisal did this for each of the options) but has been limited to a high level comparison of the options to check whether anything significant has changed that would alter the conclusions of the original STAG study.
- 5.3. **Operational**
- 5.3.1. The Ferry Service has carried out a comparative risk assessment of each of the two options. A copy of the assessment is attached as Appendix 3.
- 5.3.2. During the course of this there has also been a continuing dialogue with the Head of Service - Ports and Harbours.
- 5.3.3. In summary, the assessment highlights that there are more operational risks attached to the construction and operation of an upgraded terminal in Symbister than a new terminal in North Voe.
- 5.3.4. None of the risks render a new terminal in Symbister unusable or entirely unsafe but in mitigating the risks to acceptable levels there will be inevitable constraints placed on ferry and harbour operations which could lead to a diminished service in certain conditions.
- 5.3.5. Furthermore, providing a new pier structure within Symbister Harbour may constrain development in the future for marina users and other users of the harbour.
- 5.3.6. However, in terms of harbour operations, the construction of a new terminal in North Voe will mean the creation of what is effectively a new harbour in addition to Symbister which is likely to lead to increased costs in terms of operation and maintenance of proportionally more infrastructure.
- 5.3.7. If we are adopting purely an operational risk perspective then North Voe is the preferred site in comparison with the Symbister option. Therefore the conclusions reached in the original STAG study remain valid.

5.4. Technical and Construction Risks

- 5.4.1. The fundamental difference between the two options is that North Voe is a green field site and Symbister is a relatively small and sometimes congested operational harbour.
- 5.4.2. In essence this means that it is always going to be more difficult and therefore more risky, to construct a new ferry terminal in Symbister compared to North Voe.
- 5.4.3. To carry out a detailed risk assessment of the two sites would require significant time and resources. Therefore, at this stage, to enable the Committee to understand the principal risks and to inform a decision on which option to develop, it is adequate to adopt a simple risk comparison in the form of a “pros and cons” assessment of each of the sites. This is contained in Appendix 4.
- 5.4.4. If we are adopting purely a technical and construction risk perspective then North Voe is the preferred site in comparison to the Symbister option. Therefore the conclusions reached in the original STAG study remain valid.

5.5. Planning/ Consents

- 5.5.1. Both North Voe and Symbister are included in the Symbister Harbour area. Therefore, which ever option is chosen, it will be subject to the same Planning and Consents processes.
- 5.5.2. It is my assessment, from the most recent consultation and the consultation that took place during the STAG study, that the North Voe option is more likely to receive objections during the consents process than the Symbister option.
- 5.5.3. Furthermore, based on my experience on other projects, it is my assessment that any objections to the North Voe option are likely to be more significant in terms of the consents required, particularly under environmental legislation.
- 5.5.4. However, the case for North Voe is robust and has been reached in a very thorough manner and it is probable that the project would be successful in getting the necessary consents.
- 5.5.5. Having said that, it should be recognised that if objections cannot be resolved and the project becomes subject to any sort of planning inquiry, then it could add up to a year to the consents process to have matters determined in an appropriate manner.
- 5.5.6. These points were acknowledged in the appraisal process in the original STAG study. Therefore the conclusions reached in the original STAG study remain valid.

5.5.7. Members should note that, although the North Voe option is more likely to receive objections during a consents process, it cannot be assumed that the Symbister option would not receive any objections when going through the same process.

6. Summary of Issues from Community Consultation

- 6.1. Transport Service staff carried out a focussed consultation process on Option 4 during July 2009 and early August 2009.
- 6.2. Appendix 5 contains the detailed comments and points raised at a consultation meeting held on 7th July 2009 and in subsequent emails and telephone calls. Please note that all names have been removed so that comments are not attributed to anyone. I have tabulated the comments into the following categories: -

| (i) Comments Supporting North Voe | (ii) Comments Supporting Symbister | (iii) General Comments |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|

- 6.3. Views within the Community in the third category relate predominantly to how Option 2 could be reconfigured to make it work more effectively in relation to other users of the harbour.
- 6.4. The main principles raised in the consultation in **support** of placing the new ferry terminal within **Symbister** are: -
- It retains activity within the traditional maritime hub of the island.
 - It benefits the continued activity of existing or new facilities in and around Symbister, e.g. the shop and the boating club.
 - It would make the proposed COPE (café, information centre, visitor centre) project, if it goes ahead, more viable.
 - It leaves the North Voe unspoilt and retains the amenity (e.g. scenic area, undisturbed use for small boats and swimming) it provides to the community.
 - Residents around North Voe do not suffer possible detrimental impacts either during construction or ongoing operations.
- 6.5. The main principles raised in the consultation **against** placing the new ferry terminal within **Symbister** are: -
- It will create a more congested harbour due to larger ferries operating and more structures needed to accommodate ferries.
 - It will destroy the “Peerie Dock” with loss of heritage, displacement of some small vessels (and no room in the marina to accommodate them).
 - It will constrain the development of the ferry service because the option can only accommodate one larger vessel so if more capacity is needed in the future it will not be able to be provided.
 - It doesn’t return as much space to other users as moving to North Voe.

- 6.6. The main principles raised in the consultation in **support** of placing the new ferry terminal within **North Voe** are: -
- It releases space in Symbister for expansion for other users (white fish fleet, marina users, etc.).
 - It allows growth/ expansion of the ferry service when needed in the future.
 - It does not prevent the “Peerie Dock” from being restored in the future.
- 6.7. The main principles raised in the consultation **against** placing the new ferry terminal within **North Voe** are: -
- It creates two harbours which will cost more to maintain and run.
 - It takes activity and people away from Symbister and reduces its value as a hub in the island.
 - There will be greater environmental and social impacts, particularly during construction.
 - The facility will be redundant if Whalsay gets a fixed link.
 - Concerns about road safety due to traffic to/ from ferry and children walking to school.

7. The Key Points and New Issues from Consultation

- 7.1. The majority of the issues raised in the latest round of consultation were raised and considered in the appraisal during the STAG study. However, it can be said that some points were made by more people and made more strongly than previously and they relate predominantly to development of the North Voe. They are: -
- Impact on the environment
 - Loss of amenity
 - Road safety
 - The splitting of the hub of activity that Symbister currently is
 - Visual and noise impacts on neighbours of the proposal.
- 7.2. The most significant point in the current consultation that is new compared to the STAG consultation is that the proposed COPE development of a café/ visitor centre/ information point would benefit significantly from the retention of the ferry service in Symbister.
- 7.2.1. It is a fundamental point in the feasibility study that the proposed facility will benefit from the passing trade related to the ferry terminal in Symbister. Therefore it is a plausible argument that the COPE project would be less attractive if the terminal and the associated ferry traffic and visitors were not adjacent to the COPE development.

8. Conclusions

8.1. In order to draw meaningful conclusions it is helpful to remind ourselves of the objectives that options were appraised against in the original STAG appraisal. These were: -

- To deliver a solution that is affordable (for funding bodies);
- To deliver a solution that is operationally sustainable;
- To at least maintain the current level of accessibility to the island;
- To reduce the conflict between ferry and other harbour users;
- To better match supply and demand; and
- To ensure the socio-economic characteristics of the island are not constrained.

8.2. The original STAG study concluded that Option 4 was the best fit in terms of meeting these objectives.

8.3. In the remainder of this section the report shall reflect on each of the perspectives that have been reviewed and conclude whether anything has changed so significantly that this conclusion should be changed.

8.4. **Operational, Technical/ Construction, Planning Consents Perspectives**

8.4.1. Having reviewed the Operational, Technical/ Construction and Planning/ Consents aspects of the modified Option 2 compared to Option 4 it can be concluded from Section 5 of this report that the conclusions of the original STAG study remain unaltered (bearing in mind that the original STAG appraisal acknowledged that the consents process may not be entirely straight forward for either of the options).

8.5. **Community Perspective**

8.5.1. It can be seen from Appendix 5 that there are views in favour of and against each of the options which shows there is not an overall consensus within Whalsay with regard to which option should be implemented. This was recognised in the conclusions of the original STAG study.

8.5.2. Therefore, whatever the outcome, there is the potential that a sector of the community may not be satisfied with the Council's decision. The original STAG study reached the same conclusion.

8.5.3. From the views that have been expressed, when compared to the views expressed in the STAG consultation, there is little that was not expressed and therefore included in the appraisal carried out during the STAG process.

8.5.4. The most significant points in the current consultation that are "new" compared to the STAG consultation are: -

- There have been more, and perhaps stronger, views expressed regarding the negative impacts on North Voe in terms of spoiling the environment, loss of amenity, road safety and visual/ noise impacts on neighbours of the proposal.
- The COPE development of a café/ visitor centre/ information point would benefit significantly from the retention of the ferry service in Symbister. It is a plausible argument that the COPE project would be less attractive if the terminal and the associated traffic and visitors were taken away from Symbister.
- Symbister is seen as the hub of activity on the island and many feel that it would diminish the hub status by moving ferry operations to North Voe.

8.5.5. It would appear, when comparing the views expressed now with those given during the STAG process, that a sector of the Community is willing to accept a greater level of compromise (e.g. congestion in the harbour, constraints on future development of the ferry service and constraints on operations in poor weather conditions) than was the case during the appraisal of options in the STAG study. However, it cannot be said that this reflects the view of the entire Community.

8.5.6. Looking at the Community perspective alone then, it may be reasonable to conclude that Option 2 (the provision of a new Ferry Terminal within the existing Symbister Harbour) may gain greater support from within the Community than was thought during the original STAG study.

8.6. **Summary of Conclusions**

8.6.1. Looking at matters from a purely operational and technical perspective then a review of Option 2 (a new terminal in Symbister) and the preferred option from the original STAG study, Option 4 (a new terminal in North Voe), confirms the conclusions of the original STAG study remain unaltered, i.e. Option 4 (a new terminal in North Voe) best fits with the objectives set.

8.6.2. The issues raised in the latest consultation exercise are similar to many of the matters raised during the original STAG study, albeit they are perhaps made more strongly by more people, and two significant new points relating to the COPE project and concerns about splitting the hub of activity in the island.

8.7. It is my view that these matters are important and will add strength to any objections to the development of a terminal in North Voe. However, it is my view that ultimately, although the process may be more complex and time consuming, the project would be successful in obtaining the required consents.

9. Courses of Action Available to the Committee

9.1. The Committee has two courses of action available to it.

9.2. Course of Action 1

9.2.1. The Committee maintains its position in terms of its decision of 10 June 2008 (min. ref. 44/08) detailed in section 3.1 of this report that the terminal should be built in North Voe, on the basis that a review of the matters raised in recent consultation and a review of operational, technical and planning perspectives confirm that the conclusions reached in the original STAG study remain valid.

9.2.2. In adopting this position the Committee would respectfully recognise that a proportion of the Whalsay Community may be opposed to the development of a new terminal in North Voe for reasons described in sections 6 and 7 of this report.

9.3. Course of Action 2

9.3.1. If the Committee feels that the views that have come out of the most recent consultation are of such significance that the location of the terminal on Whalsay should be within Symbister Harbour rather than North Voe, then it could recommend to the Council that it changes its policy for the transport link to Whalsay to: -

- Retention and maintenance of MV 'Linga'
- Introduction of one larger-sized ferry vessel (31 vehicle capacity)
- Upgrading of Laxo ferry terminal to accommodate larger-sized ferries
- Construction of a new ferry terminal within Symbister Harbour
- Upgrade of Vidlin to remain as diversionary port capable of accommodating the larger ferry and MV 'Linga'.

9.3.2. When considering this course of action the Committee should bear in mind the risks discussed in section 5 and Appendices 2 and 3 of this report.

9.3.3. The Committee should also bear in mind that this course of action would not deliver as effectively as the North Voe option against the original STAG objectives detailed in section 8.1 of this report.

10. Financial Implications

10.1. As each of the options has been further developed designs refined to better meet operational needs it has been possible to bring cost

estimates down. The following table compares current cost estimates with those in the original STAG appraisal.

| Option | 2009 Estimate | 2008 Estimate |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| North Voe Terminal | £8,972,000 | £10,300,000 |
| Symbister Terminal | £9,232,000 | £12,933,000 |

10.2. It can be seen that the cost estimate for the Symbister option has come down more significantly but when considering this Members should bear in mind that this option fails to perform as well against the appraisal objectives detailed in section 8.1 therefore would not meet the stated future needs of the island.

10.3. However, it can be seen that officers continue to work to bring project costs down.

10.4. Costs associated with the ongoing development of the Whalsay project are to be met from approved budgets (GCY 7213 - £500,000).

11. Policy and Delegated Authority

11.1. The Council decided to pursue the recommendations of the Whalsay STAG 2 Study (Infrastructure Committee min. ref. 44/08, SIC Minute Ref 87/08). Delivery of this project is delegated to the Infrastructure Committee as part of its remit in Section 12 of the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

12. Recommendations

I recommend that: -

12.1. The Infrastructure Committee adopt the course of action described in section 9.2 of this report (that the Whalsay terminal be built in north Voe) on the basis that a review of the STAG conclusions reported to the Committee on 10 June 2008 remain valid and therefore the Committee decision (min. ref. 44/08) need not be altered.

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