

Dunoon Community Council – Transport Connectivity update.

Since August 2023 we have been pushing for a meeting involving Transport Scotland to discuss the Gourock / Dunoon Ferry Service. On 23rd July, Jenny Minto chaired a Video Conference involving most of the following (apologies but I don't have a list of the actual attendees) to discuss connection times;

Michael Breslin (South Cowal CC)

David Clough (Dunoon CC)

transport.planning@calmac.co.u

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Finlay J MacRae finlay.macrae@calmac.co.uk ,

Kirstie Reid kirstie.reid1@btinternet.com (Strachur CC) ,

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lochgoilcommunity@gmail.com,

Donna Lockhart donna.lockhart@calmac.co.uk

Note of the issues raised:

- 26 minute waiting time between ferry and train connection is too long
- 10 minutes ample connection time for everyone
- Passengers will use the bus rather than the train due to the 26 minute connection time
- Make more use of train Platform 1 to reduce connection time
- Affects passengers travelling for work, hospital appointments, college, etc
- Need to leave Glasgow before 3.30pm to get the last bus connection to Strachur
- No bus from Glendaruel – unable to connect with anything
- Need for joined up/integrated travel service
- CalMac website – requirement to buy ticket online – this does not suit everyone – is it just for a short period of time?
- Ticket collector can't get around everyone on ferry – are passengers being counted if they've not paid?
- Ticketing system not designed for use onboard – no signal for machine half way across the water
- Online ticket system not that easy to use
- Difficulties registering for online ticket system
- Previous assurances had been given by CalMac that tickets could still be purchased onboard
- Can CalMac confirm if they have to report to the coastguard the amount of passengers on board?
- Current lack of reliability – app notification going off all the time with cancellations

- Experience last week – Due to train cancellations, commuters to Glasgow need to leave Dunoon on the 6.35 ferry arriving in Glasgow early at 10 past 8
- The 17.19 train has been cancelled, commuters getting the 17.36 arrive in Gourock at 18.16 – due to cancelled ferry need to wait until 19.05 for the next ferry
 - Example of the connection working well - the 17:19 train from Glasgow arrives in Gourock at 18:00, ferry departs Gourock at 18:10 arriving in Dunoon at 18.35
 - Putting people off using public transport – will use car instead
 - Michael Breslin (South Cowal Community Council) – no response received from CalMac to his emails of 14th May and 21st June

Actions:

1. Current timetable not working - CalMac to look at the timetable and produce draft
2. Current community engagement not working - CalMac to arrange an in person meeting in Dunoon with local Community Councils and Councillors to discuss the draft timetable and will notify everyone next week. Ginny will provide CalMac with local Community Councils and Councillors email addresses
3. Current ticketing system not working – CalMac running a trail just now - will issue an update on findings
4. Scotrail to work with CalMac regarding the connection times
5. Jenni to write to West Coast Motors with concerns regarding timetables and connections

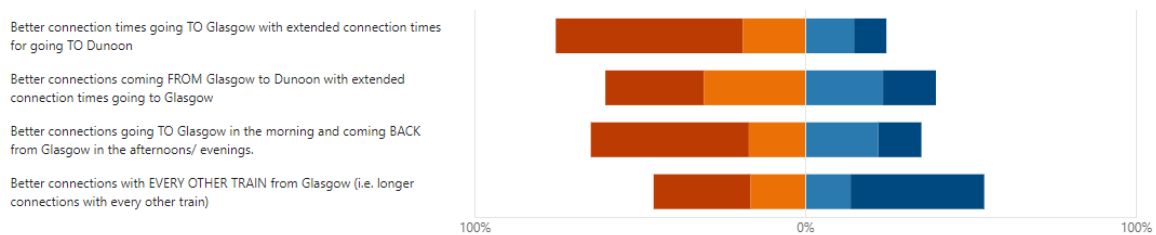
Updates.

Action points 1 and 2. Follow up meeting held with CalMac in Dunoon on 4th September where 7 options for improving connectivity were presented. As a result, Dunoon CC agreed to carry out a survey on behalf of all CC’s to establish Community Preferences. The interim results are shown in Appendix A (survey closes on 11th October). Priorities were addressed in question 5.

5. What are your priorities when using the ferry service? Please place the following statements into your priorities

[More Details](#)

■ Priority 1 ■ Priority 2 ■ Priority 3 ■ Priority 4



Action point 3 – TBA

Action point 4 - TBA

Action point 5.

Jenni has written to Argyll and Bute Council (notes incorrectly stated West Coast Motors). See their response in Appendix B.

Daniel Hampsey has also advised “..... West Coast Motors confirmed today that they would align their service with any changes made to the timetable”

I’ve started analysis of Option 3 and have to date just done inbound and outbound services for Cowal., Monday to Friday The current version (1.1) is embedded here – if you have trouble opening

it I can provide it directly. Look at the yellow tabbed worksheet. Note this includes the full Scotrail timetable that came into effect today.



Gourock-Dunoon
PPT Options - Comm

I've asked Daniel to set into motion a meeting with Martin Arnold / WCM in order to effect timetabling changes where possible to improve connectivity.

I see this as a quick win and will be met positively by the Community. CalMac have demonstrated considerable willingness to participate, and failure to deliver will just be another Ferry blow – we must all work towards a rapid resolution.

Action required of CTF – to support the efforts to increase connectivity to bring about the changes required in a prompt manner.

Direct Bus Service from Dunoon to Glasgow.

Some of you may have seen a Facebook post by Alan Livingstone, the proprietor of Highland Stores in Dunoon (reproduced as Appendix C).

After direct contact with the likes of Scania, Mercedes Benz, Volvo and Alexander Dennis Alan and I have met with one of the leading Coach Hire suppliers in the UK, Mistral. We are now in the process of arranging a meeting with West Coast Motors (Jeff McCormick) to discuss possible options, and Gordon Ross has also spoken directly with Alan. The preference is for a luxury coach service – onboard WC, refreshments, wi-fi, USB ports, with limited stops between Gourock and Glasgow. Suggested stops being considered include Greenock Station, Inverclyde Hospital, Greenock and Paisley Colleges, Glasgow Airport, Queen Elizabeth University Hospital.

One of the key unknowns is the current cost to Transport Scotland of providing the Dunoon Gourock passenger only service. During the recent meeting to discuss the Community Needs Assessment for the Gourock / Dunoon Ferry service the issue of this cost was raised. The Transport Scotland chair refereed the matter to the CalMac attendee who refused to supply the information. It was suggested I would need to raise an FoI request which I found preposterous. I therefore requested Jenni Minto to ask the Transport Secretary the same question, and that request was made last week (w/e/ 4th October).

Gourock Dunoon Kilcreggan Infrastructure and Vessels Programme - Reference Group Meeting - Community Needs Assessment - 17 September 2024

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/tl3asqe1/cowal-and-rosneath-community-needs-assessment.pdf>

Ross Moreland and I were invited to attend the above meeting, Ross in his capacity as the Argyll and Bute Harbour Boar chair, and myself as the DCC Transport lead. My contemporaneous notes of the meeting are contained in Appendix D.

Invitees.

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Andrew.Boyd@transport.gov.scot
Michael.Kean@transport.gov.scot
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nickandjaned@btinternet.com (Kilcreggan CC?)
daveclough99@gmail.com
ranald.robertson@hitrans.org.uk

Frankly I was furious that they were concentrating on the report, and not seeking to resolve / address some of the issues which account for low passenger numbers, namely lack of reliability and interconnecting services, and I left them in no doubt of my feelings on this matter. It does indeed smell like a managed decline of services rather than a what can we do to correct it. I did make reference to the presentation by Gordon Ross at the August 2023 Cowal Transport Forum, and queried how much the current CalMac service costs. When I asked Richard Hadfield what it was he passed the question to Gordon McKillop who refused to answer, and told me to put in an FOI request. I pointed out that if we didn't know the cost of the current service how could value for money of whatever the needs assessment comes up with be established.

The costs of the service are redacted in the Stantec report (pages 9 and 10).

Other observations

- The survey currently in process does not address why passenger numbers are falling.
- The report is based on public transport timetables as at December 2022, which are now out of date.
- Rail interchange timings are totally inaccurate as a result, as are connections through to Inverclyde . To highlight this issue, some sample Key Points from the report are contained in Appendix E.
- No reference is made to the Argyll Flyer being out of commission for over 6 months in 2021 <https://www.greenocktelegraph.co.uk/news/19485279.gourock-dunoon-ferry-argyll-flyer-action-september/?ref=rss>
- The drop in session at Queens Hall – no identification of some of the Transport Scotland / Scantec officials.
- There is some doubt as to how the latest CalMac ferry passenger numbers are being reported.

How on earth can the findings of this report be taken with any degree of credibility given how inaccurate and out of date the figures being used are?

Suggested CTF actions.

1. Write to Transport Scotland to highlight concerns over inaccuracy of data and therefore flawed conclusions, and that no effort has been made to correct the key issue affecting usage of the foot ferry service, namely poor reliability.
2. Call a public meeting at Queens Hall (as suggested by several attendees at the Drop in sessions at Queens Hall) to which Fiona Hyslop (Transport Secretary) is invited to hear the

views of the Community (an idea supported by Richard Hadfield of Transport Scotland when I discussed it with him last week).

3. Support the efforts to investigate further the option of a direct bus service from Dunoon to Glasgow.
4. Obtain clarity on CalMac passenger numbers.
5. Any other suggested actions?

David Clough
Dunoon Community Council
Transport Lead
7th October 2024

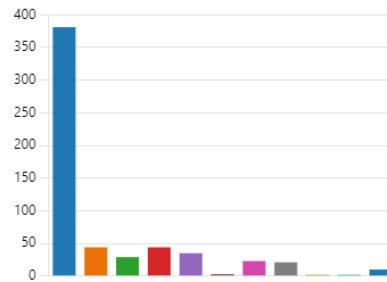
Appendix A

Results of Cowal wide CC engagement on connectivity as at lunchtime on 3rd October.

1. Which Community Council represents you?

[More Details](#)

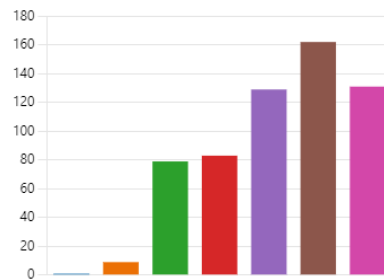
● Dunoon Community Council	381
● South Cowal Community Council	44
● Hunters Quay Community Coun...	29
● Sandbank Community Council (...)	44
● Kilmun Community Council	35
● Ardentenny Community Council	3
● Strachur & District Community ...	23
● Kilfinan Community Council (W...	21
● Colintrive & Glendarual Commu...	2
● Gourock Community Council	2
● Other	10



2. What age group do you belong to?

[More Details](#)

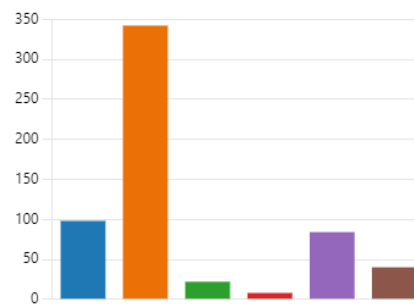
● Under 18	1
● 18-24	9
● 25-34	79
● 35-44	83
● 45-54	129
● 55 - 64	162
● 65 and older	131



3. How best would you describe your use of the Calmac foot ferry?

[More Details](#)

● Commuter	98
● Leisure	342
● Business	22
● Student going to college/univer...	8
● Medical appointments	84
● Other	40



4. Would you be happy to leave the current timetable as it is.

[More Details](#)

● Yes	158
● No	353
● Not sure	83



5. What are your priorities when using the ferry service? Please place the following statements into your priorities

[More Details](#)

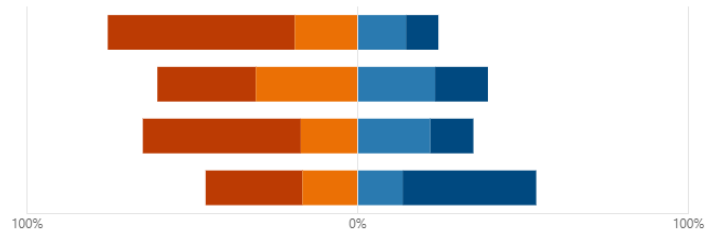
■ Priority 1 ■ Priority 2 ■ Priority 3 ■ Priority 4

Better connection times going TO Glasgow with extended connection times for going TO Dunoon

Better connections coming FROM Glasgow to Dunoon with extended connection times going to Glasgow

Better connections going TO Glasgow in the morning and coming BACK from Glasgow in the afternoons/ evenings.

Better connections with EVERY OTHER TRAIN from Glasgow (i.e. longer connections with every other train)



6. Do you have any issues with mobility?

[More Details](#)

● Yes 98
 ● No 475
 ● Prefer not to say 21



7. What do you think is an acceptable time between the ferry arriving/departing and the trains arriving/departing?

[More Details](#)

● 10 - 15 minutes 445
 ● 15 - 20 minutes 132
 ● 20 - 25 minutes 17



Survey closes on 11th October and result will be circulated.

Appendix B.

Response from Argyll and Bute Council to Jenni Minto.

We are sharing the following response Jenni received from West Coast Motors:

“Thank you for your email highlighting the concerns of the Community Councils and Councillors regarding the local bus services and their integration with ferry timetables. We understand the importance of effective public transport links for the community and have carefully reviewed the points raised.

We acknowledge the issues concerning the connection between the Glasgow services and the last bus to Strachur. Recent discussions have taken place with CalMac and local Community Councils regarding upcoming changes to the Dunoon - Gourock ferry service, necessitated as a result of a change in frequency to the train service to Gourock station, which limits train and ferry connections. As part of this ongoing dialogue, we will explore potential amendments to better align the bus schedule with ferry arrivals and departures to enhance connectivity for Strachur residents.

Contrary to the concerns raised, Glendaruel does have existing public transport connections. We refer to the West Coast Motors timetable, which provides details on the available services in the area. We would appreciate further clarification from the MSP regarding any specific connection issues that may need to be addressed, as we are committed to ensuring the community has accurate information and reliable service options.

We recognise the concern surrounding the limited turnaround time in Dunoon, which affects children's ability to use their free bus passes on Saturdays. In conjunction with our efforts to align bus services with the proposed changes to the Dunoon – Gourock ferry timetable, we are actively investigating the feasibility of providing an enhanced Saturday service. If indeed this is operationally possible, we will share the draft timetable with the Community Council before implementation.

Due to budgetary limitations, we are unable to provide bus services that connect with every ferry arrival or departure. However, we continue to explore cost-effective solutions and adjustments that may enhance the overall transport offering while remaining within the available financial resources.

As noted in the first and third points, we are evaluating potential changes to the current schedules. These changes aim to improve the coordination between buses and ferry services, including the possibility of aligning the 6pm ferry service with a Toward-bound bus.

The recovery time scheduled for buses at Toward lighthouse is necessary to ensure the service departs on time and maintains reliability throughout its route. This operational buffer is critical for managing delays and ensuring adherence to the timetable, especially on routes with multiple connection points. While we appreciate the desire to extend the service to Castle Toward, this buffer time is crucial for maintaining the overall service reliability.

We hope this response addresses the concerns raised, and we look forward to continuing discussions with the community and stakeholders to explore ways we can enhance transport services within the available resources.”

Appendix C

Facebook Post on Dunoon Argyll Scotland.

We need to talk about the ferries!

Alan Livingstone

Highland Stores

There is a meeting next Wednesday the 2nd of October in the Queens Hall

It's actually two drop-in sessions (2.30 – 4pm and 5 – 6.30pm) for people to give their views on the ferry service based on a report commissioned by the Scottish Government

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/.../cowal-and-rosneath.../>

I remember being in Pier Pressure way back in 1999. We were trying then, twenty-five years ago, to get a fit for purpose passenger ferry service to Dunoon.

The simple reality is that the failure of the Scottish Government to deliver is obvious to everyone. I'm not saying these things are easy but there has been a lot of over promising and under delivering over many years.

However, I'm not interested in the politics of this, as I'm fairly apolitical.

What I am interested in is thinking a little out of the box and accepting that we are not going to get a passenger ferry service that is fit for purpose.

In my view the 100 page consultants' report boils down to a few critical points quoted below:

Key Point: The Dunoon – Gourock route suffers from very poor reliability, with over 15% of sailings between December 2021 and November 2022 cancelled, and a fifth of all winter sailings cancelled.

The main reason for this is adverse weather, which may reflect both the suitability of the vessels operating the route and berthing arrangements, particularly at Dunoon. Poor reliability is almost certainly one of the core contributors to the reduction in passenger numbers in recent years.

Note the "and a fifth of all winter sailings cancelled" means 20% of ALL winter sailings. This is what really makes the service totally unfit for purpose.

74% of all cancellations on the route between 2011 and 2020 were a result of 'adverse weather'.

Despite being a relatively short crossing, the suitability of the vessels for the route combined with sub-optimal berthing arrangements (particularly at Dunoon) continue to cause poor performance overall.

For context, it should be noted that Western Ferries' services are rarely cancelled, only tending to go off in the most inclement weather. Moreover, with four vessels in their fleet, Western Ferries' service has significant in-built resilience to cover vessel maintenance and mechanical issues.

The solution is, of course, to have boats that are large enough to handle the sea conditions on the Clyde other than in the very worst of weather. But the Government aren't prepared to spend the money to do this, and the idea of bigger boats isn't even mentioned in this report!

What is talked about is the savings to the government.

Key Point: Whilst reducing the scale of the CFL (CalMac Ferries Ltd) Dunoon – Gourock operation would generate disbenefits for current users, the flip side is that it could offer substantial cost savings. Significant savings can though only be realised by reducing the service to a single vessel operation (the major saving) and / or reducing the length of operating day for one or both vessels, thereby reducing the crew complement.

So, it is quite probable that the direction of travel of the Government is to further reduce the passenger ferry service from Dunoon and most likely, through a lack of use because it's even more unfit for purpose, in time, to remove the passenger ferry service altogether.

An alternative

I have given considerable thought to this and what I believe may be in the best interests of Cowal would be to replace the effectively useless passenger ferry service (remember we're not getting fit for purpose boats) with a small luxury coach bus fleet.

These new luxury coaches could provide a comfortable, affordable and crucially a highly reliable service running from possibly a new purpose-built coach terminal built on part of the existing ferry parking area (long and narrow so as still to provide parking for commuters).

The coaches would use the 99% reliable Western Ferries to ply between Dunoon and Glasgow and could be timetabled to provide some mix of the following, the bus operating company would advise on how best to operate/timetable the various services.

An express commuter coach to Glasgow with very limited stops so it gets there fast for people working across the water.

One that goes to the various hospitals, Inverclyde, Glasgow and Paisley and could also stop at Braehead and the centre of Glasgow.

One that could go via Glasgow Airport (and some other stops) which could mean you don't need to take your car and pay for parking whilst on holiday. The coach could drop you off / pick you up nearly at the door.

There is also another really big opportunity/ benefit to having a luxury coach fleet.

The possibility to offer a cheap day-tripper return journey to Dunoon from Glasgow for say only £5.

This could potentially bring lots more footfall to Dunoon and Cowal which is desperately needed.

That price could also allow accommodation providers to maybe offer "free travel" from Glasgow as part of an accommodation package.

I say luxury coaches (likely with a loo onboard) because why shouldn't we and our potential visitors have a comfortable journey to and from Glasgow!

Currently it is thought to be costing the Scottish Government around £3 million a YEAR (the figure has been redacted from the report so we can't actually confirm this! However, it's thought to be in that region).

I am confident that we could run the luxury coach service within that amount and probably a good bit less. We could use any savings under the £3 million we get from the Government to improve facilities of all kinds for visitors and locals alike (e.g. walking and cycling trails, better buses to the outlying villages).

Like many small towns, Dunoon is struggling economically, we currently have 23, yes 23 empty commercial properties in Argyll Street alone!

If the government is really serious about helping rural communities, then they should welcome this idea with open arms.

I have posted this to try to gather support for the idea in principle and also encourage discussion. Of course, it is not fully fledged and I'm sure many of you will have thoughts as to how we could maximise this opportunity to turn a potential disaster for Cowal into hopefully more of a triumph.

If there is considerable support for the idea, we could go along to the drop-in sessions next Wednesday (2nd October) saying that this is what we want the Government to do.

Many thanks for reading

Alan

Appendix D

DRC notes on Gourock Dunoon Kilcreggan Infrastructure and Vessels Programme - Reference Group Meeting - Community Needs Assessment - 17 September 2024

Invited;

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ranald.robertson@hitrans.org.uk
richard.hadfield@transport.gov.scot
Moreland, Ross
Reid, Scott
stuart.jamieson@inverclyde.gov.uk
michael.kean@transport.gov.scot (Optional)

As at today no meeting minutes have been produced. I've requested an update.

The meeting was chaired by Richard Hadfield assisted by Paul Linhart-Macaskill.

I was 5 minutes late joining the meeting due to the usual Teams difficulties. When I joined the discussion about the Kilcreggan / Gourock service was underway.

The purpose was to discuss the recent Stantec report on the needs assessment of the Ferry service.

Key findings of the report;

1. High commuter route
2. Integrated network including Hospital (sorry, but I had to inwardly laugh at that one)
3. Poor reliability
4. Over provision of service in terms of sailings per day, and length of the day in winter.
5. Winter only a commuter route (i.e./ very little leisure).

After a summary of the Dunoon / Gourock route, I had to specifically request that comments are asked for, as they appeared to just accept what the report had said.

Frankly I was furious that they were concentrating on the report, and not seeking to resolve / address some of the issues which account for low passenger numbers, namely lack of reliability and interconnecting services, and I left them in no doubt of my feelings on this matter.

It does indeed smell like a managed decline of services rather than a what can we do to correct it.

I did make reference to the presentation by Gordon Ross at the August 2023 Cowal Transport Forum, and queried how much the current CalMac service costs. When I asked Richard Hadfield what it was he passed the question to Gordon McKillop who refused to answer, and told me to put in an FOI request. I pointed out that if we didn't know the cost of the current service how could value for money of whatever the needs assessment comes up with be established.

Drop in sessions are being organised;

- Cove Burgh Hall, Tuesday 1 October, 15.00-17.30
- **Queen's Hall, Dunoon, Wednesday 2 October, 14.30-16.00 and 17.00-18.30**
- Gamble Halls, Gourock, Thursday 3 October, 14.30-16.00 and 17.00-18.30

Absolutely vital that as many people as possible attend these drop in sessions and understand what is being considered. We have to get large numbers of people to this meeting to voice their opinions otherwise it could become a 'done deal'. No use voicing your opinion on Social Media - its really important you turn up and make your opinions known face to face with Transport Scotland.

Appendix E

Sample key points from the Gourock Dunoon Kilcreggan Infrastructure and Vessels Programme - Reference Group Meeting - Community Needs Assessment

Key Point: The Dunoon - Gourock ferry service is well integrated with ScotRail services to / from Gourock, with almost all ferry services connecting with a train within 25 minutes in both directions. In the 'to Glasgow Central' direction, the fastest journey time is 72 minutes, where the ferry connects with a limited stop train service within nine minutes of arriving. All Sunday ferries integrate well with the rail services in both directions.

Key Point: There are a range of other connecting bus services at both McInroy's Point and Gourock Station, providing important connections to both Inverclyde Hospital and Greenock. Gourock Station is again better connected than McInroy's Point.

Key Point: The TRACC-based analysis confirms the foregoing commentary on public transport integration. Whilst the Western Ferries crossing is shorter, end-to-end current public transport journey times from Dunoon to Glasgow are longer due to the requirement for multiple public transport interchanges for Dunoon-based foot passengers. **DRC note – all based on 2022 timetables!**

Page 19 of the report

Table 3.2: Cowal ferry routes - passenger carryings 2012-2022 ('000) (Source: Scottish Transport Statistics Tables 9.15 and 9.16)

Year	Gourock – Dunoon	McInroy's Point – Hunters Quay	Total
2012	341	1,389	1,730
2013	299	1,343	1,642
2014	310	1,347	1,657
2015	305	1,331	1,636
2016	301	1,341	1,642
2017	287	1,354	1,641
2018	287	1,373	1,660
2019	299	1,320	1,619
2020	104	850	954
2021	132	1,063	1,195
2022	196	1,226	1,422

Note passenger numbers are not an accurate comparison, as these include car drivers and car passengers, not foot passengers. There is some doubt as to how the latest CalMac ferry passenger numbers are being reported (2023 onwards).

Page 27 of the report. The Dunoon – Gourock route is subject to significant levels of disruption, a long-running area of dissatisfaction amongst users. On average, 15% of all sailings on the route were cancelled in the year December 2021 - November 2022. √ Cancellations are most frequent in the winter months (December 2021 – March 2022 and October – November 2022), accounting for 22% of all services, although this was inflated by the October / November harbour works at Gourock. However, the summer (April 2022 – September 2022) cancellation rate of 9% is not insignificant on a commuter route of this length, and one which operates in comparatively sheltered waters (although note that this figure is inflated to some degree by a breakdown of MV Ali Cat in April 2022). √ Previous work undertaken for the Dunoon and Kilcreggan Ferry Infrastructure OBC found that 74% of all cancellations on the route between 2011 and 2020 were a result of 'adverse weather'. Despite being a relatively short crossing, the suitability of the vessels for the route combined with sub-optimal berth.

Key Point: Despite a reasonable scale of health provision in the Cowal Peninsula, travel for health purposes remains common. The survey suggests that Western Ferries is again the dominant operator in this respect. (DRC comment - It would be due to poor connectivity with Hospitals in Glasgow / Inverclyde).