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19 December 2023

Dear Convener

## **Islands Connectivity Plan and the Fair Fares Review**

I note the Committee's long standing interest in the progress of the Islands Connectivity Plan and the Fair Fares Review and I am writing to provide an update on both.

### The Islands Connectivity Plan

The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) will set out how ferry services, supported by other transport modes, will be delivered, and strengthened, working towards a long-term vision, and supported by clear priorities and defined outcomes. The ICP will comprise a suite of documents with an overall Strategic Approach Paper and a series of delivery plans. I intend to initially publish the first two of these documents, the Strategic Approach Paper and the Vessels and Ports Plan, for consultation.

The Strategic Approach Paper sets our overall approach to island transport connectivity including ferries, aviation, and fixed links and, especially, addressing the strategic challenges facing Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS) and Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS) services. It reflects the Government's policies set out in the National Transport Strategy 2, the National Islands Plan, and the second Strategic Transport Projects Review 2.

The Vessels and Ports Plan provides detail on our objectives for the infrastructure used in the CHFS and NIFS which Scottish Ministers are directly responsible for. The Plan will set out the scenario needed to sustain current levels of service provision, and will also propose the investment programme required to renew the fleet and upgrade ports as required up to 2045.

As planned, I have now received the draft ICP Strategic Approach Paper and the Vessels and Ports Plan and would like to take some time to ensure they reflect the issues raised in

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your recent inquiry into “A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland” and issues that communities have raised directly with myself.

### The Fair Fares Review

The Fair Fares Review will establish a framework which will be built upon as we progress with wider work to deliver on our vision for the Future of Public Transport. The Review will be presented as a suite of documents, including the overarching ‘Recommendations & Actions’ alongside five supporting papers which will set the direction for achieving a public transport system that is financially sustainable in the long term and which provides affordable, frequent, and integrated services that are responsive to the needs of communities across Scotland.

The review will highlight the challenges facing public transport and present options on the short, medium and long-term actions that are available to reform our current transport offering to deliver more effectively. Public transport has a crucial role to play in achieving this government's priorities on equality, opportunity and community. The fair fares review presents an opportunity to address how we deliver on these objectives and improve Scotland's public transport system, delivering in a fairer and simpler way.

The Fair Fares Review has reported its findings, recommendations and actions and these are being carefully considered alongside finalising the publication and communication plans.

You will understand that the budget process also has implications on the Fair Fares Review recommendations and the delivery of the Islands Connectivity Plan and I am considering that carefully, engaging my colleagues as necessary.

I originally intended to publish both, the Fair Fares Review and the ICP Strategic Approach Paper and the Vessels and Ports Plan before the end of 2023 but this will now take place in early 2024 to allow me to finalise these to ensure they have the greatest impact on improving our transport services. I will write to the Committee again with an update or confirmation of publication. I am certain you will find it of interest as a Committee and I look forward to discussion with you in due course as we progress towards delivering the future of public transport in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

**FIONA HYSLOP**

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