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Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
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1 February 2024

Dear Convener,

I am writing to inform the Committee of progress made on the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) since I wrote to you on 19 December 2023.

I am pleased to inform you that Transport Scotland is publishing the ICP draft Strategic Approach paper and updated Vessel and Ports Plan today, along with a set of questions for public consultation. The documents can be found here:

[Islands Connectivity Plan | Transport Scotland](#)

The Committee's report "A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland" published on 26 June 2023 was key in the development of these papers. Both papers address a number of recommendations made by the Committee.

The Strategic Approach sets out an overall strategic direction for island transport connectivity relevant to all island communities and a Vision and four Priorities for all domestic ferry services across Scotland. The Strategic Approach was developed with the feedback from ferry-dependent communities as its focus and proposes a stronger voice for communities in the development of ferry services.

The Strategic Approach recognises that well-integrated onward and connecting travel is a key enabler for more sustainable island transport connectivity choices and sets out initiatives to understand how and why people use ferries, fixed links and air services. It looks ahead to developments in low emission island aviation, improvements in accessibility and integration, and fixed links. This aligns with the policy context set out in the National Transport Strategy and the National Islands Plan. The Strategic Approach points towards increased partnership working with local authorities, and the wider public and private sectors.

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Ferry Fares policy is another key element of the Strategic Approach. The Scottish Government has already committed to giving our young people the very best chances to succeed in life. Young people rightly challenge us to invest in a sustainable future for them and, ahead of the full Fair Fares Review report, we have announced the extension of free travel vouchers for young islanders to under 22s. The Strategic Approach outlines a number of proposals on ferry fares that will ensure that our ferry services remain affordable and sustainable with costs fairly shared across government, businesses and society.

The updated version of the Vessels and Ports Plan for the Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles ferry services provides the long-term plan, to 2045, for the vessel and port investment, considered necessary, to address the key challenges of reliability and resilience. The plan sets out clear delivery phases for asset renewal while making it clear that the timing of the delivery of individual projects remains subject to Value for Money, prioritisation and affordability.

We are committed to working in collaboration with ferry-dependent communities throughout the development of this Islands Connectivity Plan. Following the publication of both documents we will commence a public consultation and face to face islander engagement to inform, challenge and confirm further development of the Plan.

I commend these papers to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

FIONA HYSLOP

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