

ARGYLL AIR SERVICES

A further Tiree perspective

S.O.S



Introduction

It may help to re-state the facts about transport to and from Tiree. Our label as one of the 'Inner Hebrides' often misleads observers

A. Ferry: in winter there are five sailings per week (Mon/Tues/Thurs/Sat/Sun) leaving Oban at 0715; in summer there are daily sailings with two Saturday sailings over a ten-week peak summer period. The trip takes 3 hours 50 minutes. This is considerably longer than Stornoway-Ullapool (2h 30m) or Stromness-Scrabster (1h 30m), both routes serving island groups given special status and additional funding. There is no opportunity for a day-return Tiree-Oban-Tiree at any time of the year. In the summer, there is one weekly opportunity for an Oban-Tiree-Oban day return with a six-hour stopover; this also entails over seven hours on the ferry, a gruelling day's work. This sailing, however, has been frequently disrupted by the weather as it is linked to Barra.

B. Plane: two flights per week to Oban (Mon and Wed) twice daily using an Islander. This permits day returns both directions. Tiree Airport has become a hub: Highland and Island statistics show considerable traffic from Coll via Tiree to Glasgow. There are also two flights a day to Glasgow using a Twin Otter.

The *Review of Argyll and Bute Public Service Obligation Air Services* was published in October 2018, before the recent major review of education delivery on Tiree. This important new development needs to be included in the second tender document.

Connectivity Issues

1. Education

Tiree High School (THS) currently has 108 pupils: 29 in secondary education; 33 primary English; 34 in primary Gaelic; and 12 in nursery. As of December 2018, THS is in 'partnership' with Oban High School (OHS) following the resignation of the Tiree head teacher, and concerns expressed by some parents to Argyll and Bute Council. Peter Bain in addition to being head teacher of OHS has now become Executive Head Master of THS. To make this partnership work, he and members of staff of both THS and OHS make regular use of the Tiree-Oban plane. It is doubtful if this partnership could be successful without the Tiree-Oban air link. The trial partnership is set to run until May in the first instance. So far, it appears to be successful, but it is inconceivable without the air link. The Tiree Parent Council regards maintaining the Tiree-Oban air link as vital for the educational welfare of THS pupils, and the success of THS. The school, in turn, is utterly fundamental to the survival of the Tiree community.

2. Health

The *Review* highlighted the fact that Oban flights are often used by Tiree patients for health appointments in Oban. Argyll & Bute Health & Social Care Partnership (H&SCP) have an interest in patients attending the Oban and Lorn Hospital rather than travelling to Glasgow. A patient attending Oban is regarded as 'in house' as the Oban hospital is run by the H&SCP. If a patient from Tiree attends a Glasgow hospital, the H&SCP receives a bill for that visit from Greater Glasgow & Clyde Health Board. Without the Oban air service more Tiree patients will end up going to Glasgow with a higher cost to the local H&SCP. We see no reference to this NHS internal accounting in the *Review* or Tender documents. Being able to have an X-ray in Oban and be home the same day is a great saving in time and money to islanders on Tiree. Patients in Mull, Barra, Lewis and Orkney all have access to local X-ray services.

Notwithstanding that Tiree has a visiting dentist, appointments with Oban dental surgeries are still quite common, particularly for more specialised work. The Oban air service is essential to the viability of such dentist's visits. The alternative is an expensive night-over in Glasgow.

3. Veterinary

Coll is serviced from Tiree by the Tiree veterinary practice. It uses the Air Service to Coll mainly to supply medicines for animals, when they are needed quickly, sometimes in emergency situations. Without the service, animals will suffer, and occasionally die.

4. Construction

Statutory building authorities, architects and engineers are mainland based. An Oban air link makes convenient and cheaper day trips possible all year round. The *Review* also makes no reference to the activities of a Tiree based company Kevan Brown Ltd (we understand it was not even consulted). This

company also operates on the mainland, having contracts with the Council and various Housing Associations. It regularly sends workmen to Colonsay and Coll. It is very important to this company's operations that Argyll Air services are maintained.

5. The Democratic Deficit

Tiree no longer has a resident Argyll and Bute councillor. Notwithstanding Skype and VC technology, these are no substitute for face-to-face discussion and debate with the relevant elected members on the Council. The same applies to Scottish Government, MSPs and MP. Any loss of the Tiree-Oban air link will inevitably exacerbate our existing democratic deficit.

6. Tourism

The review made scant reference to this topic. There has been a palpable lack in marketing these air services (see Appendix 2). The viability of Oban airport will come into question should the Argyll Air Service be terminated. How can Argyll and Bute Council promote Oban Airport in its recent bid to UK and Scottish Government for funding to 'improve road and air transport links between Argyll and the central belt by developing Oban Airport and progressing improvements to key roads such as the A83 and A85, when Oban Airport may be under threat of closure?

7. Our link with Coll

We have worked hard over the last five years to build a relationship between the community councils and communities of Coll and Tiree. There has been a good deal of success. One child on Coll attends pre-school on Tiree. The air link is important to that relationship. Connectivity within the Inner Hebrides is poor enough already, without losing our air bridge.

Conclusion

Tiree Community Council and the Tiree Transport Forum place the utmost importance on the continuation of the Argyll Air Service. The island is well served with an air link to Glasgow. But Argyll and Bute Councillors must not forget that Tiree is part of Argyll and Bute Council, and that our regional centres are Oban and Lochgilphead. Other island groups in Scotland have similar or better air services. We do appreciate the problems in the service as it stands (see our previous correspondence) and we accept that there may be timetable and fare changes in a new successful tender. What we cannot accept is the loss of this service.

Dr John Holliday, Convenor, Tiree Community Council

Robert Trythall, Secretary, Tiree Community Council

John MacAskill, Chair, Tiree Transport Forum

APP

- **Tourism and Connectivity**

As part of this submission we have been asked to comment on how to develop Oban Airport.

TCC cannot offer a business plan for Oban airport ,but lack of marketing Oban Airport, and its services, is manifest to all.

The review, attached to the tender documents, offered platitudes as to marketing its services and tourism potential.

The report referred to day-trip potential as a '*specific issue*' for Coll, yet not for Tiree !! The report failed to mention that Tiree's [Wild Diamond](#) (water sports) and [Tiree Fitness](#) (cycle hire-tours) currently offer /market day trips from Glw, in partnership with Loganair. Only last week a happy couple flew in from Glw, to enjoy the pleasures of cycling around Tiree in 35k winds.

These examples are at the micro level ,but at the macro level, Scotland's tourism is marketed internationally as Europe's Out-Door Adventure Destination , yet the lack of development from Oban airport is abysmal.

Scotland is copying NZ in marketing itself as this must- visit Out-Door Adventure Destination,but the contrast in connectivity is stark.

In NZ the air taxi is a widely available facility, often operating from grass strips . In addition these operators offer stunning local day- trips like the [Siberia Experiance](#) out of Makaroa (pop 45) , the pre-eminent NZ fly/hike /jet boat day -out.

Imagine if there was a grass strip on Iona, Oban Airport like Fox Glacier NZ would be operating around the around the clock. What about trips to Barra, where a beach landing is on any air-anoraks bucket list ? What about Round- Mull summer evening flights ,or Ben Nevis round trips, or a Corryvreckan round trip?

Lets go to NZ for a relevant 'case-study ' ie [Stewart Island NZ](#)

Stewart Island is New Zealand 3rd island . It lies 30KM south off South Island, with a permanent population of 375/400 , most of whom live in the settlement of Oban (howzat for coincidence) . It is approx twice the size of Mull

It has a major shellfish and aquaculture economy, with tourism a bonus. Apart from a road from the airport to Oban , and a mile or so either side of Oban, there are no other roads on the island

Year round ,it has 3 flights /day from the mainland (Invercargill) . In summer it has 5 pass-only ferry sailings/day reduced to 2/3 per day in winter

Tiree-Coll-Colonsay would give an arm for such connectivity ,and the plane is no different !!



The airline serving Stewart Island offers round island trips ,and links up with all water taxi and local boat operators .

It markets "One day wonder" fishing trips and the 'Coast to Coast Adventure' a fly, hike, boat package.

All Oban Airport needs is imagination and commitment.

App :

- **Consultation and Tender Issues**

(1) Consultation

In Aug 2018 consultation meetings were held in all the islands and Oban. Mid summer is not the wisest time to have such a consultation . We understand attendance was poor

A questionnaire (Q)was sent to all households on the islands of Coll, Colonsay, and Tiree seeking '*information about travel patterns, perceptions and needs.*'

This Q was glaringly user-unfriendly. We are aware in many cases folk simply gave up, but its relevance or irrelevance to the Tender is the issue .

Q returns were required **by 14 Sept** yet the consultant's **Review of Argyll and Bute Public Service Obligation Air Services/Survey and Analysis Report** was drafted by 6 Sept to '*inform Council debate on tendering*',and in turn attached to the tender documents issued on the 17th Sept

Self evidently the Q was redundant to the tender process as in this time-frame it was impossible to be incorporated in this Review to '*inform Council debate on tendering* '

But has its analysis been published? If so, where ?

Prior to the tender being issued (17th Sept) it had been established that only HebAIR and LoganAir had any interest in the tender .

Para 10.2 of the Review stated :'*In recognition of the fast changing aviation market and in particular fuel prices it was suggested that **much shorter PSO contracts should be let, so that Argyll and Bute Council would know it was getting the best value at any point in time.***

It would appear this input was ignored . Why ?

The airline industry in the last few months has seen the collapse of many airlines (incl FLYBE) due to fuel price issues. Self evidently this was a significant issue for any tenderer to consider in submitting into a 'fixed price tender, such as the Argyll Air Service tender and should have been given serious consideration. Was it?

(2) Tender

Paras 1.11 **Questions and Clarification** and 1.16 **Variant Bids**, in the tender document, offered A&BC the opportunity to explore many of the alternatives proposed by TCC in its letter 18th Mar 2019 in the period between the tender's release (17 Sept2018) and its closing (19 Nov 2018),notwithstanding the rider to 1.16 re preferred bidder status.

Scottish Govt accepted **Variant Bids** in the CHFS tender in which it had two submissions . The Argyll Air Service Tender had a sole submission, which by default became the preferred bidder, ergo conformed to the tender's stipulation re 1.16 **Variant Bids**