

Shetland Inter Island Transport Study

Consultation Review

On behalf of **Shetland Islands Council**



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	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Prepared by:	Andrew Weir	Senior Transport Planner		13/10/15
Reviewed by:	Stephen Canning	Associate – Transport Planner		28/10/15
Approved by:	Dr Scott Leitham	Senior Associate		30/10/15
For and on behalf of Peter Brett Associates LLP				

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 Peter Brett Associates was commissioned by Shetland Isles Council to undertake a comprehensive review of ferry and air services within the archipelago. It was recognised that there was a need for evidence gathering to support future funding and investment decisions. It was further recognised that the evidence gathering should follow Transport Scotland's established Routes and Services Methodology (RSM) and STAG Appraisal approaches to ensure consistency and legitimacy alongside other transport projects and services in Scotland.
- 1.1.2 In advance of commissioning the study, Shetland Islands Council informed us that there have been numerous waves of consultation undertaken on the islands in relation to both previous STAG appraisals and various other studies. As a result, there is believed to be an element of 'consultation fatigue' and the Council therefore does not wish to undertake any fresh public consultations until we have developed the options. This exercise is therefore being undertaken in lieu of undertaking fresh consultation.
- 1.1.3 It should be noted that:
- some of the issues raised will have been resolved by the passage of time – we have tried to indicate where this is the case, although there may have been some changes of which we are unaware; and
 - this paper reports on the views expressed by the island communities – there are many tensions within these and some points are more reflective of perception than reality.

1.2 Consultation Material Reviewed

- 1.2.1 The paper draws on several sources of consultation from a number of studies, which were undertaken at different points in time during the last decade. As such, some of the issues raised in the consultation exercises may no longer be as relevant, and furthermore there may be some contemporary issues which were not a concern at the time. Care has been taken to sense check comments against the situation on the ground now, and cross-referencing against recent surveys has also helped to remove redundant comments. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that there may be some instances where detailed issues listed here are not completely relevant to the situation now.
- 1.2.2 Sources of consultation material include:
- Bluemull Sound STAG Study - First Stage Consultation Report
 - Bluemull Sound Previous Consultation Information Sheet
 - Bressay Link First Stage Consultation Report
 - Outer Isles STAG Study – Annex B, Consultation
 - Shetland Fixed Links Socio-Economic Study – consultation sections within report
 - Whalsay STAG Study – Appendix A Whalsay Ferries User Survey and Appendix D Consultation Meetings & Notes of Discussions
 - Shetland Ferry Passenger Survey High Level Findings

1.2.3 A series of additional papers which also contained elements of consultation were also consulted as part of other work packages and fed into this report.

1.2.4 The consultation was supplemented by face-to-face interviews with our partners Natural Capital, who carried out all of the previous consultation on the Bressay and Outer Isles studies.

1.3 Report Structure

1.3.1 The paper is structured as follows, to allow issues relevant to individual islands and crossing to be easily identified, as well as giving a summary of network wide themes. A chapter per crossing group or island group covers the main issues and opportunities in detail, for Bluemull Sound, Yell Sound, Whalsay, Bressay and Outer Islands; summary sections are included at the end of each chapter. A list of network wide themes is presented in the final chapter.

1.3.2 Where possible, consultation feedback has been reported from the point of view of different stakeholder groups eg island residents, island businesses, mainland business and island services. However, in some instances this was not possible due to the structure of consultation feedback records in some of the literature reviewed.

2 Bluemull Sound – Unst, Fetlar and Yell

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Note – whilst Yell is included in the above title, this chapter is focussed exclusively on the Bluemull Sound, with the Yell Sound being considered in a later chapter.

Bluemull Sound Transport Links STAG Study

2.1.2 An extensive consultation exercise was undertaken with stakeholders in the North Isles of Unst, Fetlar and Yell in January and February 2008, as part of the Bluemull Sound Transport Links STAG study. The exercise sought to identify problems with the current transport provision between the islands, and the opportunities that could be considered to improve the links in the future.

2.1.3 The following stakeholder groups were consulted with on the North Isles:

- North Isles residents
- Community and interest groups
- Businesses and business representatives
- Service providers in Shetland
- The Scottish Government and Transport Scotland
- Elected representatives

2.1.4 The methodology included public meetings, resident questionnaires, face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews and workshops.

2.1.5 Although this study was undertaken 7 years ago, a number of the points made are most likely still relevant to the current day operation. It should be noted that the following two key changes have happened since the consultation was undertaken:

- Fares reintroduced on Unst and Fetlar services in 2013
- Breakwater built at Hamars Ness in 2012

Shetland Ferry Passenger Survey

2.1.6 A passenger survey was carried out by Shetland Isles Council in 2014, with the Bluemull routes being surveyed between April 28th and 4th May. The key findings from this exercise are summarised in section 2.5.

2.2 Key Findings – Island Residents

Overview

2.2.1 In general, there was a good level of response received to the study from Unst and Fetlar, with fewer from Yell. Only 25% of responses indicated that they used the ferry more frequently than once a week. The majority (81%) of respondents travel on the ferry as a car driver or car passenger, but 13% travel on the bus. The results indicated that Unst households primarily travel onto the Mainland, with limited interaction between Unst and Yell. Fetlar residents travel

equally to Unst and Yell (and onward to the Mainland). In terms of trip purpose, shopping and visiting friends and relations accounted for 50% of responses received.

Strengths

- 2.2.2 Feedback provided during the consultation was often positive. The service was described as good and reasonably reliable, particularly when the weather is good. The frequency was generally described as good. The removal of fares on the Bluemull Sound service (subsequently reinstated in 2013) was also frequently stated as a reason for liking the ferry service. The crew were also seen to be friendly and helpful.

Problems associated with the current link

- 2.2.3 The problems identified with the existing service are summarised by theme below.

Timetable issues

- Poor weekend / festive period timetable (single vessel)
- Gaps in the timetable during Fetlar runs / lunch / ferry maintenance
- Not enough early and late sailings (including for Fetlar)
- Long waits between ferries (when it goes to Fetlar)
- Timetables are difficult to understand / in too small print / not user friendly
- Voice bank not updated often enough or clear
- Connections with the Yell Sound ferry service / buses are poor
- 0820 from Belmont is booked up, 0705 can be hard to get on to as people book on this once 0820 is full
- Can't get the first flight out of Sumburgh in the morning / or attend evening events on the Mainland / Yell

Fares and ticketing

- Yell Sound costs are high (at least in comparison to the Bluemull Sound)
- Expensive for pensioners / senior citizen car drivers
- The promotion of the service and fares could be improved to attract more visitors to the North Isles

Terminals:

- Ageing and need upgraded / replaced
- Facilities at terminals need upgraded
- Signs can be confusing for tourists
- Lane markings at Ulsta are confusing

Vessels

- Age of the vessels
- Size of the vessels – too small
- Causing capacity constraints at peak times and in the summer e.g. 0820 from Belmont often booked up and 0705 can be as well. However, additional sailings were added in July 2013 – sailings from Unst to Yell on Mondays to Fridays now depart at 0630, 0700, 0730, 0800, 0825, 0840 and 0945.
- Poor disabled access
- Steep stairs to lounge

Other issues

- Not always possible to book from Fetlar / Unst without having to disembark and wait for next ferry
- The need for booking limits freedom of travel

2.2.4 It was recognised that these issues combine to affect accessibility for those living and working on the islands, the efficiency and ability to deliver key services, as well as the efficiency and viability of economic enterprises.

2.2.5 Consultees also recognised the wider relationships between transport, and issues of future island vitality and viability, such as housing supply, provision of key services, population dynamics, opportunities for employment, and opportunities for accessing retail, leisure and social opportunities. The importance of good transport connections was emphasised.

Improvements and Future Options

2.2.6 The consultation process provided North Isles residents with the opportunity to comment on future options or improvements. These are listed by category below.

Timetable and operational improvements

- Extend length of time the service is available each day: this can be related to opportunities people currently miss out on, such as not being able to reach the first flights from Sumburgh and attend evening events on the Mainland / Yell
- Improve the timetable at the weekend
- Belmont / Gutcher to run every 15-20 minutes (shuttle service)
- Reduce gaps in the timetable by keeping ferries running in the middle of the day
- Better integration between the Bluemull Sound and Yell Sound services to prevent rushing between Gutcher and Ulsta to make the connection
- Introduce a water taxi for a late night service

2.2.7 Some residents also expressed a wish to see improved connectivity between the ferries and bus services, with an improved bus service from Unst to Lerwick noted as a specific improvement.

Fares and ticketing

- Free fares / discounts / passes for locals and the elderly
- Fetlar residents should not have to pay – residents have to shop regularly in Lerwick and no fuel is available on the island
- Fares for non-residents only
- Idea of long term passes – e.g. pay a fixed price for unlimited travel over a period of six months
- Fare parity with other routes, eg Whalsay service
- Ferries should be part of the road network – RET fare structure

2.2.8 A key theme related to fares was the desire to maintain the setup (as of Winter 2008) whereby travel was free on the route. With the subsequent reintroduction of fares in 2013, this aspiration has not been realised and as such is likely to be a key concern for island residents since the change took place.

Terminals

2.2.9 The key improvement highlighted by Fetlar residents was the need for a breakwater at Hamars Ness, which would allow a ferry to be based there. This project was delivered in December 2012, allowing this service improvement to be made.

2.2.10 Other improvements related to terminals included general maintenance at terminals and the provision of separate lanes for 1) Yell and 2) Unst/Fetlar traffic at Toft (Yell Sound route) – to allow Fetlar and Unst travellers to get to Gutcher in plenty of time instead of being stuck behind Yell traffic and rushing to catch the connecting ferry.

Vessels

2.2.11 Suggestions relating to vessels included replacing the existing ships with larger vessels. Related to this was the fact that the ferries operating on the Yell Sound route, which forms the onward connection to/from the mainland, are considerably larger; this leads to bottlenecks forming on the Gutcher – Belmont route. Any new ships should also be designed to improve accessibility for disabled passengers, as provision is substandard on the current vessels.

2.2.12 A dedicated Fetlar ferry was also highlighted as a key improvement; although the breakwater at Hamars Ness now facilitates this, it has not been implemented as of yet.

Fixed Link

2.2.13 With regards to the option of constructing a fixed link between Unst and Yell, many respondents suggested this would provide Unst with a more flexible link with Yell and Mainland Shetland. There was strong support for a tunnel between Unst and Yell. It was generally felt bridges would be more weather dependent and be subject to closure in periods of bad weather / high winds. However, a suggestion was made that a bridge between Unst and Yell could have wave or tidal generators to provide electricity for the islands, adding to the benefits of the project.

2.2.14 Respondents felt that the development of a fixed link would provide greater freedom of movement (than the ferries currently provide) by allowing people to travel when they want. Similarly, fixed links were said to make sense in logistical terms, with one respondent stating that only when you live on Unst are you aware of the problems of commuting on two ferries. Some respondents felt that fixed links would ensure population retention in the North Isles and

it could provide more opportunities for tourists to visit the islands and lead to further tourist and economic development.

2.2.15 The main disadvantage associated with introducing a fixed link was highlighted as being the impact that this could have on the community and current way of life. Some consultees had relatives who work on the ferries and stated a disadvantage would be the loss of jobs from the ferry and the knock on impact of this on the community. The centralisation of services between Unst and Yell was another concern – with the secondary school and health centre the most frequent examples cited. There was concern any centralisation of services would also contribute to job losses in such sectors.

2.2.16 The effect of any Unst-Yell fixed link on Fetlar was also considered by a number of respondents. It was stated that a fixed link to Unst should not come at the cost of a reduced or lesser service to Fetlar. A fixed link on Bluemull Sound could open up the potential for a dedicated Fetlar ferry / more runs to Fetlar and provide opportunities to consider options for tailoring the service to meet the needs of the island. Most North Isles residents would favour a ferry route from Fetlar to Yell if a fixed link was developed between Unst and Yell. Gutcher is the preferred destination.

2.3 Key Findings – North Isles Business Groups

2.3.1 Businesses in the North Isles are highly dependent on the ferry services. Staff commuting to work, import/export of products and supplies and accessing mainland business opportunities were all cited as frequent reasons for using the ferry.

Timetable and Operational Improvements

2.3.2 In general, businesses believe the service provided is good, fairly reliable and generally frequent. However, the following points were made with regards to constraints with the current timetable:

- One business stated that they have to operate under a “curfew” if they are working on a job on the Mainland. If they are working on a 2-3 day job, they have to give up for the day an hour before they are finished and go home early to get the ferry back to Unst. This results in there being an additional visit to complete the job which incurs more cost to the business
- Another business stated that it takes a day to make a delivery to the Mainland, because it takes two and a half hours to get to Lerwick from Unst. As a result, the proprietor of the business plans any errands they might have around the delivery because it is going to take them the whole day to make the delivery anyway
- Capacity on morning departures can be limited but the increase in the number of morning sailings from July 2013 has been beneficial in this respect.
- A service to enable people to get to the early morning flights from Sumburgh
- Reinstatement of the 1800 sailing (as opposed to the 1855) from Gutcher – Hamars Ness
- A round the clock service, with sailings first thing in the morning and last thing at night and after hours
- 2 ferries on a Saturday, including in the summer for tourists

Fixed Link

- 2.3.3 It was felt that a fixed link could provide benefits to businesses in the North Isles. It would make it considerably more convenient for workers commuting between the islands as they would have more flexibility when leaving for work in the morning and not be reliant on the ferries. One business stated that a fixed link between Unst and Yell would be beneficial because there is a shortage of workers in Yell and a fixed link would provide an easier commute from Unst. A fixed link would open up the area and make it more accessible and easier to get to the Mainland.
- 2.3.4 A fixed link was said by some to be a way to repopulate the islands and encourage the growth of tourism. With regards to Fetlar, it was felt that a fixed link between Unst and Yell would further the case for a dedicated Fetlar ferry service berthed on the island. It should be noted that the level of service associated with a dedicated Fetlar ferry would depend on the number of crews employed. To maintain an 18 hour operating day seven days a week would need three complete crews of four plus reliefs for holidays, sickness, etc. If the ferry was based on Fetlar, all of these staff would need to live on Fetlar at least whilst on duty. A tunnel was preferred over a bridge because it would be unaffected by wind and bad weather.
- 2.3.5 However, the opinion was also expressed that a fixed link could have the opposite effect with there being less need for people to stay over in the North Isles if they could get there more easily by a fixed link. Furthermore, it was stated that although fixed links should be looked at in close detail as an option, it is an emotional subject for the North Isles because ferry jobs could be lost.

2.4 Key Findings – Service Providers in Shetland

- 2.4.1 The emergency services stated that the existing service is relatively good, enabling connections between the islands and the willingness of the ferry crew to help out the Ambulance service.
- 2.4.2 From a tourism point of view, Visit Shetland believed that the timetable was relatively good and reliable. The service is key as it provides access to Britain's most northerly island, Unst.

Timetable and Operational Issues

- 2.4.3 Several issues relating to the timetable and operational issues were mentioned, including:
- The timings of sailings to / from Fetlar were identified as a particular constraint by the health services, for example when patients have appointments in Yell or need to see the GP there. There can often be long waits to catch the ferry back to Fetlar. In addition, if a patient has a hospital appointment in Lerwick, it was said that it is easier to go from Lerwick to Fetlar than Fetlar to Lerwick because of the timings of the ferry
 - If the Yell ambulance is transporting a patient back to Fetlar, it has to sit in Fetlar and wait for the ferry to come back
 - Trips to access care on the Mainland / training opportunities can require departing from Unst or Fetlar the night before; thus a degree of organisation and planning ahead is required
 - In one case of bad weather, the air ambulance system was used to evacuate a patient from Unst – and it was 7 hours before the patient reached Lerwick

Other Issues

- 2.4.4 Additional problems identified included the following:

- Ferry size / capacity can be an issue and if there are roadworks en route to the terminal or big lorries in the queue, people may have to wait longer
- Opportunities for getting to Fetlar are limited by the vessel and this causes problems for tourists trying to get to the island
- The ferry set up can confuse tourists, and it is felt that signposting at the terminals could be made friendlier for tourists and better visitor information could be provided on the larger ferries from Toft – Ulsta
- There was also confusion over fares, with tourists not knowing when / if they have to pay and tourists might sit in the un-booked queue even if they are booked on to a ferry

Fixed Link

- 2.4.5 There were a number of benefits that a fixed link were expected to bring. Reduced travel time to Ulsta and onwards to the mainland, as a result of reduced travel / waiting times (although note there would still be some waiting time associated with a signal controlled single lane tunnel). It would allow 24 hours access to the islands for emergency services, enabling out of hours operation if necessary. Finally, the ability to move resources and manpower without any weather related problems was highlighted as being a key improvement.

2.5 Shetland Passenger Survey

- 2.5.1 The 2014 passenger surveys aimed to ascertain the reasons why people are using the ferry, and where users are travelling to and from. As part of this, respondents were asked to provide comments on several aspects of the service.

Ferry Usage Patterns

- 2.5.2 In comparison to some other routes surveyed, the Bluemull service exhibited lower levels of commuting and shopping trips, and higher proportions of holiday and sightseeing trips. There was a pronounced peak in usage in the morning and evening, with Yell residents in particular frequently travelling at these times; those living on Unst had a tendency to travel more frequently throughout the day.
- 2.5.3 Although Lerwick is a key origin and destination there is significant interaction between the three isles - 65% of Yell resident journeys are for work or business related on the Bluemull Sound service.
- 2.5.4 Very low number of shopping trips, reflecting distance, time and cost factors: anecdotally it was suggested North Isles residents are making less non-essential/social trips since the re-introduction of fares. However, there was no evidence of changes in travel behaviour to reduce the impact of increased costs, compared with other services.
- 2.5.5 Headline ferry usage points based on the passenger survey include:
- There is a morning peak between 7am and 9am, when people are mostly travelling to work
 - Less pronounced evening peak (4-6pm)
 - Significant demand throughout the day
 - Demand reduced considerable after 7pm
 - Proportion of residents using service lower than other routes; tourists have a higher share

- 46% of respondents use ferry at least twice a week

Timetable Issues

2.5.6 The key theme emerging from comments pertaining to the timetable were related to the reduced number of services available at weekends. Commuting to work on a Saturday, for example, was cited as being far more difficult than during the week; overnight stays were sometimes required. A tour operator stated that they had ceased to operate trips on a Sunday due to the limited sailings available. Other comments included:

- Timetable poor for Fetlar commuters
- More ferries needed in middle of day
- Poor timetable on Mondays and weekends
- Very poor service after 6pm
- On Friday nights it is not possible to arrive on last flight to Sumburgh and get to Unst that evening

Onward Connections

2.5.7 The theme of onward connections from Gutcher to Ulsta was mentioned frequently. There was a view that the Bluemull Sound and Yell Sound timetables were not designed to provide convenient connections through Yell, and the journey involved either driving very fast (60mph) or incurring a long wait for the next service. If making the journey using public transport, it was stated that bus connections between the two routes involved a considerable wait time, sometimes up to an hour.

2.5.8 However, this appears to be an issue of perception over reality. The Council note that recognised connections normally have at least 30 minutes between arrival at one end of Yell and departure from the other. This suggests that the connections are, in reality, well integrated.

Fares

2.5.9 The reintroduction of fares on the services was mentioned frequently as key deterrent to making journeys. It was suggested that commuting between the islands was now becoming prohibitively expensive. Making frequent journeys for other purposes was also deemed too expensive for some, leading to a reduction in non-essential trips between islands.

Future Changes and Impacts

2.5.10 A number of comments were made regarding concerns over any future changes to services. Previous cuts in ferry services were deemed by some to be eroding life in the islands, and the prospect of further service reductions was stated as being potentially devastating to Unst and Fetlar in particular.

2.6 Summary

2.6.1 Extensive consultation has been undertaken on issues surrounding the Bluemull Sound ferry services. A large volume of comments have been provided, many of which go into considerable detail. To summarise, the key issues related to the service were as follows:

- Timetable issues – constraints on commuting options, Monday and weekend timetables in particular deemed to be inadequate.
- Earlier/ later sailings – lack of connectivity with early Sumburgh flight, and unable to attend night-time social events on mainland without overnight stay.
- Dedicated ferries for Unst and Fetlar – possible now due to breakwater at Hamars Ness.
- Capacity issues – a larger ferry or ferries would help alleviate crowding on some Gutcher – Belmont services.
- Fares – reintroduction of fares seen to be a retrograde step with negative consequences for the islands; suggestion that islanders should at the very least be entitled to discounted prices in comparison to visitors.
- Fixed link – a tunnel between Unst and Yell was viewed by many as more sustainable option longer term, with Fetlar also expected to benefit with a dedicated ferry service.

3 Yell Sound

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The ferry service across Yell Sound benefitted from new vessels in 2004, which represented a step change in capacity and comfort. As a result, Yell has not received the same level of consultation as other islands within the archipelago.
- 3.1.2 Nonetheless, it was covered in the 2014 Shetland Passenger Survey, the 2015 Inter Island Fares Review Study and also the Shetland Fixed Linked Study; this chapter draws primarily from these sources.

3.2 Key Findings – Yell Sound

- 3.2.1 Comments made during the survey and consultations undertaken on Yell are presented below.

Ferry Usage Patterns

- 3.2.2 The Yell Sound service was surveyed in spring and summer, thus given two different sets of survey results with the added option of comparing seasonal differences. In spring, there is a morning peak between 7-10am and a more pronounced evening peak between 4-7pm. Significant demand exists throughout the day, especially in the afternoon.
- 3.2.3 In summer, this pattern changes with a much less pronounced peak and a greater number of survey responses during the day, due to the higher volume of tourists and also an expected drop in commuting due to holidays; 90% of spring respondents were island residents, whilst only 79% were in summer.
- 3.2.4 Yell residents represent only 55% of responses in spring and 41% in summer, much lower than destination islands on other routes. This likely reflects the transitory nature of Yell, acting as a stepping stone for Unst and Fetlar to mainland trips.
- 3.2.5 Trip purposes were varied, with commuting relatively low compared to other routes and holiday trips high especially in summer. Non-essential trips were more prevalent in summer. In terms of trip frequencies, 52% of surveyed passengers made a trip twice a week or more. This compares to 66% of Yell residents who make at least two return journeys by ferry per week (37% make two to four return journeys per week and 29% make at least five return journeys per week).
- 3.2.6 Key points include:
- Morning and evening peaks, although less pronounced than some other routes
 - Steady demand throughout the day, less in evenings
 - Significant seasonality differences between spring and summer; tourism and non-commuting trips more dominant in the latter period
 - Low percentage of Yell residents using the service – reflects transitory nature of island, linking Unst and Fetlar with Mainland

Timetable Issues

3.2.7 The key theme emerging from comments pertaining to the timetable were related to the reduced number of services available at weekends, and the gaps between services as a result. The need for a sailing allowing an 8am start in Lerwick was also cited as being important. Comments included:

- Big gaps between sailings, especially at weekends
- Monday sailing frequencies are inadequate as this is the day on which drills are carried out
- Arranging meetings is difficult because of timetable
- Ferry times and school hours are not well coordinated
- Ferry times should be reviewed to suit 8am start in Lerwick
- Lack of sailings later in the evening, after 6:30pm
- Lack of early morning sailings prohibits shift workers with early start from being able to commute
- Lack of late night sailings makes attendance at social events and island wide activities impossible without an overnight stay – sailings later than 23:05 required to allow this

Onward Connections

3.2.8 Going south, it was mentioned that connections to Whalsay were difficult to make and that it was not possible to catch the first flight out of Sumburgh airport without an overnight stay. It was clearly recognised that this route forms a lifeline service for connection to the mainland and Sumburgh Airport. To summarise:

- Integration between Bluemull Sound and Yell Sound ferry timetables poor
- Poor onward connections with Whalsay
- Not possible to get the first flight out of Sumburgh

Fares

3.2.9 The fares on the Ulsta – Toft route were generally believed to be too expensive, with particular emphasis on commuters and those who have to use the service regularly. Examples of behavioural changes, such as leaving a car at the other side and going on the vessel as a foot passenger, and car sharing were evident. Some of the points relating to fares included:

- Due to high cost now frequently leave van and travel as foot passenger
- Expensive to be a resident living in Yell, as reliant on this service
- Car share because too expensive for car
- Leave car at both terminals due to high fare
- Too expensive for OAPs to travel with car
- Foot passenger fare too high

- Fares at limit of affordability

Future Changes and Impacts

- 3.2.10 A number of comments were made regarding concerns over any future changes to services. Previous cuts in ferry services were deemed by some to be eroding life in the islands, and the prospect of further service reductions was stated as being potentially devastating to Yell, Unst and Fetlar.
- 3.2.11 In terms of improvements sought, reductions in fares, timetable enhancements and better onward connections were most commonly raised. The following suggestions were made in terms of enhancements that could benefit islanders:

Timetable Issues

- Change morning ferries to run on the hour and half hour
- More evening sailings
- Add a sailing to allow 8am start in Lerwick
- Add late night sailings to allow attendance at social events on mainland without overnight stay

Onward Connections

- Add early sailing to connect with first flight from Sumburgh
- Better connections to Whalsay required
- Better integration with Bluemull Sound services

Fares

- Discount fares require for commuters and island residents
- Reduction in OAP vehicle fare
- Foot passengers should be free

3.3 Summary

- 3.3.1 There has been less consultation undertaken on Yell/Yell Sound in comparison to other routes/islands due the introduction of new vessels in 2004 and associated service improvements. Nonetheless, comments have been made in several Shetland-wide studies which have been outlined above. To summarise, the key transport issues and opportunities relating to Yell Sound are:
- Gaps in timetable, especially at weekends
 - Monday sailing frequencies are inadequate as this is the day on which drills are carried out
 - Earlier sailings required to suit shift workers and connecting with first flight from Sumburgh

- More evening sailings required, and late night sailings to allow attendance at social events
- Poor integration between Yell and Bluemull timetables – requires improvement
- Connections with Whalsay route poor – requires improvement
- Fares too high, especially if already using the Bluemull service – discount should be available for double ferry journeys
- Season passes and islanders discounts should also be considered

4 Whalsay

4.1 Introduction

Whalsay STAG Studies

- 4.1.1 In 2005, a STAG 1 study of the existing Whalsay ferry route was undertaken. Extensive public consultation was involved, and as such this forms a key source of information within this chapter. Those consulted with include island residents, businesses and other island stakeholders and services based on the mainland.
- 4.1.2 A STAG 2 study which considered potential transport links between Whalsay and the mainland was completed in 2008. As part of this process, a passenger survey was undertaken on board the ferry. Public consultation was not undertaken as part of the study, although options generated during the STAG process were also presented to stakeholders at a series of workshops, during which feedback and comments were given.
- 4.1.3 The Shetland Isles Passenger survey was carried out on behalf of SIC in 2014, with the Whalsay routes being surveyed between April 28th and 4th May. The key findings from this exercise are summarised in section 4.5. In addition, the Inter-Island Fares Survey and Shetland Isles Fixed Linked Study were also referred to when writing this chapter.

4.2 Key Findings – Island Residents

- 4.2.1 Residents of Whalsay were consulted through questionnaires, a public meeting and open consultation days. The key themes emerging from these are summarised below.

Timetable and Operational Issues

- 7:50 sailing the most difficult to get onto
- Lack of early sailings prevent onward connection to first flight from Sumburgh
- 45 minute service frequency deemed adequate, although any improvements welcome
- Commuter services and those during the festive period are the busiest
- Need for later services [than operated in 2005]

Fares and Ticketing

- No major complaints regarding fares
- Concern that new vessels would lead to increased fares to cover cost

Vessels

- Reliability of vessels the key issue
- Existing setup of two smaller vessels was preferable to one larger ship – concerns that a new vessel may remove the need for a two-ship service
- Recognition that larger vessels would deliver extra capacity and better performance in rough weather

Terminals

- Recognition that terminals modifications are required
- Conflict between ferries and fishing/leisure vessels at Symbister – a key issue surrounding redevelopment of the terminal here
- Relocating terminal to North Voe was likely to lead to loss of amenity, however this would lead to less congestion in Symbister

4.2.2 A key point highlighting the importance of the ferry service was the fact that a number of respondents, currently living and working in Whalsay, said that if they found themselves out of work, they would seek work on the mainland and commute rather than moving elsewhere.

4.3 Key Findings – Local Businesses

4.3.1 Fishing is a key industry on Whalsay and around 150 jobs are directly supported by the fishing fleet. The existing ferry service was not seen to be a barrier to operations (at the time of the STAG studies in any case).

4.3.2 The Marina Users Association highlighted that conflict in movements between ferries and other craft was a key issue affecting operations. Repositioning the ferry terminal away from the inner harbour was suggested as the preferred option, with moving the terminal to North Voe slightly less desirable.

4.3.3 The school community are also frequent users of the ferry service, both for allowing access for pupils to a wide range of educational and social activities, and for allowing supply teachers to access the island.

4.4 Key Findings – Other Stakeholders

4.4.1 The tourist office indicated a range of barriers for tourists in travelling to Whalsay, including the availability of bus/ferry timetable and the quality of the waiting areas. Whalsay was generally seen as an untapped local resource.

4.4.2 Any changes to the ferry service were predicted to have little effect for the ambulance service, as long as priority boarding arrangements remained in place.

4.4.3 Shetland Enterprise explained that Islanders place a preference for remaining on the island and hence commuting is key to sustaining population on the island, which in turn will support local community services. The ferries are a pre-requisite for economic growth because all goods coming in and out require access on the ferry.

4.4.4 The need to explore the potential for a fixed link was restated, as the social and economic impacts of this are unknown. For example, it was stated that a fixed link could lead to a dominance of commuting on the island, and erosion of island qualities. However, it is also noted that a fixed link could be the lesser of two evils – the alternative being a drastic depopulation of the island.

4.5 Shetland Passenger Survey

4.5.1 The 2014 passenger surveys aimed to ascertain the reasons why people are using the ferry, and where users are travelling to and from. As part of this, respondents were asked to provide comments on several aspects of the service.

Ferry Usage Patterns

- 4.5.2 Whalsay exhibits a lower level of commuting and business trips than other routes, most likely due to the longer crossing time. Furthermore, it may also reflect the lower dependency on mainland jobs due to the employment opportunities available on the island.
- 4.5.3 In terms of journey purpose by time of day it is evident that commuting and business trips are carried out throughout the day up to 6pm, with peaks between 6am and 8am and 2pm and 6pm.
- 4.5.4 With regards to frequency of ferry use, 60% of respondents stated that they made 2 journeys or more per week; for Whalsay residents, this was 71%.
- 4.5.5 Lerwick is a key social and economic centre for Whalsay, although there are many trips to and from other locations in Shetland.

Timetable and Operational Issues

- 4.5.6 Weekends were highlighted as having an inadequate number of sailings. This was said to make commuting to work on a Saturday very challenging, and prohibits being able to access a range of leisure and social activities on the mainland. Other comments relating to timetables and services included:
- Not enough capacity at peak times
 - People are sometimes left at Laxo or Symbister due to ferry being full
 - The 5.55pm ferry is very important
 - More sailings required – service should be as good as Yell Sound
 - Lack of services later in the evening, prohibiting attendance at social events without the need for an overnight stay
 - Need to match ferries with commuters finishing work
 - Early morning ferry required so that connection to first Sumburgh flight is possible – 5:20 sailing should be reinstated
 - No 2pm ferry on Wednesday from Laxo is a big disadvantage especially when you have to be home for children returning from school
 - Not having a 2pm crossing is very inconvenient

Onward Connections

- 4.5.7 Bus connections were mentioned as an area for improvement, as were connections to the airport and also Northlink ferry services from Lerwick.
- Bus and ferry timetables need to be better coordinated
 - 5.55pm from Laxo could leave 10 mins earlier as bus arrives at 5.45pm
 - At weekends the bus arrives 45 mins before the 6.30pm sailing departs - this is too long to sit and wait
 - Cuts make it difficult to travel between Whalsay and Yell, especially at weekends

- Need more connecting bus services to Lerwick
- Connection within Northlink sailings is poor

Fares

- 4.5.8** Fares were not cited as being as significant an issue as on some other routes. However, the cost for regular commuters was described as being too high, and the fare for a month was deemed to be too expensive; discount passes or season tickets were suggested as options. Any further fare increases were thought to make commuting unviable, whilst a subsidised fare was thought likely to increase the number of people willing to move to Whalsay. The fare for a motorbike was also mentioned as being rather high.

Future Changes and Impacts

- 4.5.9** The effects of previous cuts to services were mentioned as being significant, and it was suggested any further reductions in sailings would seriously threaten the viability of the island. A number of comments were made regarding concerns over any future changes to services. A fixed link was deemed a worthwhile long-term investment, in preference to renewing ferry infrastructure; a tunnel was preferred over a bridge.

4.6 Summary

- 4.6.1** There has been considerable consultation with a variety of Whalsay stakeholders regarding the issues surrounding transport connections to the island. The key themes emerging from the review of material area:
- Capacity issues on some sailings, particularly during morning and evening peaks and over the festive period
 - Timings could be better aligned with the needs of commuters
 - Better onwards bus connections required to Lerwick and other key destinations
 - Early morning and late night sailings required to allow connections with first Sumburgh flight and to allow access to social activities respectively
 - Discounts or season passes for commuters would make fares more affordable
 - Two ferry service preferred to one new, larger vessel
 - Symbister ferry port needs to be moved from the inner harbour to avoid conflict with fishing/leisure vessels
 - Existing service satisfactory for businesses on the island
 - Fixed link recognised as an advantageous long-term solution, although this should be assessed against possible loss of island identity

5 Bressay

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Extensive consultation has been undertaken with Bressay stakeholders as part of the Bressay Links STAG study which took place in 2007. This was achieved using a combination of questionnaires, workshop, drop-in sessions and face to face meetings.
- 5.1.2 This chapter draws on the information gathered in this study, supplemented by the findings of the Shetland Passenger Survey completed in 2014 and the Inter-Island Fares Review.

5.2 Key Findings – Island Residents

Strengths

- 5.2.1 The main reason people gave for liking the ferry service was that it is to the centre of Lerwick, making it convenient and enabling them to walk or cycle rather than rely on a car. It is also convenient from Bressay as many people are able to reach the terminal by foot. The service is described as reliable, regular and relatively unaffected by weather. The service is felt to be frequent and the journey short.
- 5.2.2 Another important factor stated was the social hub the ferry provides. This was particularly important when moving to the island, providing an opportunity to meet people, which might not otherwise be available. The crew are seen to be friendly and helpful: for younger members of the community they value the crew making sure they are safe and they can help if there is a problem.
- 5.2.3 The ferry link is also seen to provide a default security system for the island, protecting Bressay from crime and other community safety issues, such as joy riders. By having the ferry everyone knows each other. Other reasons given were that it provides a break between home and work, and is a relaxing way to get home. It has good seats and a drinks machine and is clean.
- 5.2.4 The key issues raised by the Bressay community members are summarised below.

Timetable and Operational Issues

- Connection into central Lerwick is key – option to walk or cycle
- Service generally believed to be reliable, frequent and largely unaffected by weather
- Not possible to connect with early flight from Sumburgh – early morning service required
- Lack of late night services throughout week prohibit attendance at social events in Lerwick without overnight stay
- Sunday service is inadequate
- Better timed sailings for commuters (8am) and school children required

Fares

- 5.2.5 The most significant issue about the current service is the fare levels. Although some felt they are affordable, including those at school, there is a belief that the fares are exacerbating issues of accessibility: the proximity of Bressay to Lerwick means the community rely on the

ferry to access most employment, education and leisure opportunities, yet the fares are the same as to other islands, which do not have to use the ferry to the same extent. Families can spend £3,000 or more a year on fares and there is concern that this is leading to people moving away. There is also the additional cost of parking once in Lerwick.

5.2.6 Fares are seen to stifle business viability and development. In terms of tourism there is evidence that fares are putting visitors off staying on the isle, or staying on the isle for as long as they did a few years ago when fares were cheaper.

5.2.7 Issues relating to fares can be summarised as follows:

- Fares believed to be high for the short crossing; price is the same as on other longer ferry routes
- High costs for commuters and other regular travellers – community is highly dependent on Lerwick, so frequent trips are essential, more so than on other islands
- Increase in fares has led to a decrease in tourist visits to the island, as travelling to/from the island to visit other destinations is expensive

Vessels

5.2.8 There was general satisfaction with the vessel, Leirna, and the crew were mentioned as being friendly and flexible.

- Facilities on board could be improved – coffee machine, snacks
- Awareness that vessel needs replaced (although note that the Leirna was re-engined in 2013)

Other Issues

- Ferry viewed as important social hub
- Concerns over the sustainability of the service
- Uncertainty over fixed link

Improvements and Future Options

5.2.9 Comments were made about the ageing population of Bressay and that the current impact of the ferry is making it difficult for people to consider moving to the isle, young people are not returning and there is little or no economic investment. Questions were asked regarding the implications of doing nothing. There is agreement that a solution needs to be found to ensure the long-term sustainability of the community: for some the solution is a fixed link whilst for others this could be achieved by addressing the frequency of the ferry and the fares.

Improvements to existing service

- Service could run earlier and later without the need for much more crew time
- Shuttle service required
- Cost savings if crew were based on mainland
- Refurbishing the vessel would prolong the operational life of the ship considerably – this life extension work is scheduled

- Levels of accessibility need to be retained for those who can walk to the ferry terminal in Bressay, and improved for those who are currently unable to

Fixed Link

- 5.2.10 In terms of the fixed link option, it is seen to provide the community with a more flexible and affordable link with mainland Shetland. Examples of opportunities respondents felt could be opened up included enabling existing businesses to expand and encouraging others to be established, increasing employment opportunities locally. There may be developments in Lerwick on the east side of the harbour. It could provide more opportunities for tourists to visit and lead to further tourist development. There is a belief that the economic developments a fixed link could bring could provide plenty of employment opportunities for the ferry crew and more people could move to the area enhancing community and social opportunities.
- 5.2.11 The main reason given for seeing a fixed link as a disadvantage was the impact it could have on the community and current way of life, and that the island could become the suburban sprawl of Lerwick. Access was another important issue: a fixed link in the area currently set aside would require a 14 mile return trip, taking more time and fuel than using the current ferry. This could have an impact on carbon emissions. There is concern that for those who currently rely on foot or lifts to get to the ferry could experience a decrease in accessibility as the bus service would not provide the same level of frequency or convenience. Another frequently mentioned disadvantage was the loss of jobs from the ferry and the knock on impact of this on the community. Opinion was divided on the impact for tourism; some believed increased accessibility would encourage more visitors, whilst others thought that the loss of true island status would make it a less appealing destination.
- 5.2.12 Views on positive impacts of a fixed link can be summarised as follows:
- A fixed link could provide opportunities to sustain the community
 - Business expansion, business development, employment
 - Increased housing and population
- 5.2.13 Negative consequences of a fixed link included:
- Loss of island identity and associated social benefits, including safety
 - Housing and industrial development
 - Loss of employment
 - Potential loss of tourism
- 5.2.14 In terms of fixed link options, the following comments were made:
- Bridge: plans were in place (but lapsed), iconic, restrictions on harbour, environmental impacts
 - Tunnel: reliable, no restrictions on harbour, lower maintenance costs, some people unable to use, unable to walk across. Combine with cruise ship pier
 - Chain Ferry: low costs, reliable, no restrictions on harbour, but this was deemed not possible with current MCA water classification.
 - Causeway, possibly with tidal generators

- Swing Bridge idea suggested
- Fixed link and centrally located passenger ferry

5.2.15 A tunnel was the preferred fixed link option, with the possibility of a passenger ferry maintaining the short, direct link to Lerwick town centre being stated as important too.

5.3 Key Findings – Local Businesses

5.3.1 The ferry service is used by Bressay businesses in a number of ways:

- The farms use it to collect materials required, such as fencing and feeding, and to take stock to the marts. This varies, depending on the time of year, but could average out to be about once a week through the year. On occasion farms hire in machinery/ trucks to take away stock
- To access business on the Mainland. For those concerned this is usually at least once a day, five days a week
- For workers to access SFP

Strengths

5.3.2 In general, businesses believe the service provided is good, as it is regular and easily accessible. There are seldom constraints on capacity and the shuttle service minimises the wait. For those who discussed weather disruption, it was felt to be rare, although it did not run for 36 hours in one recent winter.

Problems associated with the current link

5.3.3 Issues relating to gaps in the current timetable and fares were the most frequent themes discussed.

Timetable and operational issues

- Unable to connect with early flight from Sumburgh
- Current timetable not always ideal - loss of time planning/waiting for ferry
- Sunday service restricts the amount of service industry business that can be undertaken on the island
- Lack of late night services

Fares

- High cost of fares, particularly freight/machinery, not readily passed on to customers
- High fares deter tourists from staying on island, as it is expensive to visit other parts of the archipelago
- High fares render Bressay uncondusive to business expansion or new development

Other issues

- Young people are not wishing to return as they are aware of the opportunities provided on Mainland Shetland and the population is ageing

- Unresolved decision about a fixed link, resulting in other aspects of the community's development not being addressed and house sites are seldom available
- Bressay has not experienced same developments as other areas of Shetland and relies on Lerwick to access most employment, services and leisure facilities, yet have to pay ferry fares to do so

Improvements and Future Options

Improvements to Existing Service

5.3.4 A number of improvements to the current service were suggested

- A service to enable people to connect with early morning flights from Sumburgh
- A more regular service at more times of the day, possibly a shuttle service more frequently, as the engines run all day. This would require improvement to the way vehicles and passengers are unloaded and loaded, including giving preference to foot passengers, so as to speed up turnaround times
- Promote the service more to visitors, for example better use of the electronic signs, and the attractions of Bressay/Noss and bird-watching from the ferry, to increase income.

Fixed Link

5.3.5 A fixed link was believed to have the potential to the following benefits to businesses:

- Provide opportunities for some business to expand and more time available for business growth
- New businesses to become established, helping sustain the population
- A new business park at the north end

5.3.6 However, at the moment people who can access the ferry can easily get by foot to central Lerwick, this may not be the case with a fixed link, depending on location and frequency of public transport. Yet the ferry (particularly the cost) currently prohibits access to employment and opportunities. The island status of cars means private transport is cheaper now than it could be with a fixed link and people can drive without a full licence: some older people do not have a full licence and would be unlikely to take a test. Other potential negative impacts include loss of:

- island identity and associated social benefits
- ease of collecting supplies from the ferry
- direct access to central Lerwick
- employment of ferry crews

5.3.7 In terms of fixed link options, the following options were mentioned:

- Bridge: plans were in place but have now lapsed
- Tunnel: reliable, no restrictions on harbour, lower maintenance costs, some people unable to use, unable to walk across

- Chain Ferry: low costs, reliable, no restrictions on harbour but ruled out by MCA regulations

5.3.8 Those who would prefer a tunnel give reasons such as: lower maintenance costs, unaffected by wind and no navigational obstacles involved. However, people wouldn't be able to get across by foot and some people would be unable to use a tunnel. Those who use the harbour are aware of the need for the dredging to go ahead, as currently boats can have to wait a number of hours on the Lerwick side before being able to get across to Hogan to off-load, and vessels are getting bigger.

5.3.9 Those who prefer a bridge do so because it is ready to go and there is a danger that the plans for a tunnel could go through the same process as that of the bridge, with a need to dredge deeper. It was stated that the current bridge option was likely to be closed more often than the current ferry as it will be exposed to all wind directions and the current ferry only has problems with a south-westerly.

5.4 Key Findings – Mainland Businesses

5.4.1 Consultation was undertaken with businesses in Lerwick and other areas of the mainland. In terms of businesses on the mainland, the ferry service is good and reliable. Depending on the extent to which a business uses the service, there is concern about time lost waiting for a ferry and the time required to plan around the timetable.

5.4.2 Examples of issues included:

- If an employee misses a ferry, this is costly
- Delivery firms can lose money on deliveries to Bressay. For example if an urgent delivery is required it can take one to one and a half hours of an employee's time, which is not profitable. It also puts a limit on when deliveries can be made
- At certain times, trucks are prevented from crossing in favour of island residents commuting to work. For one company this enforced delay of 30 minutes can make the difference between profit and loss on a job.

5.4.3 In general, businesses do not believe the service prevents other opportunities being pursued or that a fixed link would increase opportunities. The main direct advantage would be greater convenience and a more cost effective means of getting to Bressay, assuming that if tolls were introduced these were reasonable.

5.4.4 For a number of industries it is important that, should a fixed link be constructed, it has no impact on Lerwick harbour operations. Businesses who use the port to operate stressed the importance of Lerwick harbour to the Shetland economy. Fishing and decommissioning industries were cited as potentially being the most affected.

5.4.5 In terms of options for a fixed link, a tunnel was stated as being the favourable option due to being reliable, no restrictions on harbour (shipping, decommissioning), removes obstacle to safe navigation, believed to be cheaper than bridge option, lower maintenance costs. It would need to be able to transport artic lorries (16-17ft) and suitable for chemicals to be transported.

5.5 Key Findings – Service Providers in Shetland

5.5.1 A number of service providers in Shetland were consulted with. The ferry service is believed to be reliable and frequent and is also readily available in an emergency, for example for the Scottish Ambulance Service, Hydro Electric and Scottish Water. There were no complaints about the service. The direct link to Lerwick Town Centre is appreciated by businesses in that

area. In terms of tourism, Visit Shetland believe that tourists like the ferry service and the novelty of accessing an island within a group of islands: Bressay is relatively accessible.

5.5.2 The key issues highlighted by service providers included:

- Lost time in operational planning to deliver services and staff time waiting either side
- Lack of integration between different transport services
- Unable to access early flights from Sumburgh
- If tourists miss a ferry, they may decide not to visit
- Higher building costs than Mainland Shetland
- Difficulty of accessing Bressay out-of-hours, unless able to call an emergency
- Ageing population and difficulties in being able to provide adequate service
- Bressay residents not getting the service they need or equality of community care
- Unable to easily access taxi services, and therefore associated opportunities this provides
- Lack of accessibility for those residents of Bressay without access to a vehicle and unable to walk to the ferry, e.g. to health services
- Bressay relies on Lerwick to access most employment, services and leisure facilities, yet have to pay ferry fares to do so: expense of a second return trip to Lerwick after school/evening for activities

5.5.3 A number of views on future opportunities were also expressed, including:

- Fixed links enable greater circulation of people, and therefore more opportunities for tourism and tourist development projects
- Question regarding constraints on the economic development of Lerwick at the current time, and/or potential negative impacts on Lerwick of opening up Bressay for development
- Question regarding the extent to which housing shortages in central areas of Shetland: could be addressed by a fixed link to Bressay
- If a large amount of capital expenditure is going to be spent on the transport link then it is important all the potential benefits are pursued in terms of savings, and housing, industry and harbour developments
- Need to ensure LPA able to continue to 'manage, maintain, improve and conserve the harbour area' in interests of industries operating in harbour
- A fixed link could lead to loss of island identity and associated social benefits; social cohesion provided by the ferry; novelty to tourists of accessing an island; direct link to shops and businesses in central Lerwick; and lead to possible increase in ASB.

5.5.4 In terms of potential option for a fixed link, a tunnel was stated as the preferred option due to reliability, safety and the fact that there would be no restrictions on the harbour.

5.6 Key Findings – Other Stakeholders

5.6.1 Members of the wider community were also consulted with. The following summarises the key points made:

- Inter-island ferry service is no longer sustainable in the long-term
- Advantages of a fixed link for Bressay, Lerwick and Shetland in terms of industrial and housing development
- Importance of finding the best solution for Shetland
- Which would be the most appropriate island to have the initial fixed link?
- Loss of island identity and associated social benefits with a fixed link

5.6.2 In terms of options for a fixed link, 3 options were mentioned:

- Tunnel: benefits that tunnels had delivered to Faroe Islands were cited
- Lift Bridge: iconic, access for vessels
- Causeway, possibly including marinas: low cost, dual solution with marinas

5.6.3 Elected Representatives were also contacted and a number of responses were received. The key issues identified by this stakeholder group were:

- Bressay relies on Lerwick to access most employment, services and leisure facilities, yet residents have to pay ferry fares to do so
- Need to resolve Bressay link, so that other links can be explored and resolved for the long-term

5.6.4 In terms of future issues and opportunities, the following suggestions were made:

- Employment based on Bressay is heavily reliant on the ferry. There is a need to provide sustainable employment opportunities on the island. There is a need to look for more cost effective transport links
- How do the costs of running Shetland's inter-island ferry service in the next 50-60 years compare with the cost of fixed links?
- Importance of having a clear programme of link replacement to understand funding challenges
- What would the impact of a fixed link be on current population drift to central areas?
- What would be the impact on other areas of Shetland, if this level of Shetland's funding is used for one project?
- Which would be the most appropriate island to have the initial fixed link?
- Loss of island identity and associated social benefits with a fixed link
- Need to retain link spans for Skerries ferry and contingency if fixed link closed.

- 5.6.5 In terms of options suggested, a tunnel, fixed link allowing berthing for cruise ships and a causeway were all suggested.

5.7 Shetland Passenger Survey

- 5.7.1 The 2014 passenger surveys aimed to ascertain the reasons why people are using the ferry, and where users are travelling to and from. As part of this, respondents were asked to provide comments on several aspects of the service.

Ferry usage patterns

- 5.7.2 As might be expected, there is a high frequency of travel on the Bressay service with 50% of passengers stating that they make at least five return journeys per week, and a quarter indicating that they make two to four return journeys per week. This highlights the dependency of the island on the capital for daily life.
- 5.7.3 Passengers travelling on the Bressay service were generally travelling either to Bressay or Lerwick, with very few trips to elsewhere in Shetland. This is notable in comparison to the other ferry services, where a much higher number of passengers were travelling to and from locations other than Lerwick.

Timetable and operational issues

- 5.7.4 Comments relating to timetables and services included:
- Ferry that is early enough to get the first flight from Sumburgh; sailing at 6am required
 - More morning sailings required – an 08:00 or 08:15 service would help alleviate overcrowding on the 08:30 ferry
 - Issues with capacity and timings in the PM peak – 17:15 oversubscribed, a 17:30 sailing would help ease this

Onward connections

- 5.7.5 Bus and flight connections were mentioned as being key problems:
- Ferry does not meet bus times – better coordination required
 - Early ferry to connect with first flight from Sumburgh (mentioned above)

Fares

- 5.7.6 The high relative cost of fares was mentioned as a key issue in the Bressay survey responses. Notable points included:
- Bressay services require very different fares from the North Isles - daily commutes/access to all services
 - Expensive since Bressay residents must use it to access all facilities and work
 - Children and OAPs should be free at all times
 - Ferry is too expensive and puts people off living in Bressay - levels of service must be maintained
 - Red Cross trips should be free as no hospital or health centre on Bressay

- Season passes are expensive
- Fares should be aligned with crossing distance
- Very expensive for young people
- Cost for Bressay residents is unfair particularly given that there is no leisure or health centre or other facilities on the island
- Too expensive with family

Future changes and impacts

5.7.7 A bridge or tunnel was stated as being a better long-term option, as running the ferries is getting too expensive.

5.8 Summary

5.8.1 There has been extensive consultation undertaken with Bressay stakeholders as part of the STAG studies looking into the future transport option to the islands. A wealth of views on existing issues and potential future options have been expressed. To summarise, the key points relating to Bressay are:

- Island highly dependent on Lerwick for daily services
- Existing connection to town centre is key – option to walk or cycle
- Service generally believed to be reliable, frequent and largely unaffected by weather
- Some congestion on morning peak services
- Not possible to connect with early flight from Sumburgh – early morning service required
- Lack of late night services throughout week prohibit attendance at social events in Lerwick without overnight stay
- Sunday service is inadequate
- Fares are too high, especially in comparison to other routes which are considerably longer
- The need to travel so frequently makes it expensive living on Bressay
- Ferry costs also make businesses on the island uncompetitive
- A fixed link was stated as being the most sensible long-term option for the transport link
- Tunnel preferred over bridge, causeway or lift bridge
- Possibility of a chain ferry also suggested
- Fixed link could potentially open up areas of Bressay for development

6 Outer Isles – Fair Isle, Foula, Papa Stour and Out Skerries

6.1 Introduction

Outer Isles STAG

- 6.1.1 A STAG 1 study was completed in 2011, which jointly covered the transport issues to the Outer Isles (Out Skerries, Papa Stour, Foula and Fair Isle). Extensive consultation was undertaken with stakeholders in each island, through a combination of interviews, email correspondence and community workshops.
- 6.1.2 As such, this consultation material provides a core source of information for the Outer Isles chapter. It should be noted that the recent Shetland Passenger Survey, undertaken in 2014, did not cover the Outer Isles services.
- 6.1.3 The analysis of consultation findings in the STAG study was presented at both island specific and combined Outer Isles level. As such, this chapter follows this structure, with issues common to all islands reported alongside consideration of problems related to individual islands. Responses were not categorised by stakeholder group, as the small population of the islands made this approach impractical.

6.2 Key Findings – Outer Isles

Strengths

- 6.2.1 There was a general view that the ferry and air services, to an extent at least, worked reasonably well. The crews were described as being highly competent and very flexible, vital in order to operate services such as these.

Problems associated with the current links – Outer Isles

- 6.2.2 Problems reported as being common to all islands are reported under the headings below

Ferry service issues

- Disabled access not adequate on most of the vessels
- Adding a 'double run' is a grey area – unclear many extra passengers are required to warrant an extra ferry run
- No daily return service to all islands which means it is difficult to access the islands in a day to complete inspections etc

Air service issues

- No daily return service to all islands which means it is difficult to access the islands in a day to complete inspections etc
- Access for elderly or disabled passengers to the aircraft can be difficult
- Plane capacity - issues with weight restrictions and landings (e.g. tourists to Fair Isle and arrivals on Skerries)

- Can only fly during daylight hours
- Aircraft expensive to maintain
- Communications – issues with obtaining flight information from Tingwall
- Direct Flights will reschedule cancelled flights but sometimes will not fly at the weekend which can be problematic
- Timetable change so that school pupils would not miss lessons
- Timetable change so that weekend visitors do not have to take time off work to visit
- Community unsure about what the criteria for use of second aircraft is
- Tingwall facilities are poor

Fares

- Ferry and airfares currently subsidised but seem high to the community and some service providers

Onward connections

- Infrequent bus service between Lerwick and Sumburgh
- If transport out of the Isles is delayed then onward connections from Sumburgh can be missed which means extra cost and inconvenience for the traveller
- Not enough space for luggage on airport bus service to Sumburgh
- The buses from Sumburgh are not timed to meet the planes
- Dial-a-Ride service only goes to the bus station in Lerwick so have to make onward connections to doctors etc on their own

Emergency services

- Fire training is restricted on the Outer Isles because of difficulties with day access

Island Infrastructure

- Cost of airstrips

Freight

- New style buses do not carry as much freight as before (bus cannot take something longer than 2 metres)
- Charges are considered by some to be high
- Cannot take dogs on the buses on mainland Shetland

Access to Healthcare

- Fair Isle and Foula residents cannot attend a doctor's appointment in one day

- Doctor does not always access the Isles every 6 weeks as scheduled

Access to Education

- Issue of getting children to school on the mainland (cost, timings, capacity etc)
- Improvements and Future Options

Improvements and Future Options – Outer Isles

6.2.3 The suggested improvements and future options for transport links to the Outer Isles are listed under the headings below.

Ferry service improvements

- Amendments to timetable
- Daily services on all Outer Isles routes

Air Service improvements

- Operation of a bigger, more accessible, newer, cleaner, greener and less costly plane
- Amended timetable to account for issues such as length of day trips, cancelled flights on Fridays, etc
- Daily services to all Outer Isles
- Improved booking system – online
- Improved communications
- Protocol / system for the use of the Extra Regular Flight
- Additional double flight day in Winter
- Improved waiting facilities at Tingwall

Emergency Services

- Improved speed of service
- Add extra evening ferry runs for emergencies
- Daily flights to the Isles for training purposes

Onward Connections

- Dial-a-Ride service to be extended to people who are waiting at Tingwall all day, extended to go to the hospital and to Medical Practices
- More frequent bus services between boats and Lerwick and Lerwick to Sumburgh
- More flexible onward flights from Sumburgh
- More luggage capacity on airport bus to Sumburgh

- Re-schedule timetable so that services are integrated

Freight

- More capacity for freight on Shetland mainland buses
- Facility for transporting animals on public transport

Access to Healthcare

- Improve access for visiting doctor
- Improved awareness and flexibility

Access to Education

- Opportunities to access secondary education on the mainland should be continued

Cost

- Reduce cost of fares

6.3 Key Findings – Fair Isle

- 6.3.1 The consultation with Fair Isle stakeholders gave rise to a wide variety of views relating to the current transport services.
- 6.3.2 There were a number of positive comments made about the ferry service, including praise for the crew for being able to successfully deliver a vital service in often difficult conditions, provision of information and updates on sailing times was deemed to be good and also there was the recognition that the service provides a vital freight link. The improvement to the breakwater was recognised as having significant benefits, and it was stated that having the boat stationed on Fair Isle is very important.
- 6.3.3 The air service was stated as being a lifeline link for the island. The cost of fares was described as being reasonable, and the crew was deemed to be highly capable and helpful.
- 6.3.4 It was also stated that having plane and ferry services on alternate days worked well, and this situation has improved since then with flights 6 days a week.

Problems associated with the current links – Fair Isle

- 6.3.5 In terms of issues raised with the current services, these are discussed below.

Ferry service issues

- Good Shepherd IV is stretched for freight and passenger capacity
- Vessel is an uncomfortable ride in moderate to bad weather
- Crossing time is long
- Freight issues – loading/unloading of vehicles is via a crane, which is off-putting for passengers, and the vessel cannot carry any heavy machinery such as tractors
- Reaching capacity in terms of livestock transportation, especially with EU regulations on this

- Disabled/elderly access is problematic
- Vessel is uncomfortable
- Tourists can get confused by rescheduling of sailings and can sometimes get stranded on the island
- Bird Observatory attracts a lot of tourists, putting pressure on some sailings

Air service issues

- Delays are a big issues – 50% in winter and 20% in summer
- Reliability – 1 in 5 flights is cancelled
- No records of unmet demand
- Regular plane sometimes does not cope with demand, and the backup aircraft is somewhat smaller than the this
- Backup plane (6-seater) also has reduced luggage weight limit, so can be a constraint
- If on the second flight due to the first being full, that can lead to appointments on the mainland being missed
- Getting service update information from Direct Flight at Tingwall airport can be difficult
- Planes are ageing and unsuitable for elderly/disabled passengers
- Difficult to attend one-day events on mainland Shetland due to flight times
- Daylight flying limits day trip windows further in winter
- Lack of online booking system

Fares

- Neither ferry fares or airfares were frequently mentioned as being too high; these were generally viewed as acceptable at current levels, although there was a suggestion that single journeys were too expensive without a discount

Onward connections

- Dial-a-ride service generally deemed to be good, although an all-day service would be better
- Onward bus connections to Lerwick can involve a long wait at the airport
- Bus services between Lerwick and Sumburgh are infrequent, making connections to external flights problematic
- Delays to Fair Isle flight can lead to onward external flights from Sumburgh being missed, which is expensive and inconvenient
- Bus service on island would be useful for tourists

Island Infrastructure

- Cost of airstrip maintenance is high - ~£4,000 per year

Freight

- Freight only goes from bus station on a Tuesday
- No chilling facilities available on ferry

Access to Healthcare

- Doctor only visits island 9 days a year
- Cost of a day trip to visit doctor on mainland is expensive by plane – a faster ferry connection would help in this respect

Access to Education

- Issue of getting children to school on the mainland (cost, timings, capacity etc)

Improvements and Future Options –Fair Isle

6.3.6 Suggested improvements to the services included the following:

Ferry service improvements

- New modern, fit for purpose vessel, faster, more comfortable and providing disabled access and disabled facilities, but without reduction in crew numbers
- Improved infrastructure for new vessel
- Covered area for loading freight onto boat as part of a future upgrade of the boat

Air Service improvements

- Relocated air strip and add navigation aids to increase number of flights in and out
- Add flights from Sumburgh to Fair Isle
- Possibility of flight to Orkney

Onward Connections

- Dial-a-Ride service should be extended to people who are waiting at Tingwall all day, extended to go to the hospital and to medical practices
- Better onward connection to Sumburgh

Island Infrastructure

- Re-tarmac and maintain roads
- Bus service on the island

Freight

- Chill facilities on new ferry

- Ability to transport animals more easily and affordably

Access to Healthcare

- Consider registering Fair Isle's residents to Lerwick medical practice
- Refurbish Fair Isle surgery

Tourism

- Increase number of flights and/ or ferry crossings during tourist season

6.4 Key Findings – Foula

6.4.1 Several positive comments were made with regards to the existing transport services to Foula. Having the service based on Foula is described as making the islanders feel more secure, the crew is viewed as being very capable and flexible, and the option of a relief boat for additional freight and passengers is very helpful.

Problems associated with the current links – Foula

6.4.2 With regards to issues with the current services, these are summarised below

Ferry service issues

- Disabled access is problem on current vessel
- Boat is not comfortable

Air service issues

- Day flights get booked up by officials - there is often a waiting list to get in and out of the island
- Weather reports often inaccurate, due to local weather station closing
- Cancellations common

Fares

- Although subsidised, there is a view that it is too expensive to get to/from the island

Island Infrastructure

- Run as a charity which adds extra requirements and burden to the community
- Fire service provision for airstrip is expensive

Freight

- Snolda can no longer operate into Foula as the harbour has been allowed to silt up.
- Need provision for rerouting perishable freight through Tingwall rather than letting it sit in Walls
- Freight centre will only take certain size as the bus cannot take something longer than 2 metres

Access to Healthcare

- Doctor's surgery in Walls (historic location) which is difficult to access – boat sails on a Thursday which is the only day doctor is closed

Access to Education

- De-population of island caused by issues with transporting children to school
- Expense of transporting children home for weekend

Improvements and Future Options –Foula

6.4.3 Suggested improvements to the services included the following:

Ferry service improvements

- Newer vessel with increased comfort and disabled access provision
- Retain ferry service based on the island

Air Service improvements

- Amend timetable
- Improved communications at Tingwall
- Opportunity for wholly SIC operated inter-island air service

Fares

- Reduce fares on ferry and air services

Island Infrastructure

- Change the operation and management of the airstrip to SIC
- Install remote weather service at airstrip to relieve problems with fire crew having to go back and forth to take readings

Freight

- Keep Walls pier operational
- SIC to amend the Snolda charter quota
- Provide refrigeration facilities on vessel

Access to Healthcare

- Allow registration at the Lerwick medical practice

Access to Education

- Continue sharing flights for school children with Fair Isle
- Alter weekend timetable for plane travel to suit school children

- SIC to supplement cost of children returning home at weekend

6.5 Key Findings – Papa Stour

- 6.5.1 Several positive comments were made with regards to the existing transport services to Papa Stour. The ferry is described as being very good and meeting the general needs of the island. The crew is very helpful and the option of a double-run when the first sailing is full is very helpful. The ferry is adequate for transporting livestock.
- 6.5.2 In terms of air services, the one return flight a week was described as important, with the option of chartering extra flights if needed.

Problems associated with the current links – Papa Stour

- 6.5.3 With regards to issues with the current services, these are summarised below

Ferry service issues

- Double run service is not always effective as sometimes booked passengers do not turn up so two trips are made when all passengers could have fitted on one
- The ferry only takes 12 passengers
- An additional Sunday morning service would be useful as there is currently only one sailing on a Sunday in the evening

Air service issues

- No issues were raised in reality to the air service provision

Onward Connections

- Link from West Burrafirth to Lerwick – on a Friday and Saturday it is possible to catch a bus but otherwise essentially stranded at West Burrafirth if do not have private transport
- It is also difficult to get public transport (bus) from Lerwick to West Burrafirth – this is a missing link and discourages tourists without private transport from visiting the island
- From the North Link boat arriving in the morning in Lerwick it is difficult (even with a car) to catch the first ferry from West Burrafirth to Papa Stour
- There is a charge for unaccompanied children travelling on flights and they cannot do more than one 'leg' of a journey unaccompanied
- Tourists can access Lerwick from Papa Stour on a good public transport service, however the service from Lerwick to Papa Stour is poor

Fares

- There was little in the way of issues relating to fares, although a respondent indicated a desire to see a free transport service to and from the island

Improvements and Future Options –Papa Stour

- 6.5.4 Suggested improvements to the services included the following:

Ferry service improvements

- More effective/ informative booking system or penalty for those passengers who do not turn up for their booking
- Investigate passenger capacity – potential to be increased

Air Service improvements

- No improvements to the air service were mentioned

Onward connections

- Improve bus services and public transport integration from Lerwick and NorthLink to West Burrafirth to catch the boat

Freight

- Ensure that post and prescriptions service continues

6.6 Key Findings – Out Skerries

- 6.6.1 There were a number of positive comments made about the ferry service, including stating that the vessel is of a good standard and capacity is rarely an issue. The four day a week service (from Vidlin) is thought to have sailing times which allow day trips to the mainland.

Problems associated with the current links – Out Skerries

- 6.6.2 With regards to issues with the current services, these are summarised below

Ferry service issues

- No information at Lerwick or Vidlin for ferry to Out Skerries and little information at Out Skerries terminal – can cause confusion for tourists
- No Saturday morning ferry to Lerwick returning in the afternoon
- Can book ferry up to 5pm the evening before sailing – sometimes causes problem as if only one person has booked the ferry then decides not to go the ferry has turned up for no reason as has no passengers

Air service issues

- At Tingwall there is nothing with information about the Out Skerries but information board has information about all other services
- Old design of plane (1965) – new plane required
- If smaller plane is being used and the winds are not favourable then drop people off at Whalsay to reduce weight for safe landing on Out Skerries

Onward Connections

- Can access 6pm ferry to Out Skerries by bus from Lerwick but cannot access Lerwick from Vidlin by bus
- Can only access Out Skerries by bus on a Friday evening from Lerwick
- Residents have to take car on ferry if want access anywhere once they are on mainland

- Bus service is not adequate for tourists to access Out Skerries

Fares

- There were no issues identified relating to fares

Island Infrastructure

- Longer airstrip required – can only land with headwind of 10 knots or greater
- Vidlin (mainland) needs upgrading for freight

Freight

- Issues with transporting fish by boat worsens in winter time with the poorer weather

Access to Healthcare

- Little flexibility when making appointments

Improvements and Future Options – Out Skerries

6.6.3 Suggested improvements to the services included the following:

Ferry service improvements

- Improve information on electronic sign posts and at ferry terminals
- Provide ferry service when planes cancelled

Air Service improvements

- More flights
- Longer airstrip

Onwards connections

- Improved public transport on the mainland to Vidlin (add bus from Vidlin to Lerwick at 5.45pm on Friday and bus from Lerwick to Vidlin on Sunday)

Fares

- No changes were suggested in terms of fares

Island Infrastructure

- Upgrade terminal at Vidlin
- Widen bridge at ends to allow for larger vehicles to cross

Freight

- Provision of refrigeration facilities at Vidlin

6.7 Summary

- 6.7.1 There are a wide range of issues and opportunities relating to the Outer Isles transport services. These are summarised by island below.

Issues and Opportunities – Fair Isle

Ferry service - issues

- Good Shepherd is stretched for freight and passenger capacity, livestock transportation an issue with EU regulations
- Vessel is an uncomfortable ride in moderate to bad weather and crossing time is long
- Disabled/elderly access is problematic
- Bird Observatory attracts a lot of tourists, putting pressure on some sailings
- Tourists can get confused by rescheduling of sailings and can sometimes get stranded on the island

Ferry service – opportunities

- New modern, fit for purpose vessel, faster, more comfortable and providing disabled access and facilities, but without reduction in crew numbers
- Improved infrastructure for new vessel
- Covered area for loading freight onto boat as part of a future upgrade of the boat

Air service – issues

- Delays are an issue – 50% in winter and 20% in summer
- Reliability – 1 in 5 flights is cancelled
- No records of unmet demand
- Regular plane sometimes does not cope with demand, and the backup aircraft is somewhat smaller than the this (baggage weight restrictions too)
- Planes are ageing and unsuitable for elderly/disabled passengers
- Difficult to attend one-day events on mainland Shetland due to flight times
- Daylight flying limits day trip windows further in winter
- Lack of online booking system

Air service – opportunities

- Relocated air strip and add navigation aids to increase number of flights in and out
- Add flights from Sumburgh to Fair Isle
- Possibility of flight to Orkney

Issues and Opportunities – Foula

Ferry service - issues

- Disabled access is problem on current vessel
- Boat is not comfortable

Ferry service - opportunities

- Newer vessel with increased comfort and disabled access provision
- Retain ferry service based on the island

Air service – issues

- Day flights get booked up by officials - there is often a waiting list to get in and out of the island
- Weather reports often inaccurate, due to local weather station closing
- Cancellations common

Air service – opportunities

- Amend timetable
- Improved communications at Tingwall
- Opportunity for wholly SIC operated inter-island air service
- SIC to operate airstrip

Issues and Opportunities – Papa Stour

Ferry service – issues

- Double run service is not always effective/efficient; no-shows often mean only one sailing was actually required
- Low capacity - only takes 12 passengers
- Some gaps in timetable – Wednesday and Sunday sailing times not ideal

Ferry service – opportunities

- More effective/ informative booking system or penalty for those passengers who do not turn up for their booking
- Investigate passenger capacity – potential to be increased
- Timetable tailored to school children returning to mainland on Sunday
- Summer timetable to be in operation all year round

Air service – issues

- None reported

Air service – opportunities

- None suggested

Issues and Opportunities – Out Skerries

Ferry service – issues

- Lack of information at Lerwick or Vidlin for ferry to Out Skerries can cause confusion for tourists
- No Saturday morning ferry to Lerwick returning in the afternoon
- Issues with booking cancellations –if only one booking (which is subsequently cancelled), then ferry can turn up with nobody to carry
- Vidlin port (mainland) needs to be upgraded for freight

Ferry service – opportunities

- Improve information on electronic sign posts and at ferry terminals
- Provide ferry service when planes cancelled

Air service – issues

- Lack of information at Tingwall for Out Skerries
- Old design of plane (1965) – new plane required
- Runway too short – landings wind dependent

Air service – opportunities

- More flights
- Longer airstrip

7 Network wide themes

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 The review of consultation material in previous chapters has produced a wealth of information regarding the issues currently affecting transport services to the islands, and opportunities for these to be improved.
- 7.1.2 Each island is very different, with a unique set of circumstances; consideration on an individual basis is important. However, there are also several themes common to many or indeed all islands. This chapter briefly summarises these network wide issues and opportunities.

7.2 Ferry Service Issues

- Age of vessels on most routes
- Disabled access and comfort of vessels on most routes
- Capacity issues on some routes, with some sailing oversubscribed at peak times
- Lack of sailings early enough to allow connection with first flight from Sumburgh on all routes
- Lack of sailings late enough to allow attendance at mainland social events without an overnight stay, an issue on most routes
- Poor integration and connection opportunities, between Yell Sound and Bluemull Sound/Whalsay in particular
- Onward connections via bus not well integrated on most routes
- Fares deemed to be too high on some routes, lack of season passes and islander discounts a key theme
- Reliability and crossing times an issue on longer routes, particularly Outer Isles
- Cutbacks to services have been damaging and eroded island life on some routes

7.3 Ferry Service Opportunities

- Newer, larger vessels required on most routes
- Some ports require significant upgrade, particularly if they are to accommodate larger vessels
- Earlier sailings to connect with first from Sumburgh, on all routes
- Later sailings to allow attendance at mainland social events without an overnight stay, on most routes
- Better integration between ferry timetables, Yell Sound and Bluemull Sound/Whalsay in particular
- Fare reductions, including season tickets and islander discounts

7.4 Air Service Issues

7.4.1 Air services currently serve the Outer Isles only, so issues listed here are relevant to this island group only.

- Ageing aircraft
- Reliability issues due to weather
- Difficult access for elderly/disabled passengers
- Restricted to flying in daylight hours
- Day return trip opportunities limited
- Lack of facilities and information at Tingwall

7.5 Air Service Opportunities

- Navigation aids to provide more opportunities to land
- Newer planes
- Timetable enhancements

7.6 Fixed Links

7.6.1 A recurring theme across some islands was the option of a fixed link replacing the ferry service. Due to vast distances, this was not a realistic proposition for the Outer Isles.

7.6.2 The locations where a fixed link was suggested included Unst –Yell (Bluemull Sound), Yell Sound, Whalsay – mainland and Bressay – mainland. In terms of the nature the fixed link, a tunnel was commonly seen as the preferred option, with bridges and causeways being alternatives.