

Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

Draft Interim Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty Report



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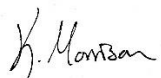


Draft Interim Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty Report
Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

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Appendix A Overall Summary of Impacts



Executive Summary

This interim Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD) report has been prepared to support the Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme (IITCP) Network Strategy Outline Business Case (OBC). It provides a programme-level assessment of potential equality and socio-economic impacts associated with the emerging route option typologies and network recommendations at this stage of development.

The Programme aims to improve transport connectivity for Shetland's ferry-served island communities, recognising the essential role of inter-island services in enabling access to healthcare, education, employment, goods and services, and social participation. Options considered at this interim stage include: Business as Usual (maintaining existing service patterns with asset renewal), incremental ferry enhancements to improve reliability and resilience, more comprehensive ferry service enhancements (including where relevant increased frequency and extended operating hours), and fixed link options where these are being explored.

The interim assessment has been undertaken in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The assessment considers all protected characteristics and focuses in more detail on those where there is a clear and credible pathway for differential impact in the Shetland island context, particularly age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, race, and religion or belief. Consideration is also given to the ways in which the Programme may affect socio-economic disadvantage through affordability, access to opportunities, and resilience to disruption.

The evidence base includes available baseline information on population, deprivation and service access, supported by officer and stakeholder input gathered through structured working sessions. Feedback from engagement indicates strong interest in improvements that reduce disruption, increase journey choice, and improve day-to-day accessibility, alongside concerns about affordability, the experience of non-car users, and the need to manage change in a way that protects island communities during transition.

At programme level, the interim findings indicate the following:

- Business as Usual options are likely to maintain existing barriers and are generally assessed as minor adverse for equality and socio-economic outcomes on candidate fixed link routes (Bluemull Sound, Bressay, Whalsay and Yell), reflecting continued timetable dependency, disruption risk, and cumulative cost and time burdens for frequent and time-critical travel.
- Incremental ferry enhancements are generally assessed as minor beneficial, primarily through improved reliability, resilience, passenger experience and, where applicable, modest timetable improvements.
- More comprehensive ferry enhancements are generally assessed as beneficial and, in some contexts, potentially significant, where increased frequency, extended operating hours, improved capacity, and improved affordability reduce structural barriers affecting protected groups and households experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.



- Fixed link options (where proposed) have the potential to deliver substantial benefits by removing timetable dependency and improving reliability and resilience. However, outcomes are strongly dependent on inclusive design and supporting measures, in particular affordable charging or tolling approaches (where relevant), accessible public transport provision that protects non-car users, and practical arrangements for active travel.

A key interim conclusion is that infrastructure and service models must be considered together. Where a fixed link could change the location of interchange or increase reliance on private car access, complementary public transport, accessibility and affordability measures will be critical to ensuring benefits are distributed fairly and that new barriers are not created.

The interim findings will be used to inform option refinement, the development of mitigation and enhancement measures, and targeted evidence gathering ahead of a final EqlA and FSD at preferred option stage.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Armed Forces Covenant Duty	This duty requires certain public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising specified functions.
Consumer Duty	In the context of the assessment, it considers whether the options are likely to deliver fair, transparent and proportionate outcomes for users, particularly those who may be more vulnerable due to socio-economic disadvantage, geography or limited transport choices.
Double-ended ferry	A ferry designed to operate in both directions without needing to turn around. It has a wheelhouse, propulsion and a loading ramp at each end, allowing vehicles to drive on at one end and drive off at the other.
Fairer Scotland Duty	Fairer Scotland Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (Scotland) Regulations 2018, which requires consideration of how strategic decisions can reduce inequalities of outcomes caused by socio-economic disadvantage.
Interim Impact Assessments	A comprehensive suite of interim impact assessments has been prepared to support SIC in meeting their statutory duties and to consider the implications of the IITCP Network Strategy in accordance with relevant legislation.
Linkspan	A moveable bridge or ramp at a ferry terminal that connects the quayside to the vehicle deck of a ferry. The linkspan adjusts with the tide to maintain a level surface for vehicles driving on and off the vessel.
Protected characteristics	The nine characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010 on the basis of which it is unlawful to discriminate. These are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.
Public Sector Equality Duty	Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations
Seakeeping	The ability of a vessel to operate safely and comfortably in rough sea conditions. A vessel with good seakeeping characteristics is better able to maintain its course and speed in heavy weather, reducing the risk of service cancellations.
Short-shipped	A term used to describe goods or cargo that have been presented for transport but could not be carried on the intended sailing, typically due to insufficient deck capacity.
Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG)	The Scottish Government's guidance framework for appraising transport projects and interventions. It sets out the process for identifying transport problems, developing options and assessing them against a range of criteria including environment, economy, safety, equality and accessibility.
Transport Planning Objective	A specific, measurable objective set at the outset of a transport appraisal that defines what the investment is seeking to achieve. Options are appraised against the TPOs to determine how well they address the identified transport problems.



List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
FSD	Fairer Scotland Duty
IITCP	Inter-Island Connectivity Programme
NHS	National Health Service
OBC	Outline Business Case
SIC	Shetland Islands Council
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SOC	Strategic Outline Case
STAG	Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance
TPO	Transport Planning Objective

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This interim Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD) impact assessment report has been prepared by Stantec UK on behalf of Shetland Islands Council (SIC) in support of the Shetland Inter-Island Connectivity Programme (IITCP) Network Strategy Outline Business Case (OBC). The purpose of the Shetland IITCP is to develop a high-level timed and costed sequence of island connectivity investments which, taken together, will form an agreed network strategy to meet the needs of Shetland's island communities.
- 1.1.2 The report fulfils statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and the FSD, and forms part of a wider suite of impact assessments that will inform future decision making as the programme progresses. It provides evidence of how equality and socio-economic considerations have been identified and considered during the development of the network strategy and option typologies.
- 1.1.3 This report is intended to be read alongside the Network Strategy OBC. It does not restate the full strategic case, option development process or economic appraisal, which are set out in detail in the OBC. Instead, it focuses on the implications of the Shetland IITCP for people and communities and on how potential impacts have been considered at a programme level.

1.2 Shetland IITCP Programme Context

- 1.2.1 The Shetland IITCP is a long term programme of work to develop a timed and costed sequence of interventions to improve transport connectivity between Shetland's island communities. The programme covers eight ferry-served islands: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell. The geographic scope of Shetland IITCP is shown below in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.2.2 The Shetland IITCP has been established by SIC to consider long term solutions for sustaining and improving transport links across Shetland's islands. The programme responds to a range of strategic challenges, including ageing assets, operational resilience, accessibility, affordability, workforce sustainability and the need to support inclusive economic and social outcomes for island communities. A range of option typologies is being considered, including enhanced ferry-based solutions and fixed link options, depending on route characteristics and future demand.

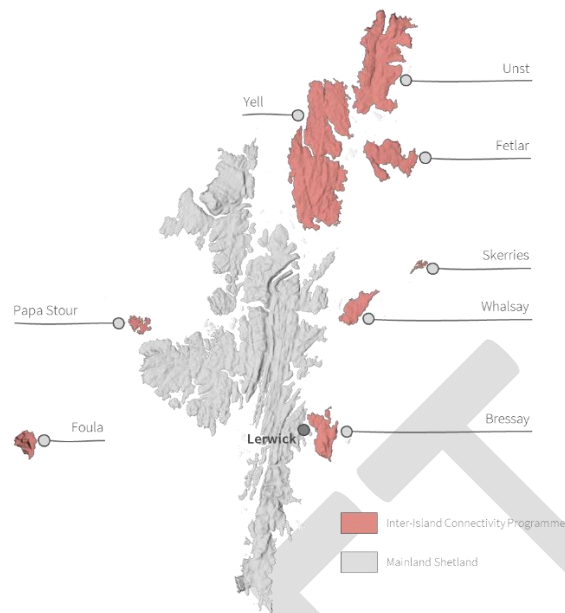


Figure 1.1: Geographic scope of the Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

- 1.2.3 The study area for the Shetland IITCP includes eight island communities currently connected to Shetland Mainland via ferry services operated by SIC. These include: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell.
- 1.2.4 It is important to highlight that there are two strands to the IITCP study and option generation process:
- **Candidate fixed link islands¹ (Bressay, Unst (plus Fetlar, as an integral element of Bluemull Sound), Whalsay and Yell):** For these five islands, the options increment up from the present-day position to a 'Ferry Do Max' option, which is effectively a ferry comparator to a fixed link. The responses to the resident survey for these islands were of a sufficient number to highlight the key areas of dissatisfaction with the service. When combined with other secondary data, it was possible to develop detailed option packages for consideration that incrementally address the problems expressed by communities.
 - **Foula, Papa Stour and Skerries:** For these smaller and more geographically remote islands, the option generation was focused on asset replacement and increments to the current ferry service. The option packages were defined through interviews with each community, supplemented by other secondary data.
- 1.2.5 An overview of the options for each island is provided below in **Figure 1.2**.

¹ It should be noted that a fixed link to Fetlar was considered and discounted from further consideration in the Strategic Outline Case.

	Business as Usual	Ferry 'Do Something'	Ferry 'Do Maximum'	Fixed Link
Bressay				
Yell				
Unst				
Whalsay				
Fetlar				
Foula			—	—
Papa Stour			—	—
Skerries			—	—

Figure 1.2: Option Packaging for Each Island

1.3 Interim Impact Assessment Overview

1.3.1 A comprehensive suite of interim impact assessments has been prepared to support SIC in meeting their statutory duties and to consider the implications of the IITCP Network Strategy in accordance with relevant legislation. A screening exercise was undertaken which confirmed that the following statutory impact assessments are to be prepared in respect of the IITCP Network Strategy:

- **Equality Impact Assessment**
- **Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment**
- Island Communities Impact Assessment
- Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment
- Climate Change Impact Assessment

1.3.2 This Integrated EqIA and FSD report also provides consideration to the Consumer Duty under the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 in **Section 2.7** and the Armed Forces Covenant in **Section 2.8**. These are both covered further in **Section 13** which outlines future assessment considerations for each respective duty.

1.3.3 The screening exercise also recommended the preparation of a non-statutory Health Impact Assessment to understand the implications of the preferred options on key health and wellbeing considerations across Shetland and the communities directly affected by the IITCP routes.

1.3.4 The Shetland IITCP has been established by SIC to consider long term solutions for sustaining and improving transport links across Shetland's islands. The existing inter-island



transport system is essential to daily life and underpins access to services, community wellbeing and the functioning of sectors of national importance. However, ageing infrastructure, increasing operational pressures and rising expectations around resilience, accessibility and decarbonisation mean that the current network faces challenges that will intensify over time.

1.4 Purpose of the Interim EqIA and FSD

- 1.4.1 This interim assessment forms part of a wider suite of impact assessments that have informed the development of the **IITCP Network Strategy - Outline Business Case** and specification of an overall preferred network option. The impact assessment process has sought to ensure that decisions about future connectivity consider the wellbeing, rights and interests of different population and community groups; reflect Shetland's unique island context; and contribute to the development of fair, inclusive and sustainable outcomes.
- 1.4.2 This is an interim assessment; option definitions, costs and operational assumptions may vary in maturity across routes. The purpose is to identify likely differential and disproportionate impacts early so that options can be refined, mitigations can be designed in, and evidence needs can be targeted. A final integrated EqIA and FSD will be prepared once route-level preferred options and the overall preferred network option and sequencing are confirmed.

1.5 Relationship to the Outline Business Case

Role of the EqIA and FSD within the Business Case Process

- 1.5.1 This report supports the OBC by providing structured evidence on equality and socio-economic impacts at a programme level. It complements the strategic, economic and financial analysis presented in the OBC and helps demonstrate that due regard has been given to statutory duties in the development of the network strategy.
- 1.5.2 The assessment has been undertaken in parallel with option development. Findings have been shared with the programme team to inform the identification of option strengths, risks and mitigation measures.

Scope and Coverage

- 1.5.3 The scope of this report includes:
- Programme level assessment of potential impacts arising from different option typologies.
 - Consideration of impacts on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
 - Consideration of inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage in line with the FSD.
- 1.5.4 Detailed option appraisal, route specific design assumptions and cost information are provided in the OBC and are not repeated here.



2 EqIA and FSD Assessment Approach

2.1 Legislative Duties

2.1.1 Public authorities in Scotland are required to apply a range of impact assessments to ensure that strategic proposals take account of societal needs and rights, and that they advance positive and fair outcomes. This interim impact assessment report considers the following statutory duties and associated assessments:

- Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations;
- FSD under the Equality Act 2010 (Scotland) Regulations 2018, which requires consideration of how strategic decisions can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage; and
- Consumer Duty Assessment under the Consumer Scotland Act 2020.

2.1.2 The assessment has been informed by SIC policies and guidance alongside Scottish Government guidance.

2.2 Integrated Assessment Approach

2.2.1 An integrated approach has been adopted, recognising the strong overlap between equality and socio-economic considerations in island contexts. Many of the factors that shape disadvantage in Shetland, such as transport dependency, cost of living pressures and access to services, affect both protected groups and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

2.2.2 The assessment therefore considers EqIA and FSD requirements together, while clearly distinguishing between protected characteristics and socio-economic factors where required.

2.2.3 This is an interim EqIA and FSD report. It is intended to provide early identification of likely impacts so that options can be refined and evidence needs can be targeted ahead of a final EqIA and FSD once route-level preferred options and network sequencing are confirmed.

2.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

2.3.1 An EqIA is used to help ensure that policies, projects or decisions do not unlawfully discriminate and that they advance equality in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. This includes having due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations.

Protected Characteristics – Assessment Scope

2.3.2 Protected characteristics include: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership.

2.3.3 All protected characteristics have been screened. Detailed assessment has focused on those where a credible pathway exists for differential impacts to arise as a result of the Shetland IITCP. The scoped-in characteristics are: age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, race,



and religion or belief. Other characteristics are scoped out at this stage on the basis that no credible mechanism has been identified through which the programme would result in differential or disproportionate outcomes. These are summarised below in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1: Assessment Scope – Protected Characteristics

Protected characteristic	In / out of scope	Rationale (summary)
Age	In scope	Potential for differential impacts through accessibility, safety, affordability and differing travel needs across life stages.
Disability	In scope	Potential impacts on physical access, step-free provision, journey complexity, information provision and reliability.
Sex	In scope	Differences in travel patterns, caring responsibilities and safety perceptions may lead to differential impacts.
Pregnancy and maternity	In scope	Potential impacts linked to comfort, walking distances, seating, step-free access and safety for pregnant people and those with young children.
Race (including ethnicity and nationality)	In scope	Potential for differential impacts through affordability, reliance on public transport, and barriers in information and service navigation.
Religion or belief	In scope (proportionate)	Impacts not anticipated to be significant, but a proportionate check helps ensure no unintended disadvantage linked to travel timing or access to facilities.
Gender reassignment	Scoped out	No credible pathway identified for differential impacts at this stage, assuming inclusive, non-discriminatory provision.
Sexual orientation	Scoped out	No credible pathway identified for differential impacts at this stage.
Marriage and civil partnership	Scoped out	Applies primarily to employment and vocational training; the programme relates to transport services and infrastructure rather than employment practice.

EqIA Guide Framing Questions

2.3.4 The below guide framing questions have been developed through the scoping process to help understand the potential equality implications of different options proposed as part of the Shetland IITCP. The guide framing questions form the basis of the interim impact assessments:

1. Access and Reliability

- How would changes in journey time, reliability or connections affect protected characteristic groups?
- Would options improve or restrict reliable access to health care, education or employment?

2. Accessibility



- How would the physical accessibility of options affect people with mobility, sensory or cognitive impairments?
- Would options improve or reduce access to information, boarding and independent travel?

3. Participation and daily life

- How would options affect participation in work, education, social and family life for protected groups?
- Would groups with higher travel dependence, including older people, disabled people and pregnant people, be disproportionately affected?

2.4 Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD)

2.4.1 FSD requirements were introduced by the Equality Act 2010 (Scotland) Amendment Regulations in 2018. This duty places a legal responsibility on public authorities to actively consider how they can reduce socio-economic inequalities when making strategic decisions.

2.4.2 The FSD requires public authorities, when making strategic decisions, to consider how to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. The duty is relevant to transport connectivity decisions because affordability, access to services, and exposure to disruption can affect households with low income, low wealth and limited resilience disproportionately.

2.4.3 Under the FSD assessment framework, the following issues should be considered, as described below and shown in **Figure 2.1**:

- Socio-economic disadvantage, which is influenced by low income, low/no wealth, material and area deprivation and socio-economic background; and
- Inequality of outcomes, including education, skills, employment, crime, health and wellbeing, life expectancy, living standards, poverty and connectivity.

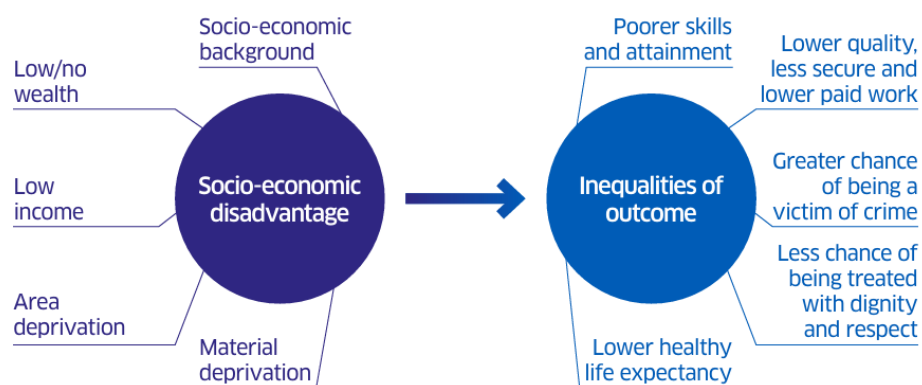


Figure 2.1: Socio-Economic Disadvantage and Inequalities of Outcome. Source: Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance (Scottish Government, 2021).

2.4.4 The assessment also considers impact on:



- **‘Communities of Place’** – “people who are bound together because of where they reside, work, visit or otherwise spend a continuous portion of their time. For example, people in particular rural, remote and island areas”; and
- **‘Communities of Interest’** – “Groups of people who share an experience, for example people who have experienced homelessness or care; or those who share one or more of the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010; or groups who may share an identity”.

- 2.4.5 The interim EqIA and FSD assessments considers these factors in an integrated way by examining how proposed options may affect people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and unequal outcomes, alongside impacts on protected characteristic groups and communities.
- 2.4.6 In line with the FSD framework, the assessment explores how changes in access, reliability and affordability of transport could influence connectivity to employment, education, health services and wider opportunities, particularly for people on low incomes, experiencing deprivation, or with limited access to private transport. It also considers potential implications for inequalities in outcomes such as health and wellbeing, living standards and social participation.
- 2.4.7 These impacts are assessed across both communities of place, including rural, remote and island communities where transport dependency and isolation may be greater, and communities of interest, including groups sharing protected characteristics or lived experiences such as disability, older age or socio-economic disadvantage.

2.5 Recognising Socio-Economic Vulnerability in Island Communities

- 2.5.1 The nature and experience of socio-economic disadvantage in Scotland’s island communities often differs significantly from the patterns observed in urban areas. Traditional measures of deprivation, which tend to focus on income, employment, education and health indicators at a neighbourhood scale, do not always fully capture the lived reality of disadvantage in rural, remote and island settings. These communities experience unique structural and geographic constraints that influence the cost of living, access to essential services, employment patterns and resilience.
- 2.5.2 Smaller population sizes can conceal localised disadvantage within area-based measures, creating a risk that inequalities are masked within aggregate statistics. Island communities often exhibit high levels of self-reliance, strong community cohesion and informal support networks, but these strengths can sometimes obscure underlying vulnerabilities related to limited service availability, reliance on travel to the mainland and restricted economic opportunities. These factors also interact with transport dependency, particularly where ferry services represent a daily gateway to employment, education, childcare, health care and retail services.
- 2.5.3 Socio-economic vulnerability in island communities is therefore best understood not only through traditional deprivation indicators but also through contextual markers that reflect the particular pressures of remote and island life. The FSD assessment should take these dynamics into account when identifying who may be disadvantaged, how disadvantage is experienced and how future transport decisions may influence inequalities of outcome.
- 2.5.4 An overview of key factors is presented below in
- 2.5.5 **Table 2.2.**



Table 2.2: Key Factors Influencing Socio-Economic Disadvantage in Island Communities.

Factor	Description
Cost of living differences	Island households face higher prices for food, fuel, vehicle costs, construction, energy and household goods because of freight costs, supply chain limitations and fewer local retailers. This can create additional financial strain that is not visible in standard deprivation indices.
Transport dependency and affordability	Many essential services are located on the Shetland Mainland, so residents of smaller islands may rely heavily on ferry travel. Multi-leg journeys, fares, time spent travelling and the risk of service disruption can compound disadvantage for low-income households and for those in insecure or low-paid work.
Access to employment and training	Many essential services are located on the Shetland Mainland, so residents of smaller islands may rely heavily on ferry travel. Multi-leg journeys, fares, time spent travelling and the risk of service disruption can compound disadvantage for low-income households and for those in insecure or low-paid work.
Service availability and geographic access	Sparse local services, fewer childcare options, reduced access to health care and limited retail choice can lead to hidden forms of deprivation. Even where incomes are moderate, the practical cost and complexity of accessing essential services can be substantial.
Energy costs and housing condition	Higher rates of fuel poverty, older housing stock and greater exposure to weather conditions can create financial vulnerability that is not always visible in conventional socio-economic datasets.
Demographic structure	Ageing populations, declining working-age populations and the out-migration of young people affect community sustainability. For households with limited financial resilience, these demographic patterns can compound barriers to employment, care and service access.
Community resilience and social capital	While island communities often have strong social networks, these can mask underlying issues of dependency, limited capacity in small populations and vulnerability when informal support systems are strained.
Emergency access and reliability risks	Disruption to transport connections can have more pronounced socio-economic impacts in islands where alternatives are limited. Missed shifts, cancelled appointments and unstable access to mainland services can contribute to unequal outcomes for residents with fewer financial buffers.
Seasonal pressures and sector dependency	Dependence on specific sectors, such as aquaculture, fisheries or tourism, can create volatility in employment and income. Households reliant on these sectors may face additional vulnerability during downturns or disruptions.

FSD Guide Framing Questions

- 2.5.6 The below guide framing questions have been developed through the scoping process to help identify key issues under the FSD in the context of the Shetland IITCP. The guide framing questions form the basis of the interim impact assessment:



1. Access to Essential Services and Opportunities

- How might each option affect the ability of households to access essential services, education, training and employment, particularly where these are concentrated on the Shetland Mainland? Is this impact differential for households experiencing socio-economic disadvantage?
- Could improvements to routes help reduce inequalities of outcome by improving the reliability of access to opportunities for island residents currently facing long, costly or uncertain journeys?

2. Economic Inclusion and Local Economies

- How might different options influence access to employment, including shift, seasonal and entry-level work, for people with limited transport choices or financial resources?
- How could improved connectivity support local economies, businesses and service provision, including resilience to weather-related disruption and more reliable access to supply chains?

3. Transport Affordability

- Would any option improve affordability for low-income households by reducing journey times, travel complexity or reliance on private vehicles?

2.6 Assessment Framework and Criteria

- 2.6.1 The assessment will consider each of the options and their potential impact on different island geographies.
- 2.6.2 The following matrix, as shown in **Table 2.3**, will be used to assess the scale of any potential impact linked to each impact assessment. The assessment criteria provide an objective means of undertaking and reporting the assessments to help inform decision making. Commentary will be provided on any identified impacts within the main assessment. The colour coding also allows for rapid identification of the impacts most likely to be significant, generally those assessed as having a major positive or negative effect. Where any major negative impacts are identified mitigations and recommendations are provided.

Table 2.3: Assessment Criteria Matrix

Impact Score	Description	Symbol
Major Beneficial Effect	The objective or policy contributes significantly to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty, particularly to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	++
Minor Beneficial Effect	The objective or policy contributes slightly to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty, particularly to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	+
Neutral / Negligible Effect	The objective or policy has a neutral effect on the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty, or the relationship is negligible.	0



Impact Score	Description	Symbol
Minor Adverse Effect	The objective or policy adversely affects the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty, particularly with respect to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	-
Major Adverse Effect	The objective or policy significantly adversely affects the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty, particularly with respect to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	--
Uncertain Effect	The objective or policy has an uncertain relationship to the Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty requirements or insufficient detail, or information may be available to enable an assessment to be made.	?
No Clear Relationship	There is no clear relationship between the objective or policy and the achievement of the Public Sector Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty.	~

2.7 Consumer Duty

- 2.7.1 At this stage, Consumer Duty is being considered within the assessment by examining whether emerging Shetland IITCP options are likely to deliver fair, transparent and proportionate outcomes for users, particularly those who may be more vulnerable due to socio-economic disadvantage, geography or limited transport choices.
- 2.7.2 The interim assessment considers how options may affect the fairness of access to transport services, the clarity and predictability of journeys, and the balance between cost, reliability and quality from the perspective of users. Particular attention is given to whether proposals could reasonably be expected to avoid foreseeable harm, such as creating unaffordable costs, reduced choice or increased complexity for certain users, and whether they have the potential to improve outcomes through more reliable, accessible and resilient connectivity.
- 2.7.3 Consumer Duty considerations are therefore embedded alongside EqlA and FSD analysis, with a focus on identifying risks and opportunities early, recognising that more detailed assessment of user impacts will be required as options are developed and refined.
- 2.7.4 Further consideration is provided in **Section 13** of this report.

2.8 Armed Forces Consideration

- 2.8.1 There is no separate “protected characteristic” for Armed Forces status under the Equality Act 2010. However, Armed Forces communities can overlap with protected characteristics, for example disability (including service-related injuries), pregnancy and maternity, age, and carers. These impacts are therefore partly captured through the EqlA analysis already undertaken.
- 2.8.2 The principal Armed Forces-specific statutory consideration is the Armed Forces Covenant Duty introduced through the Armed Forces Act 2021. This duty requires certain public bodies to have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant when exercising specified functions. The duty is focused on preventing disadvantage and supporting special consideration where appropriate for service-related factors. It applies to relevant bodies in relation to areas such as healthcare, housing and education, rather than transport policy in general. In the context of this programme, the practical implication is:



- The Covenant duty is most directly relevant where transport changes could affect access to healthcare, education or housing services for service personnel, veterans or their families, or where service delivery arrangements could indirectly create disadvantage for these groups.
- Even where the duty does not directly apply to transport functions, applying Covenant principles remains good practice, especially in remote and island contexts where access barriers can compound disadvantage.

2.8.3 Further consideration is provided in **Section 13** of this report.

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3 Governance, Participation and Evidence

3.1 Governance and Oversight

- 3.1.1 The impact assessment process has been overseen through the programme governance arrangements established for the IITCP. Overall oversight has been provided by the Shetland IITCP Programme Board, which has monitored progress, provided strategic direction and ensured alignment between the impact assessments and the wider OBC. This has helped to ensure that assessment findings are integrated into programme development and decision-making at an appropriate stage.
- 3.1.2 An Impact Assessment Working Group was established to support this process, comprising SIC officers with relevant policy, legal and community expertise. The group has also provided specialist input through a series of topic-specific workshops, designed to capture service-level insights on local pressures, risks and opportunities associated with inter-island connectivity. These workshops have informed the development and refinement of emerging findings across the impact assessments.
- 3.1.3 Across all themes, the engagement consistently highlighted affordability and the cumulative cost of frequent travel, reliability and disruption impacts (including weather and staffing constraints), timetable-related barriers that drive exclusion or overnight stays, and the knock-on effects on access to services, workforce delivery, business costs and social participation. A further recurring message was the need to consider inclusive access alongside any connectivity change, particularly for non-car users, and to recognise potential place-based effects on island identity and community cohesion where connectivity is significantly altered.

3.2 Engagement and Evidence

- 3.2.1 This interim report draws on baseline evidence and engagement undertaken for the Shetland IITCP Case for Change and Strategic Outline Case (SOC), and on locally available data sources such as the Shetland Partnership's indicators and profiles, health and resident survey material, and engagement findings gathered to date. The assessment also draws on a range of existing evidence from previous consultations, survey and community engagement undertaken as part of transport and island policy development relevant to the Shetland IITCP.
- 3.2.2 This interim report does not present detailed consultation findings. Instead, it focuses on how engagement evidence informs understanding of potential impacts and priorities.

4 Baseline Data & Engagement Evidence

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 This section outlines the evidence base used to inform the interim EqIA and FSD assessment for the Shetland IITCP, including the study area and key data sources used to establish baseline conditions and potential impacts.
- 4.1.2 The assessment is based primarily on local datasets and analysis prepared by the Shetland Partnership and its associated public and third sector bodies, providing context on inequality, socio-economic disadvantage and access to services within island communities.

4.2 Study Area

- 4.2.1 The study area comprises eight of Shetland's ferry-served island communities: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell. These islands vary in population size, demographic profile, economic structure, service provision and connectivity to the Shetland Mainland.
- 4.2.2 The islands are characterised by small, dispersed populations, high reliance on ferry services and limited alternative transport options, with remoteness and weather exposure shaping access, affordability and resilience.
- 4.2.3 While sharing common island challenges, localities differ in demographic change, health outcomes, employment structure, income levels, housing and digital connectivity, and service provision; this influences how impacts are experienced.

4.3 Data Sources

- 4.3.1 The interim impact assessments are underpinned by baseline analysis for the study area's eight island communities. This has drawn on a wealth of available evidence including routine census data, public health data, and briefings prepared through the Shetland Partnership, including local organisations such as the SIC and National Health Service (NHS) Shetland, including:
- Shetland Partnership Plan Annual Reports²;
 - Shetland Partnership Plan Latest Indicator Data³;
 - Shetland Partnership Locality Profiles Locality Profiles⁴;
 - NHS Shetland Population Health Survey (Nov21-Aug22)⁵;
 - Shetland Mainland and Island Resident Survey; and
 - Shetland Mainland and Island Business Survey.

² [Annual Reports – Shetland Partnership](#)

³ [Indicators – Shetland Partnership](#)

⁴ [Locality Profiles – Shetland Partnership](#)

⁵ [Population Health Survey - Healthy Shetland](#)



4.3.2 A summary of key issues relevant to the EqIA and FSD are provided below.

4.4 Baseline Data Summary

4.4.1 This summary provides an initial overview key social, economic, health and environmental characteristics across the island localities relevant to the IITCP. It identifies crosscutting issues and key considerations relevant to inter-island connectivity.

- **Population change and demographic pressures** are a significant issue in Shetland's localities. Yell, Unst and Fetlar, Whalsay and Skerries show patterns of rapidly ageing populations alongside small numbers of children and young people. Skerries, Papa Stour and Foula show even smaller and declining populations that are highly sensitive to even minor demographic changes. These trends include ageing populations, declining numbers of children and young people, and in some places schools have been mothballed due to no pupils on the school roll. These have implications for long term service viability, community resilience and the ability of localities to sustain a labour supply.
- **Areas such as Yell, Unst and Fetlar also show high levels of chronic pain and poorer self-reported health**, combined with weaker early mortality performance. This suggests potential increased demand for essential health and social care services, labour force pressures and informal care responsibilities. Ageing populations and changing health needs also highlight the need for enhanced accessibility considerations within Shetland's transport network to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, limited mobility and cognitive or sensory impairments.
- **Educational access and school rolls**: the school on Bressay was permanently closed in 2014, whilst Papa Stour, Fetlar and Skerries schools have all been mothballed for a number of years. This increases dependency on transport links for young people and may exacerbate out-migration of families.
- **Equality and Protected Characteristics**: Data from the 2011 Census indicated that around 7% of residents reported being limited a lot by disability, with a further 10.3% of residents limited a little. An estimated 770 people were living with sight loss in 2021, equivalent to around 34 per 1,000 population. Approximately 164 individuals were known to have a learning disability, around 8.7 per 1,000 population, and around 54 adults were known to local authorities with an autism spectrum diagnosis.
- **High cost of living pressures relative to income** are a prominent feature in peripheral islands. Localities such as Whalsay and Skerries, and Yell, Unst and Fetlar record some of the lowest median incomes alongside some of the highest living costs, with increased reliance on out-of-work benefits in some areas reinforcing a picture of growing financial vulnerability. Where working-age populations are small and occupational structures are narrow, these pressures can compound existing inequalities and influence how different groups experience changes in transport provision. Housing is also dominated by owner-occupation across the islands; while this can contribute to stability, it limits flexibility in meeting the needs of key workers, those requiring supported accommodation and individuals seeking to move into or within the islands. Although many dwellings fall within lower council-tax bands, this does not necessarily reflect overall living costs, and together these factors are important when considering future demand generated by different transport options.



- **Access inequality is a key consideration across localities:** Across almost all islands, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020 data⁶ show that Access is one of the most deprived domains. This is structurally related to geographic remoteness but interacts with health access, education, food supply, housing maintenance and economic participation.
 - **The structure of employment varies considerably between the localities:** Whalsay and Skerries are more dependent on fisheries, for example, which carries implications for occupational risk and exposure to economic fluctuations within key sectors.
 - **Car dependence is high across all localities,** with Whalsay and Skerries recording the highest ownership levels. This reflects a combination of limited public transport, distance, remoteness and challenges in accessing active or sustainable modes. These patterns are central to assessments of accessibility, affordability, carbon emissions and equality of travel opportunities.
 - **Mental wellbeing indicators are broadly in line with the Shetland average,** although loneliness appears significantly lower in Whalsay and Skerries. This points to strong social connectedness, which may have a protective effect in the face of demographic or economic change. It will be important to consider how different options support or disrupt these networks.
 - **Digital connectivity is highly uneven:** Some islands such as Whalsay, Yell and Unst have high rates of access to superfast broadband while others including Fetlar, Foula and Papa Stour have no access to superfast services at all⁷. Limited digital connectivity affects access to telehealth, remote education, employment opportunities, banking and social contact, and may reinforce isolation in the most remote communities. This is particularly significant where physical access to services is already constrained.
 - **Many islands demonstrate high reliance on voluntary effort to sustain social infrastructure, community hubs, energy systems and local services:** While this is a considerable strength, it is also sensitive to demographic change and the availability of working age residents. Coupled with limited service provision and access constraints, this may influence community resilience and the cumulative impacts of transport changes.
- 4.4.2 Overall, the baseline indicates that the islands face interconnected demographic, economic, housing, transport, digital and health challenges. These issues are unevenly distributed and are likely to shape how each locality experiences the impacts of different connectivity options. The interim impact assessments will explore these issues in greater depth and consider how proposed options may support or challenge long-term sustainability, equity of access and quality of life across the islands.

4.5 May 2026 Engagement Summary

- 4.5.1 The Council and consultant team undertook a series of engagement activities in May and June 2026. This comprised in-person public drop-in sessions in the candidate fixed link islands of Bressay, Unst, Whalsay and Yell, as well as Fetlar, which forms an integral part of the overall Bluemull Sound solution. In addition, MS Teams discussions were planned with

⁶ SIMD scores are calculated for datazones, which in some cases span multiple islands or combine island and Mainland areas. For example, Papa Stour and Foula are included within Mainland datazones, and Bressay shares a datazone with parts of Lerwick. As a result, SIMD rankings may not fully reflect the lived experience of access deprivation within individual islands.

⁷ However, at the time of writing, Fetlar is still in scope for the R100 Programme in 2027 which is a Scottish Government initiative aimed at providing faster broadband access to homes and businesses across Scotland.



communities in Foula, Papa Stour and Skerries; however, at the time of reporting these had not yet taken place.

- 4.5.2 The purpose of the engagement was to update communities on progress since the previous round of engagement in March 2025, including presentation of the Transport Planning Objectives (TPO), the approach to option development, headline appraisal findings, and next steps. The sessions also provided an opportunity for attendees to ask questions and provide feedback on the emerging options. It is important to note that this programme was not intended to provide a representative sample of public opinion, but rather to inform communities and capture a range of views.
- 4.5.3 Feedback received through the engagement indicated a generally positive view of fixed link options across several communities, reflecting perceived benefits in terms of improved accessibility, connectivity, and resilience of transport links. Across locations, key issues raised included the affordability of options, the potential need for phased delivery, and the implications of reduced reliance on ferry services. Engagement materials were generally well received, although some participants noted a degree of technical complexity.
- 4.5.4 Further information from the public engagement sessions are presented within the island-specific Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal sections of the Network Strategy OBC Report where this has been considered under the criterion of Public Acceptability.

5 Bluemull Sound

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 The Bluemull Sound route provides a strategic connection within Shetland's North Isles, supporting travel between Yell, Unst and Fetlar, and enabling onward access to Mainland Shetland via connecting ferry services, including the Yell Sound crossing. A key equality consideration is that the route is frequently used as part of a multi-leg journey, where the overall accessibility experience is shaped by the need to align connections across the day, particularly for essential travel to services and employment.
- 5.1.2 From an EqIA and FSD perspective, the Bluemull Sound route is characterised by:
- Reliance on a small number of key transport nodes, particularly Belmont and Gutcher, including associated vehicle marshalling and interchange arrangements.
 - The role of the service in enabling timely access to health care, including planned appointments and emergency response.
 - Affordability pressures that can be compounded by the cumulative costs of longer, multi-leg travel to reach services concentrated in Lerwick and, in some cases, onward travel to mainland Scotland for specialist care.
- 5.1.3 The route options for Bluemull Sound are provided below in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1: Bluemull Sound Route (Unst and Fetlar) – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option maintains the present-day operation whilst addressing some of the more recent resilience issues on the route, such as a reduction in sailings during refit periods.
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something option effectively represents the minimum required from an assets perspective to avoid a declining service on the route. This option comprises larger double-ended Type 2 vessels, major updates at Belmont and Gutcher and a more intensive timetable.
Ferry Do Max	The Ferry Do Max option would represent a major scaling-up of the Bluemull Sound service, moving to a dedicated two vessel service between Gutcher and Belmont using Type 3 vessels and providing Fetlar with a dedicated Type 1 vessel. The service frequency would consequently be expanded, whilst a 24-hour operating day would be introduced, with on-request overnight sailings.
Fixed Link	A permanent physical connection linking Yell and Unst, providing continuous access and removing reliance on ferry timetables. Represents a transformational change to North Isles connectivity. Fetlar would continue to be served by a ferry service.

5.2 Option Bluemull Sound 1: Business as Usual

BISo1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 5.2.1 Under the Business as Usual option, access and reliability on the Bluemull Sound remain broadly unchanged. While vessel replacement maintains existing capacity, baseline dissatisfaction on this route is high, reflecting the cumulative burden of timetable constraints, weather-related disruption and the need to coordinate multiple sailings to reach key services.



For Unst and Fetlar residents with protected characteristics, these conditions disproportionately affect access to secondary and tertiary health care, further and higher education and mainland-based employment. The continued risk of missed connections reinforces inequality by increasing reliance on private vehicles, overnight stays or informal support networks, which are not equally available to all groups.

- 5.2.2 The route also supports time critical journeys. In emergency situations, casualties from Unst and Fetlar may require ambulance transfer using the Bluemull Sound ferry service, and the length and uncertainty of the journey can heighten anxiety and risk for patients and accompanying carers.
- 5.2.3 Operational arrangements can further shape impacts for Unst in particular. Where the vessel lies overnight in Yell, it may need to travel to Unst first to collect casualties before onward transfer, which can add delay and increase stress for people requiring urgent care (noting that life threatening situations are supported via air ambulance).
- 5.2.4 Survey evidence indicates that a substantial minority of residents already feel constrained by current connectivity. Around 45% of Fetlar residents and 38% of Unst residents reported travelling away from their community less often than they would like, with negative impacts on activities and opportunities.

Accessibility

- 5.2.5 Physical accessibility conditions remain largely unchanged under Business as Usual. Although replacement vessels meet modern standards, ferry boarding at Bluemull Sound terminals can be challenging during adverse weather. This disproportionately affects wheelchair users, people with balance impairments and those with sensory sensitivities. While some disabled passengers may choose to travel within vehicles, this does not remove accessibility barriers at the point of boarding, disembarkation or during transfer between vehicle and passenger spaces where required. In addition, not all disabled users have access to private vehicles, and those travelling as foot passengers may experience these challenges more acutely. Information during periods of disruption remains a barrier to independent travel for some users, particularly given the length and complexity of North Isles journeys.
- 5.2.6 Accessibility barriers are not limited to weather related boarding. The current travel experience can also reflect the constraints of older vessels and layouts, including passenger accommodation arrangements that can undermine comfort and inclusive access, particularly for disabled people and older users.

Participation in Daily Life

- 5.2.7 Where residents travel less often than they would like, survey responses indicate that missed opportunities include essential activities. In Fetlar this includes attending health appointments (reported by most respondents in this sub-sample), alongside shopping and additional social opportunities. In Unst, missed opportunities commonly include visiting friends and relatives, attending health appointments, and some social activities.

Overall, it is considered that this option **BISo1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on equality outcomes.

BISo1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 5.2.8 Under the Business as Usual option, existing barriers to essential services remain. Limited operating hours, the ongoing risk of cancellation and the need to coordinate multiple ferry legs



continue to restrict access for disadvantaged households, particularly where appointments or services are time-critical. Missed connections can result in additional costs associated with overnight accommodation or lost income, reinforcing socio-economic inequality for North Isles residents.

- 5.2.9 Travel for healthcare provides a clear illustration of these impacts. Survey evidence indicates that health visits form part of regular travel patterns for both islands, with Unst residents citing health visits as both a primary and secondary reason for travel, and Fetlar residents indicating health visits as a common additional reason for travel.
- 5.2.10 Capacity and booking constraints can also translate into inequality effects, particularly where residents must secure travel at specific times to meet appointments, and where uncertainty increases stress and the risk of delayed care.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 5.2.11 Transport-related barriers to employment persist in implementing this option. Limited early morning and evening services constrain access to shift-based roles in health and social care, hospitality, fisheries and public services. Apprenticeships and training opportunities are harder to sustain due to the cumulative time burden and uncertainty associated with travel from Unst and Fetlar, reinforcing economic disadvantage for residents with fewer resources or limited transport choices.
- 5.2.12 Engagement with North Isles stakeholders indicates that ferry dependent connectivity can constrain labour recruitment and retention, particularly for Unst where travel from mainland Shetland typically involves multiple ferry crossings. Perceived unreliability and the psychological burden of “breaking” a commute with ferry legs can deter inward commuting and limit the available labour pool.
- 5.2.13 Businesses also report that ferry dependency can impose cost premiums through longer journeys and uncertainty risk, affecting contractors, service providers and supply chains. These effects can be experienced more acutely by smaller employers and by households in lower paid roles that are less able to absorb disruption and lost time.

Transport Affordability

- 5.2.14 Transport affordability conditions remain largely unchanged. Ferry fares continue to represent a significant and recurring cost for households that must travel frequently for health care, employment, education and caring responsibilities. In addition to direct fares, households remain exposed to indirect costs associated with disruption, such as lost income, childcare costs or the need for overnight accommodation. Local economic activity continues to be affected by uncertainty in connectivity, and extreme weather has a disproportionate impact on low-income households and workers in lower-paid roles. Overall, Business as Usual maintains existing inequalities of outcome for disadvantaged households on Unst and Fetlar.
- 5.2.15 Survey findings reinforce affordability as a driver of unequal outcomes. Among residents who travel less often than they would like, both car fares and passenger fares are identified as contributing factors in Fetlar and Unst, with a notable proportion describing these as a major factor.
- 5.2.16 The cumulative nature of costs is also relevant. While residents may pay for a single crossing when travelling towards Mainland Shetland, the overall journey length and the need to coordinate multiple legs increases the likelihood of indirect costs, including overnight stays and lost income when disruption occurs.



Overall, it is considered that option **BISo1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on socio-economic outcomes.

5.3 Option Bluemull Sound 2 – Ferry Do Something

BISo2: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 5.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option introduces modernised vessels with improved reliability and operational resilience. For the Bluemull Sound, this reduces the frequency of cancellations and improves journey time consistency, which is particularly beneficial for people attending scheduled hospital appointments or travelling regularly for work or education. While the service pattern remains ferry-based and timetable-dependent, improved reliability reduces stress, uncertainty and the risk of exclusion for disabled people, older residents and carers, representing a clear but incremental improvement relative to the baseline.
- 5.3.2 Improvements are also expected to reduce “connection pressure” across the North Isles. Where residents are making onward connections, improved reliability and reduced waiting times can lessen the temptation to rush to catch a particular sailing, which can support safer travel behaviours on the wider journey.
- 5.3.3 This option includes the expansion and formalisation of marshalling areas at Belmont and Gutcher to accommodate the needs of a larger vessel type. Improved marshalling design and circulation can reduce pedestrian and vehicle conflict, supporting safer and more manageable interchange for people with mobility impairments and for families with young children.

Accessibility

- 5.3.4 Accessibility is improved through more stable vessels, improved boarding interfaces and more consistent operations. For Unst and Fetlar residents with mobility or sensory impairments, this reduces physical strain and anxiety associated with boarding and disembarkation, including at points of transfer between vehicle and passenger spaces where relevant. While some disabled passengers may travel within vehicles, these improvements remain important for safe and comfortable access across all stages of the journey, particularly on longer journeys involving multiple ferry legs.
- 5.3.5 Vessel replacement also provides scope for immediate accessibility gains, addressing legacy issues such as passenger accommodation arrangements that are less suitable for disabled people and older users.

Participation in Daily Life

- 5.3.6 The Ferry Do Something option supports improved participation by enabling more consistent travel for work, education and social purposes. While flexibility remains limited, improved reliability reduces the likelihood that protected groups are excluded from activities due to transport constraints.
- 5.3.7 The likely effect is a reduction in the everyday uncertainty that drives “just in case” planning, which can disproportionately burden people with caring responsibilities and those managing health conditions, even where the timetable remains broadly similar.

Overall, it is considered that **BISo2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.



BISo2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 5.3.8 The Ferry Do Something option improves access to essential services through enhanced reliability and resilience, reducing the likelihood of cancelled or missed journeys. For disadvantaged households, this improves confidence in being able to reach health care and education services. However, access remains constrained by timetable dependency and the cumulative length and complexity of journeys involving multiple crossings.
- 5.3.9 The reduction in disruption also reduces the risk of unplanned knock-on costs, including overnight accommodation and lost income associated with missed connections, which can be particularly challenging for lower income households.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 5.3.10 Modest improvements are delivered through reduced disruption and improved reliability. This supports residents in maintaining employment and attending training more consistently but does not fundamentally alter access to shift work, seasonal employment or flexible working patterns, as operating hours remain largely unchanged.
- 5.3.11 While this option does not remove the interruption to continuous travel caused by ferry-dependent commuting, where travellers must pause their journey to transfer onto a scheduled ferry crossing, often involving waiting time and reduced flexibility, improved reliability can still support workforce mobility, including visiting clinicians and social care staff, by making travel outcomes more predictable.

Transport Affordability

- 5.3.12 Affordability outcomes improve modestly through increased reliability rather than changes to fare structures. While direct travel costs remain broadly similar, improved operational resilience reduces the likelihood of unplanned costs arising from missed connections or extended journeys. Local economies benefit from more consistent movement of workers, customers and supplies, although underlying vulnerability to disruption and extreme weather remains.
- 5.3.13 Survey evidence indicates that fares are a factor in suppressed travel for both islands. Improved reliability alone does not address the underlying affordability driver of inequality, but it can reduce the indirect costs and risk premiums that lower income households are less able to absorb.

Overall, it is considered that **BISo2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

5.4 Option Bluemull Sound 3 – Ferry Do Max

BISo3: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 5.4.1 The Ferry Do Max option delivers more substantial change for the North Isles through increased frequency, extended operating hours and, in some scenarios, free fares for residents. This significantly improves access for Unst and Fetlar residents who require early morning or evening travel, including shift workers, students and those with ongoing health care needs. For protected groups, the ability to travel outside a narrow set of sailings reduces



dependence on rigid planning and improves equality of opportunity. However, despite these improvements, journeys remain subject to maritime disruption and the need to align with onward services across Yell and to the Mainland, meaning some reliability risks persist.

- 5.4.2 Increased service frequency and capacity also reduce the risk of being unable to secure a booking at required times. On the Gutcher to Belmont leg, capacity constraints can create anxiety and barriers to timely travel, including for health appointments and for the health and social care workforce. Greater capacity and frequency reduce these pressures.
- 5.4.3 This option includes further expansion and formalisation of marshalling areas at Belmont and Gutcher, aligned to the needs of a larger vessel type, which can support safer, more legible interchange and improve overall passenger experience during peak periods.
- 5.4.4 Harbour works that address ageing infrastructure, including dredging to deepen the berth at Gutcher, can improve resilience and reduce the likelihood of disruption driven by berthing constraints, which in turn supports more predictable travel for those who rely on scheduled connections.

Accessibility

- 5.4.5 The Ferry Do Max option represents the most accessible ferry-based solution for the Bluemull Sound. High-quality vessels, frequent services and clearer information support greater independence for disabled people and older users by reducing reliance on specific sailings and staff assistance. Environmental variability remains inherent to ferry operations, but the consequences of disruption are reduced.
- 5.4.6 Replacing existing vessels also supports more inclusive onboard arrangements, addressing legacy design issues that can disproportionately affect disabled passengers and those who require accessible internal spaces and facilities.

Participation in Daily Life

- 5.4.7 Participation is substantially enhanced by enabling travel across a wider range of times. This supports inclusive access to employment, learning and social activities, particularly for those who rely on frequent travel and cannot easily adjust plans around narrow sailing windows.
- 5.4.8 A reduction in booking anxiety and missed travel opportunities is particularly relevant for accompanied travel, family travel and travel linked to health needs, where rescheduling can create disproportionate burdens for protected groups.

Overall, it is considered that **BISo3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

BISo3: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 5.4.9 The Ferry Do Max option significantly strengthens access to essential services by increasing service frequency and extending operating hours. This enables travel at times better aligned with health appointments, childcare responsibilities and part-time or flexible work patterns. For households with fewer resources, the reduced risk of being unable to travel when needed helps to reduce inequalities of outcome, although reliance on ferry operations remains.
- 5.4.10 Improved frequency and capacity can also reduce weather related and operational knock-on effects by providing more opportunities to rebook within the same day, which can reduce the likelihood of overnight stays and lost income when disruption occurs.



Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 5.4.11 This option provides meaningful support for economic inclusion by extending the operating day and increasing frequency. Access to shift work, seasonal roles and apprenticeships improves for residents with limited transport choices. Reduced travel uncertainty benefits those on lower wages who are less able to accommodate missed work or additional costs. Improved reliability also reduces operational pressures for SIC staff and ferry crew.
- 5.4.12 Wider economic evidence indicates that ferry dependency can create cost premiums through extended journeys and uncertainty risk, affecting business productivity and the viability of contracted services. Reduced uncertainty supports more stable supply chains and can improve the feasibility and affordability of services delivered from Mainland Shetland.

Transport Affordability

- 5.4.13 The Ferry Do Max option proposes free fares for residents, directly reducing the cost of travel. In combination with this, increased service frequency lowers indirect costs associated with missed sailings and inflexible travel arrangements. Together, these changes improve overall affordability, particularly for frequent users, and support fairer access to ferry services.
- 5.4.14 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to free resident fares under the Ferry Do Max scenario. If implemented, this would significantly enhance affordability outcomes, although delivery would depend on subsequent project-level and network-wide fare policy decisions.
- 5.4.15 This aligns with survey findings that fare levels contribute to suppressed travel for both islands, and that affordability pressures are a significant source of inequality, particularly for households on lower incomes who need to travel frequently for healthcare and other essentials.

Overall, it is considered that **BISo3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes.

5.5 Option Bluemull Sound 4 – Fixed Link

BISo4: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 5.5.1 The Fixed Link option offers a transformative change in access and reliability for the Bluemull Sound by removing ferry dependence between Unst to Yell, providing continuous, 24-hour connectivity. Fetlar would continue to be served by a ferry service, and therefore some dependence remains for Fetlar and for travel to and from Fetlar.
- 5.5.2 However, for most North Isles residents with protected characteristics, the fixed link option fundamentally alters access to health care, education and employment by eliminating missed connections, cancellations and timetable constraints. The OBC identifies this option as delivering the largest reduction in dissatisfaction on the route, with reliability benefits particularly pronounced for those requiring frequent or urgent travel. Equality outcomes are strongest where complementary bus services and fare structures are provided to ensure that non-car users on Unst and Fetlar benefit equally from the fixed link.
- 5.5.3 The most pronounced health and emergency access benefits relate to Unst. Continuous access would be expected to reduce ambulance response and transit times for travel to



Gilbert Bain Hospital in Lerwick, including for Accident and Emergency attendance, and to reduce risk associated with the ferry being unable to sail due to weather or technical issues.

- 5.5.4 The scale of benefit for Unst is also linked to resilience in rare but high impact circumstances, including where ferry disruption coincides with air ambulance unavailability due to another call out.
- 5.5.5 Safety related benefits include removal of ferry borne risks on the Unst to Yell leg, such as vehicle marshalling interaction, rushing to catch sailings, and incidents at sea, while recognising that traffic volumes could increase and introduce some road safety considerations.

Accessibility

- 5.5.6 The Fixed Link removes ferry boarding entirely between Unst to Yell. Fetlar residents would still rely on ferry boarding for travel to and from Fetlar. Public transport provision is a key determinant of equality outcomes. To avoid new barriers for those without access to a car, bus services through the tunnel would need to be at least as frequent as the current ferry service availability.
- 5.5.7 Cycling access is also relevant. Tunnel design constraints will not be able to accommodate cyclists, which increases the importance of providing bus services capable of accommodating bicycles to avoid creating new accessibility barriers for those who rely on active travel.

Participation in Daily Life

- 5.5.8 The strongest participation benefits relate to Unst being integrated with Yell through a continuous connection. Fetlar remains ferry served, so participation benefits for Fetlar depend on the quality and affordability of the continuing ferry service and on how the wider network evolves. This enables protected groups to participate in daily life with far fewer constraints, supporting social inclusion, wellbeing and long-term population sustainability in the North Isles, provided that affordability and public transport accessibility are addressed alongside the infrastructure investment.
- 5.5.9 Distributional impacts require careful consideration. There is a risk that islands not connected by fixed links could experience widening inequalities relative to those that are fixed linked, which is particularly relevant if Unst and Yell were to benefit from fixed links while Fetlar remains ferry dependent.

Overall, it is considered that **BISo4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes, **subject to** affordable, accessible public transport and inclusive measures for non-car users.

BISo4: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 5.5.10 Continuous travel benefits relate primarily to Unst to Yell. Fetlar would remain dependent on ferry services for access to Yell and onward travel to Lerwick. This is particularly important for disadvantaged households who cannot easily absorb the financial or social costs of disruption. Improved reliability supports more equitable access to health care, education and retail services, subject to the provision of affordable and accessible public transport for those without private vehicles.



- 5.5.11 For Unst, the fixed link provides a step change in access to emergency and unscheduled healthcare, including reduced response times and improved flexibility for time critical journeys.
- 5.5.12 For Fetlar, improved access depends on the continuing ferry service. Increased frequency across the day is identified as particularly important for improving access to health infrastructure for Fetlar residents.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 5.5.13 The Fixed Link delivers the strongest economic inclusion outcomes by enabling 24-hour connectivity. Structural barriers to shift work, on-call roles, seasonal employment and apprenticeships are removed, significantly broadening the labour market accessible to North Isles residents and improving income stability for disadvantaged households. Improved connectivity also supports business growth, labour market participation and workforce retention.
- 5.5.14 For Unst, improved connectivity addresses a key constraint identified through business engagement: access to labour and the deterrent effect of multi leg commuting that includes ferry crossings. A fixed link is therefore expected to improve recruitment and retention outcomes.
- 5.5.15 Reduced uncertainty also addresses business cost premiums, including inflated quotations and declined work linked to disruption risk. This is relevant to construction, maintenance and service delivery, and to household costs for essential repairs and work.
- 5.5.16 Changes to transport provision in implementing this option have implications for ferry crew and SIC staff. While ferry-based options continue to support maritime employment, the Fixed Link would alter the nature of employment on the route, potentially reducing ferry crew requirements while creating construction, maintenance and ancillary roles. Careful workforce planning is required to avoid adverse socio-economic impacts and support redeployment or retraining where necessary.
- 5.5.17 Deliverability considerations also include ensuring sufficient bus vehicles and drivers if services are scaled up to provide equivalent accessibility for non-car users, as resourcing constraints could otherwise create new inequalities.

Transport Affordability

- 5.5.18 The Fixed Link has the greatest potential to transform transport affordability, but outcomes are highly dependent on accompanying policy and service design. The removal of ferry fares eliminates a significant direct cost for households that travel frequently. However, costs may be transferred through vehicle operating costs or tolls, depending on the funding model. For people with low incomes, protected characteristics or no access to a car, affordability outcomes depend critically on toll policy and the availability of affordable public transport. Improved reliability reduces the socio-economic impact of extreme weather and supports more stable access to household essentials.
- 5.5.19 Affordability impacts depend on the balance between ferry fares and tunnel tolls. Where tolls are set broadly equivalent to fares, overall affordability may be similar for car users, but distributional effects can differ because ferry fares apply per passenger whereas a toll would be paid per vehicle regardless of occupancy.
- 5.5.20 Survey findings highlight affordability as a driver of inequality, with a notable proportion of residents citing both car fares and passenger fares as contributing to travelling less often than



they would like. This underscores the importance of toll and fares policy in shaping socio-economic outcomes under the fixed link option.

- 5.5.21 Consideration should also be given to the potential removal of MOT exemption where fixed links integrate islands with the Mainland, which may increase vehicle compliance and maintenance costs and could disproportionately affect low income households; however, there is currently insufficient detail to definitively assess this impact, and it should be examined further at the project-level stage.

Overall, it is considered that option **BISo4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes, **subject to** toll and service design that protects affordability for low-income households and non-car users.

5.6 Integrated Conclusion

- 5.6.1 The integrated EqIA and FSD assessment concludes that current transport arrangements on the Bluemull Sound route can contribute to inequalities for Unst and Fetlar residents, driven by reliance on ferry timetables, journey uncertainty and cumulative travel costs. These impacts fall most heavily on residents who experience both protected characteristics and socio-economic disadvantage, including older people, disabled people, carers and lower-income households who depend on regular, reliable access to essential services, employment and education.
- 5.6.2 The Business as Usual option maintains these barriers. Ferry Do Something and Ferry Do Max have the potential to progressively reduce inequalities by increasing reliability, flexibility and, in some cases, affordability, with Ferry Do Max delivering clearer benefits for access to work, training and participation in daily life. The Fixed Link option offers the greatest potential to reduce inequalities of outcome by removing structural constraints associated with ferry dependence and significantly improving reliability, resilience and opportunity across the North Isles.
- 5.6.3 Realisation of the Fixed Link benefits is dependent on complementary measures, including affordable travel, accessible public transport and proactive workforce transition planning for ferry crew and SIC staff. Overall, options that reduce reliance on ferry timetables and improve reliability and flexibility provide the strongest alignment with equality and inclusive growth objectives for the Bluemull Sound route.

6 Bressay

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 Bressay is the island community most closely connected to Lerwick, with the ferry route forming a critical part of daily life rather than a purely discretionary transport link. Baseline evidence indicates that Bressay residents rely heavily on frequent, short-distance travel for employment, education, health care, childcare, shopping and social activity, with many trips undertaken on a daily basis. As a result, issues of reliability, frequency, affordability and accessibility have a direct and ongoing influence on equality outcomes.
- 6.1.2 Survey evidence indicates that, despite relatively good service availability compared with other islands, a substantial minority still experience constrained travel or negative day-to-day impacts: 29% (n=20) report travelling across Bressay Sound less than they would like, and 19% (n=13) report travelling as much as they need but with day-to-day activities negatively affected by the current service.
- 6.1.3 The evidence base also indicates that, in Bressay, affordability is a particularly strong determinant of whether trips are made, with cost reported as a major barrier to travel for those making fewer trips than they would like.
- 6.1.4 The route options for Bressay are provided below in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Bressay Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option broadly maintains the present-day operation and represents the appraisal baseline.
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something option for Bressay represents the minimum viable upgrade to maintain a sustainable and reliable service. It is primarily focused on revenue measures to extend and intensify the current operating day, plus an in-principle commitment to reduce fares.
Ferry Do Max	The Ferry Do Max option represents a significant scaling-up of ferry provision to address capacity and service constraints. The Bressay service would continue to be operated by a single vessel but on an intensive and continuous basis throughout the day, with on-request overnight sailings.
Fixed Link	Construction of a permanent fixed link between Bressay and the Mainland, providing continuous access. Benefits and impacts are dependent on alignment, landing location and the quality of onward public transport connections to Lerwick town centre. Affordability impacts under this option are highly sensitive to the relationship between any toll level and current ferry costs, and accessibility outcomes depend on bus provision because this route has a comparatively high proportion of foot passengers due to the central Lerwick berth.

6.2 Option Bressay 1 – Business as Usual

Bre1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 6.2.1 Under the Business as Usual option, transport access and reliability for Bressay residents remain broadly unchanged from baseline conditions. Predictable and frequent access to



Lerwick continues to be essential for participation in employment, education and health care. Baseline evidence indicates high levels of ferry use across all age groups, with particular reliance by older people, disabled people, school pupils, carers and residents without access to a private vehicle.

- 6.2.2 In addition, there is no formal on-island health provision on Bressay, meaning routine appointments and hospital care depend on travel to Lerwick, and this increases the equality relevance of reliability and affordability even on a relatively short crossing.
- 6.2.3 The resident survey indicates that 15% (n=37) of respondents selected “Health Visit” as one of their other reasons for travel in a given month, reinforcing the importance of the route for healthcare access.
- 6.2.4 While the short crossing time limits overall journey duration, existing constraints linked to timetable dependency, service disruption and fare levels persist. For protected groups who rely on regular or repeated daily travel, including those attending employment or education in Lerwick, missed sailings or disruption can have a disproportionate impact due to the frequency of trips required.
- 6.2.5 Although the route has in-built operational flexibility relative to other islands, reductions in frequency at certain times, reliability issues, or deployment of a smaller vessel during refit periods can still exacerbate stress and social exclusion, particularly for older people, carers and those with long-term health conditions.
- 6.2.6 Safety outcomes in Bre1 are also influenced by terminal operations. This option includes expansion and formalisation of marshalling in Bressay and reconfiguration in Lerwick, which supports safer traffic management and reduces pedestrian and vehicle interaction relative to current arrangements.

Accessibility

- 6.2.7 Physical accessibility remains largely unchanged. Although vessels generally meet modern standards, variability in boarding conditions and reliance on assistance continue to affect independent travel for some disabled people and older residents. Information provision during periods of disruption can present additional barriers, particularly for people with cognitive impairments or anxiety.
- 6.2.8 The in-terminal environment is also relevant. Improvements to marshalling layout and circulation can reduce conflicts between foot passengers and vehicles during boarding and disembarkation, supporting safer and more manageable movement for disabled people, older people and families with young children.

Participation in Daily Life

- 6.2.9 Participation in employment, education, social activity and family life remains constrained by timetable dependency and disruption risk. For older people, disabled people and carers who require frequent travel, this can limit employment opportunities, access to services and social engagement, reinforcing risks of isolation and inequality.
- 6.2.10 Survey evidence suggests that where residents travel less often than they would like, the impacts are most strongly felt in social participation, including visiting friends and relatives and other social activities, consistent with cost being a decisive factor for discretionary trips even where service levels are relatively good.

Overall, it is considered that this option **Bre1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on equality outcomes.



Bre1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 6.2.11 Under Business as Usual, access to essential services remains dependent on ferry timetables and vulnerable to disruption. Missed sailings can result in missed health appointments, childcare difficulties or lost income, even where alternative sailings may be available later in the day. For disadvantaged households who rely on frequent travel, the cumulative impact of disruption reinforces inequalities of outcome.
- 6.2.12 In emergencies, casualties may need to be transferred by ambulance using the Bressay to Lerwick ferry. While frequency is relatively high and unscheduled runs can generally be undertaken, the requirement to cross a body of water can still create anxiety and potential risk or discomfort for the patient, particularly given the absence of on-island care.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 6.2.13 Limited operating hours and disruption continue to constrain access to shift work, early starts, late finishes and on-call roles. These barriers disproportionately affect residents in lower-paid, less secure or entry-level employment, apprenticeships and training, where flexibility is limited and missed work has immediate financial consequences. Economic inclusion remains constrained by transport uncertainty.
- 6.2.14 In Bressay, the evidence base indicates that the primary constraint on labour market participation is more often affordability than service availability, given the island's close integration with Lerwick and relatively frequent services. This is relevant to the distribution of impacts for lower income households and those not currently in the labour market.

Transport Affordability

- 6.2.15 Affordability conditions remain broadly unchanged. Ferry fares continue to represent a recurring and cumulative cost for households that rely on frequent travel, with disproportionate impacts on lower-income residents and those in part-time, lower-paid or insecure employment. In addition to direct fares, households remain exposed to indirect financial impacts arising from disruption, including lost income, additional childcare costs or the need to reorganise caring responsibilities. Overall, Business as Usual maintains existing affordability pressures and transport-related socio-economic disadvantage.
- 6.2.16 Survey findings indicate that, among those travelling less often than they would like, 100% cited vehicle fares as a barrier (95% as a major factor), and 80% cited passenger fares as a barrier (25% major, 55% minor), reinforcing that cost is the dominant fairness and inclusion issue on this route

Overall, it is considered that this option **Bre1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on socio-economic outcomes linked to the cumulative effects of transport affordability and frequent need to travel to Shetland Mainland.

6.3 Option Bressay 2 – Ferry Do Something

Bre2: Equality Impact Assessment



Transport Access and Reliability

- 6.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option improves access and reliability through modernised vessels and enhanced operational resilience. For Bressay residents with protected characteristics, improved reliability reduces the likelihood of missed work, education or health appointments and lowers stress associated with daily travel. While the need to plan journeys around ferry timetables remains, this option represents a clear improvement over baseline conditions for groups dependent on consistent access to Lerwick.
- 6.3.2 This option also includes a new secure waiting room in Lerwick, which can improve perceived safety for foot passengers and those travelling at quieter times.
- 6.3.3 As with Bre1, marshalling enhancements in Bressay and reconfiguration in Lerwick improve traffic management and reduce pedestrian and vehicle interaction at terminals, supporting safer interchange.

Accessibility

- 6.3.4 Upgraded vessels and terminal infrastructure enhance physical accessibility and provide more consistent boarding conditions. This supports greater independence for people with mobility or sensory impairments and reduces reliance on staff assistance, although some ferry-related variability remains.
- 6.3.5 Improvements to marshalling layout can also reduce the complexity of moving through the terminal environment for people with mobility impairments, older people and families with young children, particularly at peak periods.

Participation in Daily Life

- 6.3.6 Improved reliability supports more consistent participation in employment, education and social activities. Although overall flexibility remains limited by service patterns, protected groups benefit from increased confidence that travel can be undertaken when required, supporting more stable engagement in daily life.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.

Bre2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 6.3.7 The Ferry Do Something option improves access by increasing reliability and reducing the likelihood of missed or cancelled journeys. This supports more consistent access to health care, education and childcare for disadvantaged households. However, reliance on ferry timetables remains a constraint, particularly for early morning or late evening needs.
- 6.3.8 In the Bressay context, the overall health service access impact is expected to be modest, as the existing ferry service includes 24-hour operational cover through MV Leirna being manned and able to undertake unscheduled runs.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 6.3.9 Improved reliability supports more consistent attendance at work and training, benefiting residents in lower-paid roles where missed shifts have immediate financial consequences.



However, the option does not significantly expand access to shift-based, seasonal or flexible employment, as operating hours remain broadly unchanged.

Transport Affordability

- 6.3.10 Modest affordability benefits are delivered through improved reliability rather than changes to fare levels. While direct travel costs remain broadly the same, improved operational resilience reduces the likelihood of unplanned expenses linked to disruption. For lower-income households, this improves financial predictability, although cumulative fare costs remain a pressure for frequent travellers.
- 6.3.11 Given that survey evidence identifies cost as the dominant barrier to travel on this route, this option is unlikely to materially change affordability-related inequality unless accompanied by fare measures.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes, noting that affordability pressures remain a key constraint.

6.4 Option Bressay 3 – Ferry Do Max

Bre3: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 6.4.1 The Ferry Do Max option further enhances access by increasing service frequency and extending operating hours. This significantly improves flexibility for protected groups, including shift workers, carers and people with health conditions who benefit from the ability to travel at a wider range of times. Reduced reliance on specific sailings supports more equitable access for those whose daily routines do not align with traditional commuting patterns.
- 6.4.2 This option also strengthens the terminal environment through expanded parking and marshalling in Bressay, and the inclusion of a covered pedestrian walkway from the marshalling area to the linkspan, fully segregating pedestrians and vehicles during boarding and improving the safety and usability of the interchange.
- 6.4.3 In addition, this option includes a new secure waiting room in Lerwick, which supports improved personal security and comfort for foot passengers, including protection from inclement weather while waiting to travel.

Accessibility

- 6.4.4 Ferry Do Max offers the most accessible ferry-based solution, combining higher service frequency with improved vessel standards and clearer information provision. Increased frequency reduces the consequences of missed sailings and supports independent travel for people who require reassurance, flexibility or repeated daily trips.
- 6.4.5 The covered walkway is also relevant to accessibility, reducing exposure to inclement weather and improving predictability of movement between waiting and boarding areas for people with mobility impairments, sensory sensitivities, and those travelling with children or luggage.



Participation in Daily Life

- 6.4.6 Participation outcomes are substantially improved. The ability to travel across a wider range of times supports inclusive access to employment, education, childcare, health care and social activity, particularly for protected groups who rely on regular or multiple daily journeys.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

Bre3: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 6.4.7 The Ferry Do Max option significantly strengthens access by increasing service frequency and extending operating hours. This better aligns travel with appointment times, school and childcare schedules and retail opening hours. For households that rely on frequent travel and have limited flexibility, these changes reduce inequalities of outcome.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 6.4.8 This option materially improves access to shift work, seasonal employment and apprenticeships by extending operating hours and increasing frequency. Barriers for residents with fewer transport choices are reduced, supporting greater economic inclusion, particularly for younger people, low-income households and those with caring responsibilities.

Transport Affordability

- 6.4.9 The Ferry Do Max option proposes free fares for residents, directly reducing the cost of travel. In combination with this, increased service frequency lowers indirect costs associated with missed sailings and inflexible travel arrangements. Together, these changes improve overall affordability, particularly for frequent users, and support fairer access to ferry services.
- 6.4.10 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to free resident fares under the Ferry Do Max scenario. If implemented, this would significantly enhance affordability outcomes, although delivery would depend on subsequent project-level and network-wide fare policy decisions.
- 6.4.11 This is particularly important in Bressay, where the evidence base indicates that cost, rather than connectivity, is the principal barrier to travel for those making fewer trips than they would like.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes.

6.5 Option Bressay 4 – Fixed Link

Bre4: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 6.5.1 The Fixed Link option delivers the most significant change in access and reliability by removing ferry dependence entirely and enabling continuous, 24-hour connectivity between Bressay and Lerwick. For protected groups, this removes barriers associated with timetables, cancellations and missed connections, fundamentally changing the experience of daily travel.



- 6.5.2 Any road safety disbenefit associated with increased vehicle movements is expected to be minor, as traffic volumes would remain low by national standards, most movements would be short trips between Bressay and Lerwick, and heavy goods movements would be limited.
- 6.5.3 Conversely, a fixed link removes ferry-borne interface risks such as vehicle marshalling interaction, foot passenger and vehicle conflict, and exposure to incidents in the busy Lerwick Harbour environment, although these impacts are expected to be marginal given existing operations
- 6.5.4 Where the fixed link alignment lands on the Mainland to the north of Lerwick, away from the existing ferry terminal and town centre, additional equality and socio-economic considerations arise. Although this alignment would provide continuous, weather-resilient access, it would alter the point of arrival from a central, walkable location to a more peripheral location requiring onward travel.
- 6.5.5 For residents without access to a private car, including lower-income households, older people, disabled people and young people, this could result in longer journeys, increased reliance on bus services and additional travel costs compared with the current ferry service, which delivers passengers directly into central Lerwick.
- 6.5.6 This route has a higher proportion of foot passengers than other Shetland routes due to the central Lerwick berth. A fixed link would therefore only deliver comparable access for non-car users if bus services mirror the current ferry timetable and are affordable relative to foot passenger fares.
- 6.5.7 Without high-frequency, affordable and accessible public transport connections between the fixed link landing point and key destinations, including health facilities, employment centres, education and retail, there is a risk that access to the town centre becomes less convenient than at present for some groups. In this scenario, the Fixed Link could shift accessibility and affordability barriers rather than remove them, limiting its effectiveness in delivering equitable access despite the removal of ferry timetable constraints.
- 6.5.8 Cycling access is also relevant. The tunnel design constraints will not be able to accommodate cyclists, which increases the importance of providing cycle-capable buses to avoid introducing new barriers for those who currently rely on cycling as part of access to Lerwick.

Accessibility

- 6.5.9 The Fixed Link removes ferry boarding entirely, offering a consistent and weather-resilient travel environment. For people with mobility, sensory or cognitive impairments, this has the potential to significantly improve physical accessibility and ease of independent travel, subject to inclusive design of the link itself and the provision of accessible onward public transport.
- 6.5.10 Accessibility outcomes are strongly dependent on service design for those who do not drive. If bus frequency is lower than current ferry availability, or if services do not accommodate mobility aids and bicycles, new inequalities could emerge even where the fixed link improves resilience for car users.

Participation in Daily Life

- 6.5.11 The Fixed Link delivers the strongest potential participation outcomes by effectively integrating Bressay with Lerwick. Continuous access supports participation in employment, education, social activity and family life on more equal terms with mainland residents, provided that non-car users are supported through accessible, affordable and well-integrated public transport. Mitigation through integrated bus services, fare parity with the existing ferry



provision and careful consideration of walking and cycling routes would be essential to ensure alignment with EqIA objectives and the FSD.

- 6.5.12 Further distributional consideration is the potential for increased geographic inequality across Shetland if fixed links make some of its island communities comparable to mainland locations, widening disparities with islands that remain ferry dependent.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre4 Fixed** will have an **uncertain (?) / minor adverse effect (-)** on equality outcomes.

Bre4: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 6.5.13 The Fixed Link option provides continuous access between Bressay and Lerwick, removing timetable dependency altogether. This delivers the strongest improvement in access to essential services, particularly for disadvantaged households who are least able to absorb the impacts of disruption, subject to the availability of affordable and accessible onward transport in Lerwick.
- 6.5.14 It would also provide unfettered 24-hour access to Gilbert Bain Hospital, including Accident and Emergency attendance, and would slightly reduce ambulance response times and transit time to hospital, while reducing residual risks associated with ferry technical issues and air ambulance unavailability.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 6.5.15 The Fixed Link delivers the strongest employment outcomes by enabling 24-hour access. Structural barriers to shift-based, seasonal and flexible employment are removed, broadening the labour market accessible to residents facing socio-economic disadvantage and supporting more stable participation in work, education and training.
- 6.5.16 In the Bressay context, the realised scale of benefit is expected to be shaped primarily by toll policy and by ensuring bus services maintain access for foot passengers, given the integration of the island's labour market with Lerwick.

Transport Affordability

- 6.5.17 The Fixed Link has the greatest potential to transform transport affordability, although this would be dependent on how supporting measures are designed. The removal of ferry fares eliminates a recurring direct cost for households that travel frequently, delivering clear benefits for lower-income residents. However, affordability outcomes depend on whether alternative costs are introduced through tolling, vehicle use or parking, and on the availability of affordable public transport for households without access to a private car. Where these factors are addressed, the Fixed Link also significantly reduces indirect costs by removing disruption-related financial impacts and improving reliability in extreme weather, supporting more stable access to employment, essential services and household essentials.
- 6.5.18 Affordability impacts should explicitly recognise the distributional difference between ferry fares and tolls: ferry fares apply per passenger, whereas a toll would apply per vehicle regardless of occupancy. This can change affordability outcomes for larger households and accompanied travel.
- 6.5.19 There is also a small security consideration: 24-hour access may marginally increase the risk of crime or anti-social behaviour due to proximity to Lerwick, although any such impact is expected to be minor, particularly if tolling applies.



- 6.5.20 Consideration should also be given to the potential removal of MOT exemption where fixed links integrate islands with the Mainland, which may increase vehicle compliance and maintenance costs and could disproportionately affect low income households; however, there is currently insufficient detail to fully assess this impact, and it should be examined further at the project-level stage.

Overall, it is considered that option **Bre4 Fixed Link** will have an **uncertain (?) / minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

6.6 Bressay Integrated Conclusion

- 6.6.1 Bressay differs from other island communities in the programme in that it is closely integrated with Lerwick and benefits from relatively frequent services, yet a notable proportion of residents still experience constrained travel or negative day-to-day impacts. The evidence consistently indicates that affordability is the primary equality and socio-economic issue, with ferry fares acting as a significant barrier to participation, particularly for lower income households and those requiring frequent travel.
- 6.6.2 Under Business as Usual, existing patterns of access, reliability and affordability are largely maintained. While the route performs relatively well in frequency terms, ongoing dependence on scheduled services, exposure to disruption and cumulative fare costs continue to constrain participation in employment, education, health care and social activity, resulting in a neutral effect from an equalities standpoint and minor adverse effects on socio-economic outcomes due to the cumulative pressure of transport affordability on this route where residents are required to undertake frequent trips to meet their daily needs and access essential services.
- 6.6.3 The Ferry Do Something option delivers incremental improvements in reliability, resilience and the terminal environment. These changes support more consistent access to services and reduce travel-related stress, with particular benefits for disabled people, older people and those undertaking regular journeys. However, operating patterns and fare structures remain broadly unchanged, meaning affordability pressures persist and overall benefits remain modest.
- 6.6.4 The Ferry Do Max comparator option represents a substantial enhancement of the ferry-based approach, with increased frequency, extended operating hours and improved infrastructure. This significantly improves flexibility, reduces the consequences of missed sailings and supports participation across a wider range of activities and working patterns. Combined with potential fare measures, this option offers the strongest positive impacts among the ferry options, particularly in addressing both indirect and direct cost barriers.
- 6.6.5 The Fixed Link option fundamentally changes accessibility by removing reliance on ferry services and enabling continuous travel between Bressay and Lerwick. This provides the greatest potential improvement in reliability, access to essential services and labour market participation, including 24 hour connectivity. However, outcomes are highly dependent on supporting measures. In particular, the distribution of benefits is shaped by toll policy, the availability, affordability and accessibility of bus services, and the location of the mainland landing point. Without appropriate provision for non-car users, there is a risk that existing affordability and accessibility issues are redistributed rather than resolved.
- 6.6.6 The mixed (uncertain) outcome for the Fixed Link option reflects a clear distributional trade-off. The Fixed Link would remove structural constraints associated with ferry dependence and deliver substantial benefits in terms of reliability, journey flexibility and access to employment, services and opportunities, which are reflected in the positive socio-economic assessment. However, these benefits are not evenly distributed across all users.

- 6.6.7 In particular, the relocation of the point of access on the Mainland and the increased reliance on road-based travel introduce a risk that some groups, including non-car users, lower-income households, older people, disabled people and young people, may experience reduced accessibility compared with the existing ferry service, which provides direct access into central Lerwick. Without frequent, affordable and fully accessible public transport connections that replicate or improve upon the current level of service, these groups may face longer, more complex or more costly journeys.
- 6.6.8 The overall effect is therefore dependent on the extent to which complementary measures are implemented. Where high-quality, affordable and accessible public transport is provided, and where tolling or user charging structures are designed to protect low-income households, the Fixed Link has the potential to deliver net positive and more equitable outcomes. In the absence of these measures, there is a risk that existing inequalities are redistributed or exacerbated rather than reduced.
- 6.6.9 The combined EqIA and FSD assessment therefore reflects this balance of outcomes, with positive impacts driven by improved connectivity and economic inclusion, and potential adverse impacts linked to accessibility and affordability risks for specific groups.
- 6.6.10 Across all options, the assessment highlights that while improvements to reliability and infrastructure are important, affordability remains the key determinant of equitable outcomes in the Bressay context. Options that combine enhanced connectivity with measures to reduce or offset travel costs are most likely to deliver meaningful improvements in equality and Fairer Scotland Duty outcomes.

7 Whalsay

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 This section considers the potential EqlA and FSD implications of the long-term transport options for Whalsay. Whalsay is one of Shetland's larger island communities, with a resident population, school, employment base and a high level of daily interaction with the Shetland Mainland. The ferry route therefore performs a critical role not only in access to essential services, but also in supporting commuting, freight movements and wider economic participation. The assessment considers how each option affects people with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, relative to the existing baseline.
- 7.1.2 The evidence base indicates that Whalsay has a distinctive economic structure within the programme area, with a highly skilled resident workforce linked to the pelagic fishing industry, and comparatively high levels of car ownership and car-based travel to work relative to Shetland and national averages.
- 7.1.3 Despite the island's local services, a significant minority of residents report that they travel to the Shetland Mainland less than they would like, which indicates continuing constraints on access to opportunities and participation.
- 7.1.4 The route options for Whalsay are provided below in **Table 9.1**.

Table 7.1: Whalsay Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option broadly maintains the present-day operation whilst addressing some of the more recent resilience issues on routes, such as a reduction in sailings during refit periods. On the Whalsay route, the key short-term intervention to maintain the current service is a replacement for the 1982-built MV Hendra. She is now well past her nominal service life – the need for her replacement was identified in the previous Shetland Inter-Island Transport Study (2016) and the Whalsay OBC (2019, updated in 2022).
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something option for Whalsay would entail significant harbour works, with the redevelopment of the current Pelagic Basin in Symbister. This option would also include an expansion of the service, with a two-vessel timetable from early morning to late evening Monday to Saturday and for much of the day on a Sunday.
Ferry Do Max	The Ferry Do Max option would represent a major scaling-up of the Whalsay ferry service to address capacity and service constraints. It involves moving to a three vessel, 24-hour operation and would require the development of a new harbour in Whalsay at North Voe.
Fixed Link	Construction of a permanent fixed link between Whalsay and the Shetland Mainland, providing continuous access and removing timetable dependency. Benefits and impacts are shaped by the relationship between any toll level and existing ferry costs, and by whether bus services are provided at a frequency that is at least equivalent to the current ferry service in order to avoid disadvantaging non-car users.

7.2 Option Whalsay 1: Business as Usual

Wha1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 7.2.1 Under Business as Usual, ferry services between Whalsay and the Shetland Mainland would continue at current levels of frequency, capacity and operating hours, with a like-for-like vessel replacement at the end of asset life. This option maintains existing connectivity but does not address known challenges relating to reliability, weather disruption and peak-time pressure. Given Whalsay's role as a commuting and service island, continued disruption has disproportionate impacts on people who rely on regular, time-critical travel, including older people, disabled people, carers and those travelling for work or education.
- 7.2.2 In the baseline, continued reliance on existing ferry timetables can constrain timely access to preventative health appointments, allied health services, acute and specialist healthcare and mental health support located on mainland Shetland.
- 7.2.3 The baseline also includes peak capacity and booking pressures, which can increase anxiety and reduce predictability for those who need to travel at specific times for work, education or appointments.

Accessibility

- 7.2.4 Accessibility would remain broadly unchanged in implementing this option. While replacement assets would meet current regulatory standards, no enhancements to boarding arrangements, vessel layout or passenger facilities are anticipated. Existing barriers affecting disabled people, people with reduced mobility and those travelling with children would therefore persist, limiting independent and spontaneous travel.
- 7.2.5 Although replacement of MV *Hendra* is expected to deliver an immediate benefit for disabled access relative to the current vessel, structural barriers such as the need to book and limited choice at peak times remain a constraint on spontaneous and independent travel.

Participation in Daily Life

- 7.2.6 Current service patterns constrain flexibility for daily activities, particularly for those balancing employment, education, caring responsibilities and healthcare appointments on the Shetland Mainland. Under Business as Usual, these constraints remain. Disruption can have knock-on effects on income, attendance and wellbeing, reinforcing existing inequalities in participation for some groups within the community.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on equality outcomes.

Wha1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 7.2.7 Business as Usual maintains baseline access to healthcare, education and other essential services. However, it does not reduce the additional time, cost and uncertainty associated with ferry-dependent access. For people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, these factors can limit effective access to services and exacerbate inequalities of outcome.



- 7.2.8 In emergencies, casualties from Whalsay may require ambulance transfer via the Symbister to Laxo or diversionary Vidlin ferry service. While out of hours cover is available, the cross-water journey can create anxiety and potential risk or discomfort for patients. In life threatening situations, air ambulance support is used.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 7.2.9 Whalsay's economic links to the Shetland Mainland rely on predictable and reliable ferry services. Under Business as Usual, continued exposure to disruption limits opportunities for commuters, shift workers and businesses dependent on just-in-time movements. These impacts are felt most strongly by people in lower-paid or less flexible employment.
- 7.2.10 The evidence base indicates that the key economic mechanism for improved connectivity in Whalsay is labour market functioning. A combination of peak vehicle-deck capacity, frequency and cost can act as barriers to residents taking up employment on Mainland Shetland.
- 7.2.11 Among the residents who reported travelling to the Mainland less than they would like (31%, n=49), 15 reported that they are missing out on employment opportunities as a consequence.

Transport Affordability

- 7.2.12 Transport costs remain unchanged in implementing this option. For households requiring frequent travel, ferry fares represent an ongoing financial burden, particularly when combined with indirect costs arising from delays or missed connections. Business as Usual does not mitigate these affordability pressures.
- 7.2.13 Affordability is identified as a key driver of suppressed travel. Among those travelling less often than they would like, 41% identified car fares as a major factor and 33% as a minor factor, while 27% identified passenger fares as a major factor and 43% as a minor factor. Among those travelling as often as they would like but whose day-to-day activities are negatively impacted, 31% identified car fares as a major factor and 37% as a minor factor, while 39% identified passenger fares as a major factor and 14% as a minor factor.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on socio-economic outcomes.

7.3 Option Whalsay 2: Ferry Do Something

Wha2: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 7.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option introduces a replacement vessel designed to improve reliability and operational resilience. Reduced disruption is expected to deliver benefits for people who depend on regular ferry travel, including commuters, disabled people and those accessing essential services. While overall service patterns remain similar, improved reliability represents a meaningful improvement on the baseline.
- 7.3.2 This option increases service levels relative to baseline and is expected to generate additional demand and vehicle kilometres. While this marginally increases statistical accident risk, the overall scale of impact is expected to be small given low traffic volumes.
- 7.3.3 This option also includes modernised and formalised marshalling arrangements at the ports, which reduces pedestrian and vehicle conflict and supports safer interchange.



- 7.3.4 When the service is diverted to Vidlin, increased vehicle movements through the village and Lunnasting Primary School are a specific local road safety consideration, even where traffic management is modernised.
- 7.3.5 Improved frequency can also reduce the incentive to rush to catch a sailing, particularly in diversion scenarios to Vidlin where driving time is longer and the road becomes single track with passing places west of Laxo.

Accessibility

- 7.3.6 This option provides opportunities for incremental improvements to accessibility through vessel design and operational practice. More consistent performance and improved passenger facilities support inclusive travel for people with mobility impairments, sensory impairments and families with young children, although fundamental timetable constraints remain.
- 7.3.7 However, the need to book remains a structural accessibility barrier for some groups, and incremental change may not fully address inequality effects linked to competition for space at peak periods.

Participation in Daily Life

- 7.3.8 Improved reliability supports greater confidence in travel planning and participation in work, education and social activities. Reduced disruption lowers stress and uncertainty for residents, particularly those managing complex daily routines involving ferry travel.
- 7.3.9 Reduced stress and fatigue associated with more reliable travel can support mental wellbeing, particularly for frequent travellers and for those balancing health needs, caring responsibilities and work commitments.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.

Wha2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 7.3.10 By reducing the likelihood of cancellations and delays, this option improves effective access to essential services for Whalsay residents. For people on lower incomes or with limited flexibility, improved reliability reduces the risk of missed appointments and additional costs.
- 7.3.11 Expanded capacity also reduces the risk of being unable to secure a booking, which supports access to health appointments and supports health and social care workforce mobility, including visiting clinicians and social care staff.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 7.3.12 Improved reliability supports employment participation and business activity by reducing travel-related risk. While capacity and frequency remain unchanged, more dependable services particularly benefit those in employment that requires regular Shetland Mainland access.
- 7.3.13 In Whalsay, improved connectivity is expected to support labour market functioning, including enabling residents to enter employment, move to more productive work, and work additional hours, where suppressed travel currently acts as a constraint.



Transport Affordability

- 7.3.14 Although fares are unchanged in implementing this option, improved reliability reduces indirect costs such as lost income or additional accommodation. This delivers a modest positive affordability effect for lower-income households compared to Business as Usual.
- 7.3.15 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to exploring reduced resident fares in the Do Something scenario, which would strengthen affordability impacts if implemented, although detailed fare policy is subject to project-level business case development.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

7.4 Option Whalsay 3: Ferry Do Max

Wha3: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 7.4.1 Ferry Do Max significantly enhances access by increasing frequency and extending operating hours. This reduces timetable dependency and improves resilience by providing alternative sailings when disruption occurs. The option delivers clear benefits for commuters, service users and people requiring flexible travel, including disabled people and carers.
- 7.4.2 This option is expected to provide a step change in capacity and a reduction in competition for space, which is particularly relevant where peak capacity constraints otherwise create booking anxiety and exclusion risks.
- 7.4.3 This option includes expanded and formalised marshalling at the ports, and is particularly advantageous at Symbister as it provides a purpose-built ferry terminal segregated from other harbour users.

Accessibility

- 7.4.4 Increased frequency and extended hours improve functional accessibility by offering more choice and reducing reliance on specific sailings. Combined with modern vessel standards, this supports more inclusive travel and greater independence for people with protected characteristics.
- 7.4.5 In contrast to incremental change, increased service levels reduce the structural accessibility barrier associated with the need to book and can provide particular benefit for carers, families and those travelling for health or education purposes.

Participation in Daily Life

- 7.4.6 Greater service availability supports fuller participation in employment, education, healthcare and social life. The option particularly benefits people balancing multiple commitments and those whose participation is currently constrained by limited sailing times.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

Wha3: Fairer Scotland Duty



Access to Essential Services

- 7.4.7 Enhanced frequency improves timely access to essential services and reduces the risk that socio-economic disadvantage limits service use. This option represents a clear improvement in equality of access compared to lower-intervention ferry options.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 7.4.8 Ferry Do Max supports economic inclusion by enabling more flexible commuting patterns, supporting shift work and improving conditions for business and freight movements. These benefits are particularly important for lower-income households reliant on ferry access for employment.
- 7.4.9 However, the wider economic narrative indicates that the principal benefit mechanism is labour market functioning rather than freight volumes, as Whalsay does not generate significant freight movements due to the nature of its pelagic industry.

Transport Affordability

- 7.4.10 The Ferry Do Max option proposes free fares for residents, directly reducing the cost of travel. In combination with this, increased service frequency lowers indirect costs associated with missed sailings and inflexible travel arrangements. Together, these changes improve overall affordability, particularly for frequent users, and support fairer access to ferry services.
- 7.4.11 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to free resident fares under the Ferry Do Max scenario. If implemented, this would significantly enhance affordability outcomes, although delivery would depend on subsequent project-level and network-wide fare policy decisions.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes.

7.5 Option Whalsay 4: Fixed Link

Wha4: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 7.5.1 A fixed link between Whalsay and the Shetland Mainland would provide continuous, weather-resilient access, removing timetable dependency and ferry-related disruption. For Whalsay residents, this represents a substantial improvement in transport reliability, particularly given the island's strong daily interaction with the Mainland for employment, education, healthcare and services. The OBC identifies that this option would significantly reduce the uncertainty and constraints associated with ferry cancellations, missed sailings and limited operating hours.
- 7.5.2 However, the OBC also highlights that the benefits of a fixed link must be considered alongside wider network impacts. These impacts may disproportionately affect other island communities and people who remain dependent on ferry services, and therefore require careful consideration as part of a network-wide approach.

Accessibility

- 7.5.3 By removing reliance on vessel boarding and scheduled assistance, a fixed link has the potential to significantly improve accessibility for many users, including disabled people, older



residents and families with young children. Continuous access supports independent travel and reduces reliance on staff availability or specific sailing times, which can be a barrier under ferry-based services.

- 7.5.4 At the same time, the OBC recognises that accessibility outcomes are highly dependent on detailed design. Without appropriate provision for walking, cycling and safe access for non-motorised users⁸ considered within public bus service provision, there is a risk that accessibility benefits accrue primarily to people with access to a private car. This could disadvantage non-drivers, including some disabled people, young people and lower-income households, particularly if alternative transport options are limited.
- 7.5.5 For there to be no loss of accessibility with a fixed link, bus services through the tunnel would need to be at least as frequent as the current ferry service. This is particularly important given that only a very small number of services currently connect with bus services at Laxo.
- 7.5.6 Tunnel design constraints for cyclists mean that, to avoid new inequalities, replacement bus services would need to be capable of accommodating bicycles.

Participation in Daily Life

- 7.5.7 The fixed link would fundamentally alter participation in daily life by enabling unrestricted travel between Whalsay and the Shetland Mainland. This supports greater flexibility in employment, education, healthcare and social activity, and has the potential to improve wellbeing and quality of life for residents whose daily routines are currently shaped by ferry timetables. The fixed link may deliver long-term public health benefits associated with reduced isolation and improved access to health promoting activities and services.
- 7.5.8 However, the OBC also notes that improved connectivity can lead to changes in service provision and travel expectations. Ongoing monitoring would therefore be required to understand how participation outcomes evolve over time. There is also a risk of increased geographic inequality overall, with islands receiving a fixed link becoming comparable to Mainland locations, potentially widening disparities with non-linked islands.
- 7.5.9 The potential loss of MOT exemption following integration with the Mainland via fixed links may lead to higher vehicle compliance and maintenance costs, with possible disproportionate effects on low income households; at this stage, evidence is insufficient to determine the scale of impact, and this should be explored in more detail at the project-level stage.

Overall, it is considered that option **Wha4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes, **subject to** accessible public transport and inclusive provision for non-drivers.

Wha4: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 7.5.10 A fixed link removes a key structural barrier to accessing essential services by providing continuous access to healthcare, education and other services located on the Shetland Mainland. This has the potential to significantly reduce inequalities of outcome associated with geographic isolation for Whalsay residents, particularly those who require frequent or time-critical travel.

⁸ Non-motorised users primarily refers to pedestrian, cyclists, equestrians and disabled users relying on wheelchairs or mobility scooters.



- 7.5.11 This includes a step change in access to emergency and unscheduled healthcare, with 24-hour access to Gilbert Bain Hospital including Accident and Emergency attendance, and a significant reduction in ambulance response and transit times. The fixed link also mitigates the combined risk of ferry unavailability due to weather or technical issues and air ambulance unavailability due to other call outs.
- 7.5.12 However, the OBC indicates that benefits may not be experienced equally by all groups. People without access to a private car may not realise the same improvement in effective access unless public transport and active travel connections are provided and maintained. There is also a need to consider the implications for access to services in other island communities if investment priorities or service patterns change.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 7.5.13 The fixed link supports economic inclusion by enabling more flexible commuting, supporting shift work and reducing travel-related risk for workers and employers. This is particularly relevant for Whalsay, where regular Shetland Mainland access underpins employment and economic activity.
- 7.5.14 The wider economic narrative indicates that improved connectivity would primarily support the functioning of the labour market, enabling residents to enter employment, move to more productive jobs and work more hours, where peak capacity, frequency and cost currently act as barriers.
- 7.5.15 At the same time, the OBC recognises that economic benefits may accrue more quickly to households with greater financial flexibility, including car ownership. Without complementary measures, there is a risk that lower-income households or non-drivers do not benefit to the same extent, or that economic activity is drawn away from other islands. Alignment with wider economic and transport strategies would therefore be required to support equitable outcomes.
- 7.5.16 It is also important to recognise that the Council ferry service is a major employer on Whalsay, with crews for MV *Hendra*, MV *Linga* and the Skerries vessel MV *Filla* drawn from the island. Discontinuation of the ferry service under a fixed link would therefore lead to job loss or redeployment, with potential localised socio-economic impacts.

Transport Affordability

- 7.5.17 The affordability impacts of a fixed link depend on future operating and funding arrangements. The OBC notes that tolling has not been ruled out as a potential mechanism to contribute to capital or ongoing costs. While the fixed link would remove ferry fares and reduce indirect costs associated with disruption, such as lost income or accommodation expenses, the net affordability outcome for users remains uncertain at this stage.
- 7.5.18 Affordability impacts are sensitive to the relationship between tolls and ferry fares. A toll would be paid per vehicle regardless of occupancy, whereas ferry fares apply per passenger in addition to the driver, which can change affordability outcomes for larger households and accompanied travel.
- 7.5.19 There is a risk that toll charges could disproportionately affect lower-income households, frequent users and those who rely on regular travel for employment or caring responsibilities. For these groups, tolls could offset some of the anticipated affordability benefits of continuous access. Mitigation would require careful consideration of tolling structures, potential exemptions or concessions, and the availability of viable alternatives to private car use, alongside ongoing monitoring of distributional impacts.



- 7.5.20 The evidence base indicates that affordability is already a key driver of inequality on this route, with both car fares and passenger fares identified as factors suppressing travel or negatively affecting day-to-day activities for a substantial share of residents.
- 7.5.21 It is important to recognise that the removal of MOT exemption under fixed link options could increase ongoing vehicle costs and place additional pressure on low income households; however, given the current lack of detail, this issue cannot yet be robustly assessed and should be considered further during project-level appraisal.

Overall, it is considered that option **Whal4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes, **subject to** toll policy, non-car provision and workforce transition planning that avoids adverse impacts on island-based employment.

7.6 Integrated Summary

- 7.6.1 Across the Whalsay options, equality and socio-economic outcomes are shaped by a combination of reliability, peak capacity and booking pressures, and affordability. A significant minority of residents report travelling away from Whalsay less than they would like, with reported missed opportunities spanning social participation as well as health appointments, employment, education and training. Ferry-based increments improve outcomes progressively through improved reliability, frequency and capacity.
- 7.6.2 A fixed link offers the most transformative change for access to emergency and unscheduled healthcare and for labour market functioning, but equitable benefit depends on toll policy and on providing bus services at least as frequent as the current ferry service, including provision for non-car users and bicycles. Any fixed link case must also consider localised employment impacts associated with the ferry service workforce on Whalsay.

8 Yell Sound

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 This section assesses the EqIA and FSD implications of long-term transport options for Yell. Yell plays a strategic role within the Shetland transport network as the primary gateway to Unst and Fetlar, as well as a resident island community with its own employment base and service needs. The ferry service across Yell Sound therefore supports both local travel and wider inter-island connectivity. The assessment considers how each option affects people with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, taking account of Yell's network function and the scale of demand identified in the OBC.
- 8.1.2 The resident survey indicates that 32% (n=57) of Yell residents travel off Yell less often than they would like, with associated impacts on social participation and access to opportunities.
- 8.1.3 The route also has a distinct freight and business function, with consultation describing Yell Sound as the most freight intensive route on the network, linked to Yell's manufacturing base, primarily driven by the island's marine and aquaculture sectors, and its role as the gateway to SaxaVord Spaceport on Unst.
- 8.1.4 The route options for Yell Sound are provided below in **Table 8.1**.

Table 8.1: Yell Sound Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option broadly maintains the present-day operation whilst addressing some of the more recent resilience issues on routes, such as a reduction in sailings during refit periods. On Yell Sound, the Business as Usual option is primarily a continuation of the present-day operation combined with a proposal to maintain a two-vessel service during refit once additional tonnage is introduced in the wider fleet.
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something option represents the minimum viable upgrade to maintain a sustainable and reliable service. On Yell Sound it is primarily focused on expanding the service using the current vessels, providing additional weekday sailings and a two-vessel weekend service.
Ferry Do Max	The Ferry Do Max option would represent a major scaling-up of the Yell Sound service, moving to a three vessel, 24-hour operation.
Fixed Link	A permanent physical connection between Yell and the Mainland, providing continuous access and supporting wider inter island connectivity. Distributional outcomes under this option are sensitive to toll policy relative to ferry fares and to whether bus services are provided at a frequency at least equivalent to current ferry services, including provision for cyclists where tunnel design does not permit cycling.

8.2 Option Yell 1: Business as Usual

Yell1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 8.2.1 Under Business as Usual, ferry services across Yell Sound would continue broadly as at present, with like-for-like replacement of vessels at the end of asset life. This maintains



baseline levels of access but does not address existing challenges relating to reliability, weather sensitivity and peak-period pressure. Given Yell's gateway function, disruption affects not only Yell residents but also users travelling to and from the North Isles. Groups with higher dependency on reliable ferry services, including disabled people, older people, carers and those travelling for employment or education, would continue to experience disproportionate impacts.

- 8.2.2 Baseline reliance on existing timetables may constrain timely access to preventative healthcare, allied health services, acute and specialist care and mental health support located on mainland Shetland, and reduced service during refit or single-vessel operation can exacerbate stress and anxiety for frequent travellers.
- 8.2.3 The "gateway" function also creates connection pressure for through-trips from Fetlar and Unst, where missed connections can compound journey impacts for those travelling for appointments, education or employment.

Accessibility

- 8.2.4 Accessibility would remain largely unchanged in implementing this option. While replacement vessels would meet minimum accessibility requirements, no step-change improvements to boarding arrangements, vessel layout or passenger facilities are anticipated. Existing barriers to independent travel for disabled people, people with reduced mobility and families with young children would therefore persist.
- 8.2.5 Incremental accessibility gains from vessel replacement are likely to be limited on this route, as current Yell Sound ferries are already compliant in terms of disabled access, and structural barriers such as the need to plan around timetables and bookings remain.

Participation in Daily Life

- 8.2.6 Current service patterns constrain flexibility for daily activities, particularly where ferry travel is required for work, healthcare, education or caring responsibilities. Under Business as Usual, these constraints remain, and the cumulative effect of disruption can limit participation in daily life, especially for people with limited flexibility or financial resilience.
- 8.2.7 Survey evidence indicates that residents travelling less often than they would like most commonly report missing social opportunities, but also report missed health appointments (56% of this sub-sample), shopping and employment opportunities, illustrating that constrained travel affects both participation and essential activity.

- 8.2.1 Overall, it is considered that option **Yell1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on equality outcomes.

Yell1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 8.2.2 Business as Usual maintains current access to essential services on the Mainland. However, it does not reduce the additional time, cost and uncertainty associated with ferry-dependent access. For people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, these factors can restrict effective access to healthcare, education and support services.
- 8.2.3 In emergencies, casualties from Yell may require ambulance transfer using the Yell Sound ferry. While there is out of hours cover and relatively high frequency, the journey can still create anxiety and potential risk or discomfort for patients, noting that air ambulance support is used in life threatening situations.



Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 8.2.4 Yell's economy and labour market links to the Shetland Mainland and the North Isles rely on predictable ferry connections. Under Business as Usual, continued exposure to disruption limits opportunities for commuters, shift workers and businesses reliant on time-sensitive movements. These impacts are most acute for people in lower-paid or less flexible employment.
- 8.2.5 Stakeholder evidence indicates that ferry dependency is a key constraint on labour recruitment and retention for Yell (and Unst), with the need to use scheduled ferry services deterring potential employees even where total journey time is not longer than a direct drive. The business community also describes "uncertainty risk premiums" associated with working around a ferry service, including inflated quotations, declined work and strategic business decisions, which can affect household costs and local service provision as well as business productivity.

Transport Affordability

- 8.2.6 Transport costs remain unchanged when implementing this option. For households requiring frequent travel, ferry fares and the risk of indirect costs associated with disruption contribute to ongoing affordability pressures. Business as Usual does not mitigate these effects.
- 8.2.7 Affordability evidence from the residents' survey indicates that among residents travelling less often than they would like, car fares (37% major, 32% minor) and passenger fares (21% major, 39% minor) contribute to suppressed travel. Among those travelling as often as they would like but whose day-to-day activities are negatively impacted, car fares (39% major, 30% minor) and passenger fares (19% major, 43% minor) are also contributing factors.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell1 Business as Usual** will have a **minor adverse effect (-)** on socio-economic outcomes.

8.3 Option Yell 2: Ferry Do Something

Yell2: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 8.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option introduces an improved vessel specification, enhancing reliability and capacity relative to the baseline. Reduced disruption is expected to improve confidence in being able to travel as planned, benefiting people with high travel dependency, including disabled people, older residents and those accessing essential services. While service patterns remain broadly similar, reliability improvements represent a positive incremental change.
- 8.3.2 This option also supports safety and usability at terminals through expanded marshalling areas at Toft and Ulsta, reducing pedestrian and vehicle interaction and improving the management of peak movements.
- 8.3.3 Improved frequency and reduced waiting time can also reduce the incentive to rush to catch a specific connection, particularly for through-trips across Yell from Fetlar or Unst where connection pressure can affect driver behaviour.



Accessibility

- 8.3.4 Improved vessel design and capacity provide opportunities for incremental accessibility benefits, including more consistent boarding conditions and improved passenger facilities. These changes support more inclusive travel for people with mobility impairments, sensory impairments and families with young children, although timetable dependency remains.
- 8.3.5 The provision of new waiting rooms at Toft and Ulsta improves the experience for foot passengers by reducing exposure to vehicle interaction and improving personal security while waiting to travel.

Participation in Daily Life

- 8.3.6 Greater reliability supports improved participation in employment, education, healthcare and social activities by reducing uncertainty and stress associated with ferry travel. Benefits extend to both Yell residents and those travelling onward to Fetlar and Unst.
- 8.3.7 Reduced disruption and improved predictability can reduce travel stress and fatigue, supporting wellbeing for frequent travellers and those managing caring responsibilities or health conditions.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.

Yell2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 8.3.8 By reducing the frequency and impact of cancellations and delays, this option improves effective access to essential services. For people on lower incomes or with limited flexibility, improved reliability reduces the risk of missed appointments and additional travel costs.
- 8.3.9 Improved service reliability and resilience can improve health equity by reducing weather-related cancellations and service reductions associated with refit or single-vessel operation, increasing predictability of travel for treatment.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 8.3.10 Improved reliability and capacity support economic participation by reducing travel-related risk for commuters, businesses and freight users. These benefits are particularly relevant for lower-income households dependent on ferry access for employment.
- 8.3.11 However, while this option can improve labour mobility, it does not remove that the need to rely on scheduled ferry services, which stakeholders identify as a barrier to attracting workers from mainland Shetland.

Transport Affordability

- 8.3.12 Although fares are unchanged in implementing this option, improved service performance reduces indirect costs such as lost income or additional accommodation. This delivers a modest positive affordability effect relative to Business as Usual.
- 8.3.13 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to reduced resident fares, which would strengthen affordability impacts if implemented, although detailed fare policy remains subject to project and network-level development.



Overall, it is considered that option **Yell2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

8.4 Option Yell 3: Ferry Do Max

Yell3: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 8.4.1 Ferry Do Max significantly increases frequency and extends operating hours across Yell Sound. This strengthens network resilience by providing more alternative sailings and reducing reliance on specific departures. Improved access particularly benefits people requiring flexible or time-critical travel and enhances Yell's role as a resilient gateway to the North Isles.
- 8.4.2 While capacity is not generally a major issue on Yell Sound, expanded capacity in implementing this option reduces any residual risk of not securing a booking and the anxiety associated with this, supporting access for health and social care travel and visiting workforce mobility.
- 8.4.3 This option also includes expanded marshalling and new waiting rooms at Toft and Ulsta, which reduce vehicle interaction risk for foot passengers and improve personal security.

Accessibility

- 8.4.4 Increased frequency and extended hours improve functional accessibility by offering greater choice and reducing the consequences of missed or cancelled sailings. Combined with modern vessel standards, this supports more inclusive and independent travel for people with protected characteristics.
- 8.4.5 However, on this route, incremental accessibility benefits from upgraded vessel tonnage are expected to be limited as current services are broadly compliant, and the principal accessibility gains arise from increased choice and reduced booking pressure rather than from step change vessel accessibility improvements.

Participation in Daily Life

- 8.4.6 Greater service availability supports fuller participation in daily life, including employment, education, healthcare and social activities. The option benefits people balancing multiple commitments and those whose participation is currently constrained by limited sailing times.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

Yell3: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 8.4.7 Enhanced frequency improves timely access to essential services and reduces the likelihood that socio-economic disadvantage limits service use. This option represents a clear improvement in equality of access compared to lower-intervention ferry options.



Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 8.4.8 Ferry Do Max supports economic inclusion by enabling more flexible commuting, supporting shift work and strengthening freight movements. These impacts are particularly important for lower-income households reliant on ferry access to sustain employment.

Transport Affordability

- 8.4.9 The Ferry Do Max option proposes free fares for residents, directly reducing the cost of travel. In combination with this, increased service frequency lowers indirect costs associated with missed sailings and inflexible travel arrangements. Together, these changes improve overall affordability, particularly for frequent users, and support fairer access to ferry services.
- 8.4.10 The option assumptions include an in-principle commitment to free resident fares under the Ferry Do Max scenario. If implemented, this would significantly enhance affordability outcomes, although delivery would depend on subsequent project-level and network-wide fare policy decisions.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell3 Ferry Do Max** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on socio-economic outcomes.

8.5 Option Yell 4: Fixed Link

Yell4: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 8.5.1 A fixed link between Yell and the Mainland would provide continuous, weather-resilient access, removing timetable dependency and ferry-related disruption. This represents a substantial improvement in access and reliability for Yell residents and for those travelling onward to Fetlar and Unst, particularly people with high travel dependency, including disabled people, older residents, carers and those requiring urgent or unplanned travel.
- 8.5.2 The OBC identifies that the benefits of a fixed link are not confined to Yell alone and may have wider network implications. There is a risk that changes in travel behaviour, traffic patterns and service demand could generate uneven impacts across the wider island network. There is potential for adverse effects on other island communities or on people who remain dependent on ferry services.

Accessibility

- 8.5.3 The fixed link removes reliance on vessel boarding and scheduled assistance, supporting independent travel for many users. This has the potential to significantly improve accessibility for disabled people, older residents and families, particularly where ferry boarding conditions currently present barriers.
- 8.5.4 At the same time, accessibility outcomes are highly dependent on detailed design and on the balance between motorised traffic and non-motorised users. Without adequate provision for walking, cycling and public transport, there is a risk that accessibility benefits are realised primarily by people with access to a private car. This could disadvantage non-drivers, including some disabled people, young people and lower-income households, both on Yell and elsewhere in the network.
- 8.5.5 For there to be no loss of accessibility with a fixed link, bus services through the tunnel would need to be at least as frequent as current ferry services. The tunnel design does not allow



cycling, so buses would need to accommodate bicycles to avoid introducing new barriers for people relying on active travel.

Participation in Daily Life

- 8.5.6 Continuous access would enable greater flexibility in participation in employment, education, healthcare and social activity, supporting long-term wellbeing and community sustainability on Yell. The removal of timetable constraints particularly benefits people whose daily lives are currently shaped by ferry schedules.
- 8.5.7 However, the OBC highlights that changes of this scale can alter patterns of service use, commuting and economic activity. Monitoring of participation outcomes would therefore be required to ensure that improved connectivity does not inadvertently widen inequalities for people with limited mobility, limited income or limited access to transport.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

Yell4: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 8.5.8 The fixed link has the potential to remove a key structural barrier to accessing essential services, significantly reducing inequalities of outcome associated with geographic isolation for Yell residents and Fetlar and Unst users. For people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, continuous access can reduce missed appointments, travel uncertainty and associated stress.
- 8.5.9 However, there is a risk that benefits are unevenly distributed if access to services increasingly assumes private car use. People without access to a car may not experience the same improvement in effective access unless complementary public transport and active travel measures are provided. There is also a need to consider impacts on access to services for communities elsewhere in the network if changes in investment or service patterns occur.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 8.5.10 A fixed link supports economic inclusion by integrating Yell more fully with the Shetland Mainland labour market and strengthening inter-island connectivity. This can expand employment opportunities, support business development and reduce travel-related risks for workers and employers.
- 8.5.11 Stakeholder evidence indicates that a fixed link would address the labour recruitment and retention constraint associated with ferry dependency.
- 8.5.12 Consultation also indicates that the productivity benefit from removing uncertainty and time loss associated with waiting for and travelling on ferries is particularly relevant for freight and business users, given the high freight intensity on Yell Sound.
- 8.5.13 At the same time, the OBC recognises that economic benefits may accrue more quickly to households with greater resources, including car ownership and financial flexibility. There is a risk that lower-income households or non-drivers do not benefit to the same extent, or that economic activity is drawn away from other islands. Mitigation would require alignment with wider economic and transport strategies to ensure fair distribution of benefits.



- 8.5.14 Business stakeholders consider a fixed link to Yell to be a “game changer” and conservatively estimate that it could generate circa £30m to £60m in additional output per annum by lifting production constraints, with much of this attributable to fisheries and aquaculture, and supported by the introduction of new NorthLink Freight Flex vessels from 2029.

Transport Affordability

- 8.5.15 The affordability impacts of a fixed link are dependent on future operating and funding arrangements. The OBC notes that tolling has not been ruled out as a potential mechanism to contribute to capital or ongoing costs, and that any decision on tolls would be subject to further appraisal and policy consideration. As such, while the fixed link would remove ferry fares and reduce indirect costs associated with disruption, such as lost income or accommodation costs, the net affordability outcome for users remains uncertain at this stage.
- 8.5.16 Affordability impacts are sensitive to the relationship between tolls and ferry fares. A toll would be paid per vehicle regardless of occupancy, whereas ferry fares apply per passenger in addition to the driver, which can change distributional outcomes for households travelling together or for accompanied travel.
- 8.5.17 There is a risk that the introduction of tolls could disproportionately affect lower-income households, frequent users and people who rely on regular travel for employment, education or caring responsibilities. For these groups, toll charges could represent a recurring cost that offsets some of the anticipated affordability benefits of continuous access. Conversely, households with greater financial flexibility or lower travel frequency may experience greater net benefit.
- 8.5.18 To mitigate these risks, the OBC highlights the importance of considering affordability and distributional impacts as part of any future tolling strategy. This includes assessing the potential for differential charging, exemptions or concessions, and ensuring that viable alternatives to private car use, such as public transport and active travel provision, are available. Ongoing monitoring would be required to ensure that fixed link charging arrangements do not exacerbate socio-economic inequalities or create new barriers to access for vulnerable groups.
- 8.5.19 Survey evidence indicates that affordability pressures already influence travel behaviour: among those travelling less often than they would like, car fares and passenger fares are identified as contributing factors, and similar affordability pressures are reported among those whose day-to-day activities are negatively impacted by the ferry service.
- 8.5.20 Consultation also indicates that, for business users, the uncertainty and risk cost premium of working around a ferry service is more significant than the fare itself, and a fixed link would remove this risk in its entirety.

Overall, it is considered that option **Yell4 Fixed Link** will have a **major beneficial effect (++)** on equality outcomes.

8.6 Integrated Conclusion

- 8.6.1 While the Fixed Link option offers substantial potential benefits, the OBC emphasises the importance of managing distributional impacts both within Yell and across the wider island network. Key mitigation measures include inclusive design, early and ongoing engagement with affected communities, integration with public transport and active travel provision, and careful consideration of network-wide impacts on ferry services and investment priorities. Ongoing monitoring would be required to identify and respond to unintended consequences and to ensure that improvements in connectivity contribute to reducing, rather than reinforcing, inequalities of outcome.



- 8.6.2 The evidence base also indicates that a fixed link across Yell Sound would support improved equality of access for people living in Fetlar and Unst, amplifying distributional benefits across the North Isles, provided affordability and non-car accessibility are addressed through toll policy and service design.
- 8.6.3 In parallel, the appraisal highlights that the Ferry Do Max option performs poorly in conventional value-for-money terms relative to Ferry Do Something, suggesting that the case for large-scale ferry expansion should be framed primarily around strategic and distributional outcomes rather than monetised economic efficiency.

DRAFT

9 Foula

9.1 Introduction

- 9.1.1 Equality outcomes for Foula residents are shaped by the island's geographic distance from the Mainland, small population and reliance on a limited number of scheduled ferry and air connections. Travel away from the island is typically infrequent, planned well in advance and often linked to specific purposes such as health care, education, essential shopping or administrative needs. When services are disrupted, there are few alternative options and limited flexibility to rearrange journeys at short notice.
- 9.1.2 For Foula, the ferry's core role is closely linked to meeting the island's supply-chain needs rather than serving as the primary mode for passenger travel, with the air service typically providing the main passenger connection where suitable and available.
- 9.1.3 These conditions, in particular the island's geographic distance from the Mainland and limited number of ferry and air services, disproportionately affect older people, disabled people, pregnant people, carers and those with long-term health conditions, who are more likely to depend on timely access to services and who may face greater difficulty adapting to cancellations, extended delays or unplanned overnight stays off-island.
- 9.1.4 Accessibility outcomes are influenced by the Foula context, where ship-to-shore access is not fully step-free at present and remains inherently challenging to address. While both options are expected to deliver some improvement in onboard accessibility for people with reduced mobility, constraints at the pier interface are likely to persist. Although future pier replacement under both scenarios could provide opportunities to enhance accessibility, these improvements would not differentiate between options. Evidence also indicates a degree of community acceptance of these limitations, reflecting the realities of island living. As the air service is the primary mode of passenger travel to and from Foula, overall equality and accessibility impacts associated with the ferry service are expected to remain limited under both options.
- 9.1.5 The route options for Foula are provided below in **Table 9.1**.

Table 9.1: Foula Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option is essentially continuation of the existing service and represents the appraisal baseline.
Ferry Do Something	Whilst consultation undertaken in March 2025 identified that the community is satisfied with the current arrangements, it is important to have a point of comparison in an appraisal. To this end, the Ferry Do Something entails the delivery and operation of a 'Fair Isle Class' vessel for this route.

9.2 Option Foula 1: Business as Usual

Fou1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 9.2.1 Under the Business as Usual option, access and reliability for Foula residents remain largely unchanged. Ferry services continue to be highly sensitive to weather conditions, with



cancellations having a disproportionate impact due to the limited number of sailings and the lack of alternative routes. For residents with protected characteristics, a single cancelled sailing can result in delayed access to medical appointments, postponed care or extended time away from home, particularly where return journeys are also affected.

- 9.2.2 The current operating model is also characterised by an island-based crew and the ability to operate sailings flexibly around weather windows, which supports resilience in practice even where the timetable remains limited.
- 9.2.3 The need to plan travel well in advance, combined with the risk that journeys may not proceed as scheduled, places a greater burden on people who require regular or time-critical travel and reinforces reliance on informal support networks.
- 9.2.4 Given that the ferry's primary function is to meet supply-chain needs, the most material equality risks in implementing this option often arise when disruption affects access to goods and essential deliveries rather than only passenger travel.

Accessibility

- 9.2.5 Accessibility challenges under Business as Usual are closely linked to weather exposure and boarding conditions rather than terminal infrastructure. Variable sea conditions can make boarding and disembarkation difficult, particularly for wheelchair users, people with reduced mobility or balance impairments and those with sensory sensitivities. When services are disrupted, access to timely information is limited, which can increase anxiety and reduce confidence in travelling independently.
- 9.2.6 While onboard access may improve with replacement assets over time, ship-to-shore access would remain a defining constraint under a like-for-like approach.

Participation in Daily Life

- 9.2.7 Participation in daily life is constrained by the infrequency and uncertainty of travel opportunities. For protected groups, this can limit the ability to engage in education, training, social activity or family life on the Mainland, and can contribute to isolation, particularly where planned trips are cancelled or postponed.

Overall, it is considered that option **Fou1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on equality outcomes.

Fou1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 9.2.8 Under Business as Usual, access to essential services remains constrained by limited service availability and sensitivity to weather disruption. Missed or cancelled sailings can delay access to health care, education and essential supplies, with limited scope for short-notice alternatives. For disadvantaged households, the consequences of disruption can include extended stays away or delayed access to services, reinforcing inequalities of outcome.
- 9.2.9 In the Foula context, a key fairness consideration is the extent to which disruption delays the movement of goods and essential supplies, given the supply-chain role of the ferry service.



Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 9.2.10 Employment opportunities on Foula are limited and predominantly local. In implementing this option, transport constraints continue to restrict access to employment, training and apprenticeships on the Mainland. Uncertainty associated with travel arrangements makes it difficult to sustain regular participation in Shetland Mainland-based work or learning opportunities, particularly for residents with fewer financial resources.

Transport Affordability

- 9.2.11 Transport affordability pressures remain unchanged. While travel frequency may be lower than on some other routes, the financial and practical consequences of travel are high. Households remain exposed to indirect costs associated with disruption, including lost income, extended stays or difficulties accessing essential goods. Overall, Business as Usual maintains existing socio-economic challenges and does not reduce affordability pressures for Foula residents.

Overall, it is considered that option **Fou1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on socio-economic outcomes.

9.3 Option Foula 2: Ferry Do Something

Fou2: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 9.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option improves access and reliability primarily through enhanced vessel capability and operational resilience. For Foula residents, this reduces the likelihood of cancellations and improves confidence that planned journeys will take place as scheduled. This is particularly beneficial for residents attending pre-arranged health appointments or undertaking essential trips that cannot easily be rescheduled.
- 9.3.2 The vessel uplift is expected to provide better seakeeping capability than MV *New Advance*, supporting a minor but meaningful reduction in operational risk and improving the ability to make use of tighter weather windows.
- 9.3.3 As this route's primary function is meeting Foula's supply-chain needs, the most material reliability benefit is likely to be improved consistency in the movement of goods and essential items, including reducing the incidence of short-shipped supplies where capacity constraints occur.
- 9.3.4 While the overall number of sailings remains limited, improved reliability represents a meaningful improvement for protected groups who experience the greatest consequences when journeys do not proceed.
- 9.3.5 The improvement should be interpreted in the context that the current solution is widely regarded as working well for Foula, including through an island-based crew, local knowledge and the ability to operate flexibly around weather windows, meaning that changes in implementing this option are incremental rather than transformational.

Accessibility

- 9.3.6 Improved vessel performance and more consistent operating conditions reduce physical strain associated with boarding and disembarkation. This benefits people with mobility or



sensory impairments by making the travel experience more predictable, although exposure to weather conditions remains a defining characteristic of the route.

- 9.3.7 This option also provides some minor improvements to vessel access, improving onboard conditions for people with reduced mobility.
- 9.3.8 However, ship-to-shore access remains a key constraint and step-free access is likely to remain challenging in practice, reflecting both the physical context and the accepted realities expressed through earlier community discussions.
- 9.3.9 There is greater scope to make accessibility improvements when implementing this option because it entails more significant harbour works at Ham, creating opportunities to improve the interface between vessel and shore even if weather exposure cannot be eliminated.

Participation in Daily Life

- 9.3.10 Improved reliability supports more consistent participation in planned activities, including health care, training and maintaining social connections. However, limitations on service frequency continue to restrict flexibility and spontaneity.
- 9.3.11 For Foula, the participation benefits of this option are expected to be marginal overall, reflecting that passenger travel is primarily supported through the air service, with the ferry playing a more limited passenger role.

Overall, it is considered that option **Fou2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.

Fou2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 9.3.12 The Ferry Do Something option improves access to essential services primarily through enhanced vessel reliability and operational resilience. Reduced disruption improves confidence in being able to travel for planned health appointments and essential trips. However, service availability remains limited and weather-dependent, meaning that access constraints persist.
- 9.3.13 In Foula, improved access benefits are more likely to be realised through improved consistency of the supply chain and reduced risk of short-shipped essential goods, rather than through large changes in passenger access to health infrastructure.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 9.3.14 Improved reliability supports more consistent participation in employment, training and education where opportunities exist. This represents a modest improvement for residents seeking to engage with Mainland-based work or learning. However, limited service frequency continues to restrict access to a wider range of opportunities.
- 9.3.15 This option may also provide marginal economic efficiencies by allowing larger single items, such as plant, to be moved more readily, supporting island maintenance and practical activity and reducing the need for repeated movements.
- 9.3.16 The scale of economic change should be treated as modest, as earlier community feedback indicates limited dissatisfaction with current arrangements.



9.3.17 As noted in the OBC, the current solution very much works for the Foula community. It offers an island-based crew and jobs, personal investment in the service and the ability to operate sailings flexibly around weather windows. Both Business as Usual and Ferry Do Something options seek to maintain this arrangement and thus are unlikely to have fundamental socio-economic impacts.

9.3.18 However, relative to Business as Usual (Fou1), a Fair Isle Class vessel for Ferry Do Something (Fou2) would provide a minor Economy benefit through potentially:

- Reducing journey times, which in turn could allow sailings to be operated in tighter weather windows (so more sailings operated to timetable or overall), albeit these sailings are very lightly used.
- Reducing the number of at-capacity sailings / short-shipped goods (i.e., goods presented for carriage for which there is insufficient capacity), given the larger deck capacity of the Fair Isle Class vessel compared with the like-for-like BaU replacement.
- Allowing larger single items to be moved, such as plant, thus providing efficiencies when undertaking activities on Foula.

Transport Affordability

9.3.19 Affordability outcomes improve modestly through reduced disruption and greater certainty. While direct travel costs remain broadly unchanged, improved reliability reduces the risk of unplanned expenditure associated with missed sailings. For lower-income households, this improves financial predictability but does not fundamentally change affordability constraints.

Overall, it is considered that option **Fou2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

9.4 Integrated Conclusion

9.4.1 Foula is distinctive in that the ferry primarily functions as a lifeline for the island's supply chain, while most passenger travel is typically met by the air service. Equality and Fairer Scotland Duty impacts are therefore driven less by frequency and more by the high consequences of disruption on a limited timetable, particularly for households with low financial resilience and for people with protected characteristics who need dependable access to Mainland healthcare and essential goods.

9.4.2 Business as Usual maintains the current operating model but does not reduce weather-related disruption risk or the indirect costs that arise when sailings are cancelled. Ferry Do Something delivers a modest but meaningful improvement through better seakeeping capability and minor access upgrades, which can increase the likelihood of operating within tighter weather windows and reduce short-shipped essential supplies, supporting fairer outcomes through improved predictability and fewer disruption-related costs. The main constraint is deliverability and affordability of the more significant harbour works at Ham, which should be treated as a key risk to equitable benefit if it compromises service continuity during construction or proves unaffordable.

10 Papa Stour

10.1 Introduction

- 10.1.1 Equality outcomes for Papa Stour residents are shaped by the island's small population, short crossing distance and reliance on a ferry service operating on specific days and within tidal constraints. While Papa Stour is geographically close to the Mainland, access to Lerwick for health care, employment, education and essential services is not continuous and requires careful planning around sailing availability. Disruption or missed sailings can therefore have disproportionate effects relative to the short journey length.
- 10.1.2 Older people, disabled people, pregnant people, carers and those with long-term health conditions are particularly affected, as they are more likely to depend on predictable travel for routine appointments, support services and daily needs and may have limited flexibility to rearrange journeys when sailings are unavailable.
- 10.1.3 Socio-economic outcomes for Papa Stour residents are influenced by reliance on a ferry service with limited operating days and sensitivity to tidal and weather conditions. Access to employment, health care, education, childcare, retail and public services in Lerwick is not continuous. This creates structural disadvantages for households with fewer resources, particularly where regular travel is required.
- 10.1.4 Lower-income households, people with caring responsibilities and residents without access to private vehicles are more exposed to the impacts of disruption, missed sailings or inflexible timetables, which can result in lost income or delayed access to essential services.
- 10.1.5 The route options for Papa Stour are provided below in **Table 10.1** Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Papa Stour Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The short-term requirement on the Papa Stour route is a new vessel to replace MV <i>Snolda</i> . The SOC eliminated consideration of a like-for-like replacement of the existing vessel and so the Business as Usual option for Papa Stour reflects continuation of the existing service with a new Type 1 vessel. The Business as Usual option represents the appraisal baseline.
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something for Papa Stour is focused on revenue measures only, expanding the timetable to provide seven-day sailings by introducing two return sailings on a Tuesday and Thursday.

10.2 Option Papa Stour 1: Business as Usual

PS1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 10.2.1 Under the Business as Usual option, access and reliability for Papa Stour residents remain unchanged. Ferry services continue to operate on a limited timetable influenced by tidal and weather conditions. For residents with protected characteristics, this can restrict access to routine health appointments, employment and education opportunities in Lerwick, particularly where services are only available on specific days.



- 10.2.2 The consequences of a missed or cancelled sailing can extend beyond a single day, resulting in postponed appointments or lost opportunities. These impacts fall disproportionately on those who rely on regular, predictable access and cannot easily rearrange commitments.

Accessibility

- 10.2.3 Accessibility challenges are linked to boarding arrangements, tidal variability and the absence of alternative travel options on non-sailing days. These factors can create barriers for people with mobility or sensory impairments and increase reliance on assistance. Limited service frequency also reduces flexibility for those who require additional time or support when travelling.

Participation in Daily Life

- 10.2.4 Participation in work, education, social activity and family life remains constrained by the availability of sailings. For protected groups, this can limit engagement in routine activities on the Shetland Mainland and contribute to a sense of dependency on ferry availability rather than individual need.

Overall, it is considered that option **PS1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on equality outcomes.

PS1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 10.2.5 Under Business as Usual, access to essential services remains constrained by limited ferry availability. Missed or cancelled sailings can delay access to health care, education and essential shopping, particularly where appointments or services are only available on specific days. For disadvantaged households, these delays can reinforce inequalities of outcome despite the short physical distance to the Shetland Mainland.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 10.2.6 Employment opportunities for Papa Stour residents are closely linked to the Shetland Mainland. In implementing this option, limited sailing days restrict access to shift work, part-time employment and training opportunities that require regular or flexible attendance. These constraints disproportionately affect residents in lower-paid or less secure employment who have limited ability to absorb lost income.

Transport Affordability

- 10.2.7 While direct ferry fares may be relatively low, the affordability impacts of Business as Usual arise from indirect costs. Missed sailings can result in lost workdays, additional childcare costs or the need to rearrange commitments. For lower-income households, these indirect costs contribute to ongoing socio-economic disadvantage.

Overall, it is considered that option **PS1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on socio-economic outcomes.

10.3 Option Papa Stour 2: Ferry Do Something

PS2: Equality Impact Assessment



Transport Access and Reliability

- 10.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option would improve access and reliability through the introduction of a new Type 1 or equivalent vessel and enhanced operational resilience. Improved vessel performance, increased passenger and vehicle capacity, and compliance with modern safety and stability standards would reduce the likelihood of cancellations and capacity-related booking constraints. For Papa Stour residents, this would increase confidence that scheduled sailings will operate as planned.
- 10.3.2 Option PS2 would deliver additional benefits by filling non-sailing days, thereby increasing the number of days on which travel is possible. This represents a material improvement for protected groups, particularly those who need to attend health appointments, education or employment commitments on the Shetland Mainland. Reduced uncertainty and greater timetable coverage would lessen the risk of extended delays or unplanned overnight stays.

Accessibility

- 10.3.3 A new vessel built to modern design standards would improve physical accessibility by providing step-free access throughout and more consistent boarding conditions. This would reduce barriers currently experienced by people with mobility or sensory impairments, including issues associated with doorway sills on the existing vessel. Increased reliability and connectivity would also support a more predictable travel experience, reducing anxiety associated with uncertain or infrequent sailing.

Participation in Daily Life

- 10.3.4 Improved reliability, increased capacity and seven-day connectivity would support more consistent participation in daily activities on the Mainland, including access to health care, education, employment and social connections. Option PS2 would be particularly beneficial for older people, families and children by enabling day return travel on any day of the week, facilitating educational opportunities, family visits and participation in extra-curricular activities. These changes would help to reduce inequalities experienced by Papa Stour residents relative to larger island communities.

Overall, it is considered that option **PS2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes. While some constraints related to timetable structure would remain, the increase in connectivity, capacity and accessibility represents a meaningful improvement for protected groups.

PS2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 10.3.5 The Ferry Do Something option would improve access to essential services by lifting the existing 12-passenger cap and reducing the likelihood of cancelled or unavailable sailings. Improved reliability and increased sailing days would support more consistent access to health care, dentistry, education and other essential services on the Shetland Mainland. This is particularly important given the absence of health and social care provision on Papa Stour.
- 10.3.6 Option PS2 would be especially beneficial for residents attending hospital appointments or returning to Shetland from mainland Scotland on days that currently have no Papa Stour sailings. Filling non-sailing days would reduce the need for costly overnight accommodation and extended delays, which disproportionately affect lower income and vulnerable households.



Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 10.3.7 Improved connectivity and increased vessel capacity would reduce the cost and complexity of travelling to and from Papa Stour for work, training and education. Option PS2 would support greater economic inclusion by enabling day return travel on any day of the week, reducing disruption to employment and lowering the risk of lost income, particularly for residents in lower paid or less flexible roles.
- 10.3.8 The ability to carry larger vehicles, plant and higher passenger numbers would also reduce the cost of doing business on the island. Earlier community feedback highlighted that current ferry constraints inflate costs for construction, maintenance and service delivery. Option PS2 would help address these issues, with indirect benefits for household costs and local economic resilience.

Transport Affordability

- 10.3.9 While there would be no direct changes to fare levels in implementing this option, affordability benefits would arise through reduced indirect costs. Improved reliability and seven-day sailings would lessen the likelihood of missed work, rearranged childcare or unplanned accommodation costs. Greater predictability in travel would improve financial stability for households on lower incomes and contribute to reducing socio-economic disadvantage.

Overall, it is considered that option **PS2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

10.4 Integrated Conclusion

- 10.4.1 Under Business as Usual, Papa Stour residents continue to face constrained access driven by limited sailing availability and the disproportionate consequences of cancellations, which can extend beyond a single day and lead to postponed appointments, missed work and reduced participation in education and social life. These effects fall most heavily on disabled people, older people, carers, and lower-income households, with accessibility barriers reinforced by tidal variability, boarding conditions and the lack of alternatives on non-sailing days.
- 10.4.2 Ferry Do Something delivers a modest but meaningful improvement by reducing cancellations and improving confidence that planned sailings will operate, supporting more reliable access to essential services and planned travel for healthcare, work and education. The main FSD benefit is reduced indirect cost and disruption (lost income, childcare and rearranged commitments), although limited sailing availability continues to constrain shift work, flexibility and spontaneous participation.

11 Skerries

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 Skerries is a small and relatively remote island community, where connectivity outcomes are strongly shaped by the consequences of a small number of sailing opportunities and the limited availability of alternatives when disruption occurs. The OBC notes that resilience is not currently a major challenge relative to some other routes, but that the vessel is ageing and the harbour infrastructure includes an asset that requires short-term replacement, creating a clear near-term resilience risk that needs to be managed to maintain even baseline service.

11.1.2 The route options for Skerries are provided below **Table 11.1**.

Table 11.1: Skerries Route – Options Summary

Option	Description
Business as Usual	The Business as Usual option includes the replacement of MV <i>Filla</i> with a Type 1 vessel at life expiry and replacement of the life expired finger pier at Skerries. The Business as Usual option represents the appraisal baseline against which costs and benefits are assessed.
Ferry Do Something	The Ferry Do Something option for Skerries is focused primarily on revenue measures, but includes coastal protection works on the road to the ferry terminal.

11.2 Option Skerries 1: Business as Usual

Sker1: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

11.2.1 Under the Business as Usual option, ferry provision for Skerries would continue broadly in line with current service patterns, with like-for-like replacement of assets at the end of their service life. While this maintains a basic level of connectivity, the OBC identifies ongoing challenges relating to service reliability, limited frequency and exposure to weather disruption on this route. These issues disproportionately affect residents who rely on regular, time-critical travel, including older people, disabled people, carers and those with long-term health conditions. The option does not materially improve resilience or flexibility and therefore maintains existing inequalities in access associated with geographic isolation.

11.2.2 Under the option definition, MV *Filla* is replaced by a Type 1 (or equivalent) vessel at life expiry, with the potential for limited route-specific design refinement to meet seakeeping needs while remaining within broadly standard dimensions.

11.2.3 This option also requires replacement of the existing finger pier at Skerries in the near term, meaning service continuity is dependent on careful phasing of construction and temporary arrangements to avoid disruption to an already limited timetable.

Accessibility

11.2.4 Accessibility under the Business as Usual option would remain at current levels. Replacement vessels and infrastructure would be expected to meet minimum regulatory standards, but no proactive improvements to accessibility are anticipated. As a result, existing barriers related to



boarding conditions, vessel layout and reliance on assistance may persist, limiting independent travel for disabled people, people with reduced mobility, and parents travelling with young children.

- 11.2.5 On this route, the principal equality and accessibility constraints arise less from vessel accessibility compliance and more from the limited timetable and the disproportionate consequences of missed sailings for those who cannot travel flexibly.

Participation in Daily Life

- 11.2.6 Limited service frequency and timetable flexibility under Business as Usual can constrain participation for Skerries residents. Access to healthcare, employment, education and social connections remains dependent on a small number of scheduled sailings. Disruption or cancellation can therefore have disproportionate consequences, particularly for those with caring responsibilities, health needs or limited financial resilience. Overall, the option sustains existing patterns of restricted participation and social isolation.
- 11.2.7 The evidence base highlights that the presence of a non-sailing day is a distinctive participation constraint for Skerries, because it creates a fixed gap in connectivity that can extend the consequences of disruption either side of that day.

Overall, it is considered that option **Ske1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on equality outcomes.

Ske1: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 11.2.8 The Business as Usual option maintains current access arrangements to essential services located on the Shetland Mainland. However, the OBC highlights that existing constraints relating to reliability, frequency and travel costs contribute to inequalities for Skerries residents, particularly those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. This option does not actively reduce these inequalities and risks perpetuating barriers to timely access to healthcare, education and essential goods.
- 11.2.9 Skerries has a health care assistant, but health provision is otherwise limited and there is no dentistry or social care provision on island, requiring residents to travel to access these services, predominantly in Lerwick, and in some cases via Whalsay for dentistry.
- 11.2.10 Coastal flooding and erosion affecting the ferry terminal access road is a route-specific access risk. Without adaptation over time, there is a long-term possibility that households could be cut off from the terminal, creating acute inequalities for those with reduced mobility or limited resources to arrange alternatives.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

- 11.2.11 Economic opportunities for Skerries residents remain constrained under Business as Usual. Limited and inflexible ferry services restrict access to mainland employment, training and apprenticeships, particularly for shift-based or part-time roles. These impacts are most pronounced for people on lower incomes, younger residents and those without access to alternative transport options, reinforcing existing patterns of economic exclusion identified in the OBC.
- 11.2.12 Earlier community engagement has highlighted the island's limited on-island services and uncertainty surrounding the future of the island shops, increasing reliance on dependable links to mainland Shetland for both household needs and supply-chain functioning.



- 11.2.13 Replacement with a Type 1 (or equivalent) vessel also provides a modest vehicle capacity benefit, including improved ability to carry larger vehicles, which can support essential economic activity and reduce exclusion risks where vehicle access is necessary.

Transport Affordability

- 11.2.14 Transport affordability remains broadly unchanged when implementing this option. Ferry fares continue to represent a structural cost for households that rely on frequent travel for essential purposes. For lower-income households, the cumulative cost of travel, combined with the risk of indirect costs arising from disruption, contributes to ongoing socio-economic disadvantage. No mitigation of affordability pressures is delivered under Business as Usual.
- 11.2.15 For Skerries, affordability impacts are strongly influenced by indirect costs and unavoidable additional expenses created by timetable gaps and disruption, rather than by fare changes at programme stage.
- 11.2.16 The non-sailing day can force additional overnight stays away from Skerries, at considerable expense for residents returning from onward travel, creating a distributional burden that falls most heavily on lower income households and those travelling for health or caring reasons.
- 11.2.17 Replacement of a highly fuel-intensive vessel with a more fuel-efficient Type 1 (or equivalent) is expected to improve the emissions profile overall even with an additional sailing day, supporting longer-term sustainability of operating costs, albeit without an immediate change to household fares.

Overall, it is considered that option **Sker1 Business as Usual** will have a **neutral effect (0)** on socio-economic outcomes.

11.3 Option Skerries 2: Ferry Do Something

Ske2: Equality Impact Assessment

Transport Access and Reliability

- 11.3.1 The Ferry Do Something option introduces targeted improvements to the Skerries ferry service, including enhanced vessel reliability and operational resilience. The OBC indicates that these changes would reduce the frequency and impact of cancellations and improve confidence in being able to travel as planned. Improved reliability delivers clear benefits for residents with protected characteristics, particularly those requiring regular or time-critical travel for healthcare, employment or caring responsibilities.
- 11.3.2 In the option definition, the core service change is an additional sailing day on a Wednesday, transitioning the service to a seven-day timetable, with the current Friday timetable assumed to operate on Wednesday to provide three return sailings to Vidlin.
- 11.3.3 This removes the fixed costs and wider impacts of having a non-sailing day and reduces the “bunching” of demand and capacity pressures either side of that day, particularly where a cancellation occurs the day before or the day after the non-sailing day.
- 11.3.4 This option also includes coastal protection and reinforcement works for the access road to the ferry terminal, addressing a route-specific resilience dependency linked to coastal erosion and flooding risk.



- 11.3.5 The service pattern is supported by vessel positioning arrangements to and from Symbister, and routing via Symbister can provide an alternative connection pathway in some circumstances.
- 11.3.6 Deliverability depends on securing additional crew to sustain seven-day operation, which is a key practical constraint for this option given existing crewing arrangements.

Accessibility

- 11.3.7 This option provides greater scope to address existing accessibility challenges through improved vessel design and operational practices. Enhanced boarding conditions and more consistent service performance support more inclusive travel for disabled people, older residents and families with young children. While not transformational, these improvements represent a positive step towards reducing barriers to independent travel relative to the baseline.
- 11.3.8 For Skerries, the largest equality and accessibility gain when implementing this option comes from improved timetable coverage and removal of the non-sailing day, in addition to enhanced vessel accessibility compliance.
- 11.3.9 Replacement with a roll-through Type 1 (or equivalent) vessel also provides a small safety and usability benefit by reducing the need for reversing manoeuvres onto the ferry, which can support confidence for some users and reduce reliance on assistance.

Participation in Daily Life

- 11.3.10 By improving service reliability and usability, the Ferry Do Something option supports increased participation in Mainland Shetland activities for Skerries residents. More dependable connections facilitate access to healthcare, employment, education and social networks, reducing stress and uncertainty associated with travel. These benefits are particularly important for residents who experience both protected characteristics and socio-economic disadvantage.
- 11.3.11 The shift to seven-day operation supports participation primarily by removing a structural connectivity gap that can otherwise extend disruption into multi-day exclusion from services, rather than by creating a high-frequency service.

Overall, it is considered that option **Ske2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on equality outcomes.

Ske2: Fairer Scotland Duty

Access to Essential Services

- 11.3.12 The Ferry Do Something option improves access to essential services by reducing the likelihood of missed or cancelled journeys. The OBC highlights that even modest improvements in reliability can have a meaningful effect for small island communities such as Skerries. This option therefore has the potential to contribute positively to reducing inequalities of outcome.
- 11.3.13 Scaling up to a seven-day timetable improves effective access to healthcare and social care-related travel by reducing the risk that appointments or onward travel fall on, or are disrupted into, a non-sailing day.



11.3.14 This is particularly relevant for residents returning from appointments on mainland Scotland, where arriving back in Shetland on a non-sailing day can otherwise extend delays and increase accommodation costs before returning to Skerries.

Economic Inclusion and Employment

11.3.15 Improved reliability when implementing this option supports greater economic inclusion by enabling more consistent access to mainland employment, training and business activity. While service frequency remains constrained, reduced disruption lowers the risk of lost income and supports workforce participation for residents in lower-paid or less secure employment. These effects align with the FSD objective of reducing socio-economic disadvantage.

11.3.16 Seven-day services support the functioning of the Skerries supply chain and can make it easier and potentially lower cost to deliver goods and services to the island, particularly where disruption occurs adjacent to the non-sailing day.

11.3.17 The coastal protection works included in this option safeguard the long-term resilience of the Skerries economy, as loss of the access road would have severe consequences for residents, essential deliveries and island viability.

Transport Affordability

11.3.18 Although fare structures are not fundamentally altered in implementing this option, improved service reliability reduces indirect costs associated with disruption, such as additional accommodation or lost income. For lower-income households, this improves the predictability and affordability of travel over time. Overall, the Ferry Do Something option delivers a modest but positive affordability benefit relative to Business as Usual.

11.3.19 For Skerries, the most material affordability benefit arises from reducing unavoidable indirect costs created by the non-sailing day, including additional overnight stays at considerable expense when travel plans or disrupted travel fall into that gap.

11.3.20 Coastal protection works also reduce the longer-term risk of severe affordability impacts that could arise if households were unable to access the ferry terminal due to an unusable access road.

11.3.21 Replacement of a highly fuel-intensive vessel with a more fuel-efficient Type 1 (or equivalent) is expected to improve the emissions profile overall even with an additional sailing day, supporting longer-term sustainability of operating costs, albeit without an immediate change to household fares.

Overall, it is considered that option **Ske2 Ferry Do Something** will have a **minor beneficial effect (+)** on socio-economic outcomes.

11.4 Integrated Conclusion

11.4.1 Skerries is distinctive within the network because equality and socio-economic outcomes are shaped less by incremental frequency uplifts and more by the consequences of having limited sailing opportunities, a non-sailing day, and no practical alternatives when disruption occurs. This creates disproportionate impacts for people with protected characteristics and for households experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, particularly where travel is time-critical for healthcare, caring responsibilities, education or income security. Skerries has a health care assistant but otherwise limited provision, with residents needing to travel for dentistry and social care and for most health needs delivered in Lerwick. In this context,



relatively small changes that reduce timetable gaps and the knock-on effects of cancellations can have meaningful benefits.

- 11.4.2 Business as Usual maintains baseline connectivity but is primarily a continuity option dependent on timely asset replacement and careful phasing of harbour works to avoid service interruption on a route where missed sailings have outsized consequences. Ferry Do Something provides the clearest improvement pathway within the available option set by moving to a seven-day timetable through an added sailing day, reducing the “cliff-edge” effects created by the non-sailing day, and safeguarding physical access to the ferry terminal through coastal protection of the access road threatened by erosion and flooding risk. These measures are expected to reduce unanticipated overnight stays and indirect costs that fall most heavily on lower-income households and those travelling for health or caring reasons, but delivery is contingent on resolving the practical constraint of securing additional crew to sustain seven-day operation.

12 Protected Characteristic Summary

12.1.1 This summary table (**Table 12.1**) provides a programme-level view of how option typologies may affect groups with protected characteristics. It should be read alongside route chapters, as the scale and direction of impact varies materially by route function, existing service pattern, prevalence of foot passengers, and the relative importance of affordability versus reliability. Fixed link options in particular have the potential to be transformative but are conditional on inclusive design, affordable charging policy and public transport provision that maintains access for non-car users.

Table 12.1: Protected Characteristic Summary

Protected Characteristic	Summary by Option
Age Key issues: - An ageing population with a high reliance on frequent, short-distance travel to Mainland Shetland for healthcare, shopping and social connection. - Sensitivity to missed sailings and service disruption due to the frequency of trips required rather than journey length. - Younger people also experience transport-related barriers, particularly in accessing education, training, early employment and social activities, which are often time-sensitive and dependent on reliable and suitably timed services.	Business as Usual: Tends to maintain existing barriers where disruption, limited operating hours, booking pressure or non-sailing days restrict older people's predictable access to health and daily needs. Effects can be more acute on routes requiring multi-leg connections to reach Lerwick. Current service patterns can also constrain younger people's ability to access education timetables, training placements, part-time work and social opportunities, particularly where early morning and evening travel is required. Ferry Do Something: Typically delivers incremental benefit via improved vessel reliability, safer and more legible terminals and reduced disruption-related stress. On short or weather-exposed routes, the main age-related benefit is fewer high-consequence cancellations rather than greater flexibility. For younger people, improved reliability supports more consistent access to education and employment, although limited operating hours may continue to restrict wider participation in training and social activities. Ferry Do Max (where proposed): Stronger age-related benefit where frequency and operating hours expand, reducing dependence on a narrow set of sailings and better aligning with appointment times and social participation. Benefits are highest on "commuter" and "gateway" routes; less relevant where service models remain inherently infrequent. Increased frequency and extended hours are also important for younger people, improving access to a wider range of education, training and employment opportunities, including those with non-standard hours, and enabling greater participation in social and recreational activities. Fixed Link (where proposed): Potentially transformative for older people through continuous access and reduced isolation, but outcomes depend on (a) toll affordability and (b) accessible, frequent onward public transport where current ferry access is central and supports foot passengers. Without this, barriers can shift from "timetable constraint" to "car dependence". Similar considerations apply to younger people, where improved connectivity could enhance access to education, training and employment, but benefits may be limited without affordable, non-car travel options.

Protected Characteristic	Summary by Option
Disability Key issues: - Disproportionate impacts from disruption, boarding variability and reliance on assistance for frequent travel. - Barriers to independent travel where services are unreliable or information is unclear during disruption.	Business as Usual: Retains the core accessibility risks associated with variable boarding interfaces, disruption and journey complexity (including multi-leg travel). Even if replacement vessels meet standards, functional accessibility can remain limited by timetable dependency, booking pressure and unclear disruption communications. Ferry Do Something: Often yields tangible improvements through modern vessel layouts, improved boarding interfaces and safer terminal design (marshalling, waiting facilities). These changes can reduce reliance on assistance and reduce travel anxiety, but do not remove the inherent variability of maritime conditions. Ferry Do Max (where proposed): Usually provides the most effective ferry-based accessibility outcome because frequency and capacity reduce the consequences of a missed sailing, reduce booking anxiety and enable travel at times that work with support needs. This can materially improve independence for regular travellers. Fixed Link (where proposed): Can remove ferry boarding entirely and improve reliability, but accessibility gains are conditional. If bus provision, accommodating walkers and cyclists to facilitate tunnel access, are not aligned with current ferry availability, disabled non-drivers may benefit less, and design constraints (for example cycling restrictions in tunnels) require mitigation such as cycle-capable buses and inclusive interchange design.
Pregnancy and Maternity Key issues: - Need for reliable and flexible travel to access maternity and post-natal healthcare in Lerwick, often at specific times. - Greater impacts where disruption affects time critical journeys or daily routines.	Business as Usual: Continued limited flexibility and disruption risk can make attending appointments difficult, particularly where missed connections, non-sailing days, or cancellations create multi-day knock-on effects. Impacts are amplified for those needing accompanied travel or travelling with young children. Ferry Do Something: Typically reduces the risk of missed appointments through reliability improvements and safer, more comfortable terminal environments (waiting rooms, better circulation), but may not change the underlying timetable constraint on routes that remain infrequent. Ferry Do Max (where proposed): Provides stronger benefit where extended hours and higher frequency reduce stress associated with rigid timetables, improve the feasibility of day-return travel, and offer greater resilience when plans change at short notice. Fixed Link (where proposed): Continuous access can materially reduce stress and improve time-critical healthcare access, but equitable benefit depends on affordability (tolls or transferred costs) and ensuring that non-car users can access services on equivalent terms through frequent, accessible bus provision.
Sex Key issues: Women are more likely to undertake caring responsibilities and may rely on frequent, flexible travel to the Shetland Mainland for work, education and childcare.	Business as Usual: Where operating hours are limited or disruption is common, this can disproportionately affect women's ability to combine caring roles with employment, education and household tasks, especially on routes requiring frequent short trips or multi-leg connections. Ferry Do Something: Reliability gains and specific terminal measures (for example improved waiting facilities and marshalling) can reduce day-to-day stress and improve perceived safety for foot passengers, supporting caring-related travel. However, if affordability is the dominant constraint (notably on short commuter links), impacts may remain unless fares are addressed.

Protected Characteristic	Summary by Option
Disproportionate effects where services are inflexible or disrupted.	- Ferry Do Max (where proposed): Increased frequency and extended operating hours typically offer the greatest benefit for caring-related, part-time, shift and irregular work patterns, reducing reliance on narrow sailing windows and lowering the consequences of disruption. - Fixed Link (where proposed): Can best support complex daily schedules through continuous access, but may redistribute disadvantage if it increases car dependence or if toll policy raises costs for frequent users. Retaining strong public transport provision is critical where current ferry services support a high share of foot passengers.
Religion or Belief Key issues: - May need to travel at specific times for religious observance, community participation and cultural activity, and may be outside standard commuting hours. - Constraints where services lack flexibility.	- Business as Usual: Limited flexibility may restrict participation in religious and community activities. - Ferry Do Something: Minor improvement through improved reliability. - Ferry Do Max: Greater flexibility supports participation at a wider range of times, including evenings. - Fixed Link: High flexibility enables equal participation regardless of timing or duration of activities.
Race and Ethnicity Key issues: - Connectivity influencing inclusion, workforce attraction and integration, particularly for residents who rely on public transport. - Structural barriers linked to affordability and access to onward transport.	- Business as Usual: Existing connectivity constraints continue to affect inclusion and access to employment and services. - Ferry Do Something: Improved reliability supports inclusion by reducing barriers to regular travel for work and services. - Ferry Do Max: Further reduces isolation and strengthens connections to destinations for residents and workers. - Fixed Link: Strongest potential to reduce structural barriers by enabling continuous access, subject to affordable travel and accessible local transport networks.

13 Consumer Duty & Armed Forces Consideration

13.1 Consumer Duty

13.1.1 It is considered that the impacts assessments completed to date already address the core issues that would ordinarily sit under a consumer-focused lens for island transport users. In practice, these have been captured through the EqIA and FSD consideration of:

- Service reliability and resilience, including how disruption affects people who rely on predictable travel for healthcare, education, caring responsibilities and employment.
- Accessibility and inclusive travel, including physical access, information provision during disruption, booking requirements, and the experience of foot passengers and non-drivers.
- Affordability and indirect costs, including how fares, overnight stays, missed work and caring impacts can fall unevenly across households.
- Distributional impacts across island communities, particularly where network changes risk widening comparative inequalities between communities with different levels of connectivity.
- User groups most likely to experience disadvantage, including disabled people, older people, carers, families with young children, people with long-term health conditions, and low-income households.

13.1.2 This approach provides strong coverage of consumer outcomes because it focuses on how users experience the service in practice, who is most affected by shortcomings, and where there is a risk of exclusion or disproportionate burden. It also supports proportionate identification of mitigations that are relevant to real-world journeys, such as the ability to travel at short notice, certainty around connections, and the cost consequences of cancellation.

13.1.3 In addition to passengers and freight customers, it is important to recognise that changes to service models and infrastructure also affect ferry operators and the workforce that delivers the service. Although operators are not “consumers” in the conventional sense, their experience directly shapes consumer outcomes through reliability, safety, customer service and operational resilience. The assessment therefore also considers operator-facing implications where these create downstream equality and FSD effects for communities, including:

- Workforce sustainability and crewing capacity: options that increase frequency, extend operating hours or introduce new service days can intensify recruitment and retention challenges, increase fatigue risk, and affect the stability of the roster. This is relevant to consumer outcomes because workforce shortages can lead to cancellations, reduced timetables and reduced customer confidence, with disproportionate impacts on those who rely on time-critical travel.
- Health, safety and wellbeing for staff and service users: changes to marshalling arrangements, waiting environments, and vessel and harbour interfaces can reduce any pedestrian and vehicle issues and improve personal security. For operators, these measures can also reduce workplace risk and improve operational control during peak demand and disrupted conditions.
- Deliverability during construction and transition: harbour works, terminal reconfiguration and vessel replacement introduce a risk of temporary service disruption if not phased



effectively. This has a direct consumer impact and can also create operational pressures for crews and harbour staff, with knock-on effects on service quality and incident risk.

- Changes to the nature of employment: where options materially alter the route model, including scenarios where services could be reduced, restructured or displaced, there can be localised socio-economic impacts on crews and support staff, particularly where island communities provide a significant proportion of the workforce. This is relevant to FSD considerations where employment impacts could fall unevenly across communities.
- Customer-facing service quality: operational changes can alter how bookings are managed, how disruption is communicated, and how assistance is provided. The consistency and usability of these arrangements has implications for equality, especially for disabled passengers, older people, and those requiring accompanied travel, and depends in part on operator resourcing, training and procedures.

13.1.4 Overall, the assessment framework provides a sound basis for consumer outcomes and can be strengthened further by explicitly maintaining a “service delivery lens” alongside the passenger lens. This ensures that route-specific improvements to reliability, accessibility, affordability and resilience are understood not only as infrastructure and timetable changes, but as changes that must be operable, staffed and safely delivered in day-to-day conditions to achieve equitable outcomes.

13.2 Armed Forces Consideration

13.2.1 Armed Forces considerations are partly captured through existing EqIA and FSD analysis because service personnel, veterans and their families may share protected characteristics or experience socio-economic disadvantage. The Armed Forces Covenant Duty, introduced through the Armed Forces Act 2021, requires specified public bodies to have due regard to Covenant principles when exercising certain functions, primarily in healthcare, housing and education. While transport is not typically the primary focus of the statutory duty, Covenant principles remain relevant where changes to connectivity could materially affect access to these services. It is recommended that Armed Forces impacts are revisited at the project-level business case stage, when the service model, affordability approach and access arrangements are defined, to confirm that no new disadvantage is created for the Armed Forces community.

13.3 Further Assessment Considerations

13.3.1 Consumer and Armed Forces considerations should be revisited in project-level business cases because the most material consumer impacts depend on option-specific design and operational decisions. In particular, the following should be progressed at this next stage:

- Consumer experience and service standards: operating hours, booking systems, information and communications during disruption, integration with onward public transport, and arrangements for accompanied travel.
- Fare policy and affordability: fare structures, concessions, and mitigation of indirect costs, including the distributional impacts for frequent users and lower-income households.
- Accessibility by design: vessel and terminal interfaces, pedestrian safety and comfort at terminals, step-free access where feasible, and alternative provision for non-drivers if service models change.



- Complaints, redress and user feedback: clear mechanisms for service users to raise issues, receive updates and seek redress where appropriate, aligned to service delivery responsibilities and contracts.
- Armed Forces and veterans: confirmation of whether any preferred option or associated service changes create specific barriers for service personnel, reservists, veterans or families, particularly in relation to access to healthcare, education or housing services.

13.3.2 This staged approach is proportionate because many consumer and Armed Forces impacts cannot be evidenced robustly until more detail is explored at project-level business case stage.

14 Conclusions & Next Steps

14.1 Conclusions

- 14.1.1 This interim integrated EqIA and FSD assessment indicates that current inter-island connectivity constraints contribute to inequalities across Shetland's ferry-served island communities relative to Mainland communities. These constraints relate to timetable dependency, disruption and cancellation risk, capacity and booking pressures, and the cumulative cost and complexity of travel to access services and opportunities. The effects are likely to be most acute for people who are more dependent on reliable, affordable, and accessible transport, including older people, disabled people, pregnant people and families with young children, carers, and households experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 14.1.2 At programme level, Business as Usual options are unlikely to address these inequalities and may perpetuate existing barriers. Options that improve reliability and resilience are expected to deliver beneficial outcomes by reducing uncertainty and the indirect costs associated with disruption. Where more comprehensive ferry enhancements are proposed, the interim assessment indicates potentially greater benefits through increased journey choice and flexibility, reduced waiting and connection pressures, and improved ability to access healthcare, education, employment and essential services.
- 14.1.3 Fixed link options, where under consideration, have the potential to substantially improve reliability and remove timetable constraints, which could support improved access to services and opportunities. However, the interim assessment also identifies that these benefits are conditional on inclusive delivery. In particular, outcomes for non-car users, people with mobility impairments, and low-income households will depend on the combined effect of charging or tolling arrangements (if applicable), the accessibility and affordability of public transport, and the location and design of connections to key destinations.
- 14.1.4 The assessment also highlights the importance of distributional impacts across islands and between different user groups. Improvements that significantly benefit some communities could widen perceived or actual inequalities if other communities remain constrained, or if changes introduce new cost or access barriers. These considerations are central to meeting the Fairer Scotland Duty and will require explicit assessment as options are refined and sequencing decisions are made.
- 14.1.5 An overall summary of potential impacts is provided in **Appendix Table A.1**.

14.2 Next Steps

1. Confirm preferred options and define service model assumptions

- 14.2.1 Progress to the final EqIA and FSD requires confirmation of route-level preferred options and the preferred network and sequencing.

2. Continue engagement with affected groups and communities

- 14.2.2 Ensure engagement is accessible, proportionate and focused on groups most likely to experience unequal outcomes, including disabled people, older residents, carers, families with young children, and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 14.2.3 Use engagement to test how proposed service models at the project level would operate in practice, including:



- Booking and information provision;
- Disruption communications and alternative arrangements;
- Assisted and accompanied travel;
- Affordability and concessions; and
- Onward connections and interchange safety.

3. Develop mitigation and enhancement measures and embed them in project-level option development

- 14.2.4 Develop affordability principles for fares, concessions and any charging approach, with the aim of avoiding disproportionate impacts on low-income households and frequent users.
- 14.2.5 Specify measures to protect non-car users where fixed links are proposed, including:
- Accessible public transport frequency and span aligned to the needs currently served by ferry availability;
 - Integration with key destinations and connections; and
 - Practical alternatives for cyclists, including provision of cycle-capable buses.
- 14.2.6 Embed inclusive design requirements across vessels, terminals, interchanges and access routes, including:
- Safe pedestrian environments with appropriate segregation from traffic;
 - Suitable and secure waiting facilities;
 - Clear and accessible information, including during disruption; and
 - Step-free access where feasible.
- 14.2.7 Prepare construction and transition management measures to minimise temporary disruption, particularly on routes with low frequency where the consequences of cancellation are high.
- 14.2.8 Consider workforce sustainability and transition requirements, recognising that staffing constraints can affect service reliability and therefore equality outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation

- 14.2.9 Develop a monitoring framework aligned to EqIA and FSD objectives, including indicators for affordability, reliability and disruption, non-car accessibility, and access to essential services and opportunities.
- 14.2.10 Establish an approach to identifying and responding to unintended consequences, including review points where mitigation or service design can be adapted if evidence indicates emerging inequalities.
- 14.2.11 Overall, this interim EqIA and FSD supports the continued development of the IITCP Network Strategy by clarifying where impacts are likely to be most significant, where inequalities may widen without mitigation, and where early interventions can provide the greatest benefit for island communities facing structural disadvantage



Appendix A Overall Summary of Impacts

Table A.1: Overall Summary of Impacts

Route	Overall Equality Impact Assessment Score				Overall Fairer Scotland Duty Score			
	Business as Usual	Ferry Do Something	Ferry Do Max	Fixed Link	Business as Usual	Ferry Do Something	Ferry Do Max	Fixed Link
Bluemull Sound (Unst & Fetlar)	-	+	++	++	-	+	++	++
Bressay	-	+	++	? -	-	+	++	? +
Whalsay	-	+	++	++	-	+	++	++
Yell Sound	-	+	++	++	-	+	++	++
Foula	0	+	No options proposed.		0	0	No options proposed.	
Papa Stour	0	+			0	+		
Skerries	0	+			0	+		