

PE1722/P

Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands submission of 4 March 2021

Thank you for your letter of 18 February 2021, regarding written evidence provided by myself stating that parking charges at lifeline ferry ports would be an agenda item to be discussed with islands authorities' leaders and Chief Executives at the Islands Strategic Group (ISG) meeting on 9 December 2020, and my commitment to update the Committee on these discussions.

During the ISG meeting, I was informed by Argyll and Bute Council that the proposals which had been put forward are now not going ahead, and that the Council would be rethinking their approach to Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs).

In order to provide an opportunity for a more full response on the approach to parking at lifeline ports across all our islands, I wrote to all six ISG local authorities on 16 February 2021 with a deadline of 1 March 2021 for responses.

I am grateful to the responses we have received so far, and can provide updates from Argyll and Bute Council, North Ayrshire Council, Orkney Islands Council, and Shetland Islands Council on their approach to parking charges at island ports.

Whilst neither Highland Council nor Comhairle nan Eilean Siar have provided me with a response regarding their respective car parking policies, I will write to the Committee again should this information be sent to me in the future.

Argyll and Bute have confirmed that, where parking is available at council ferry ports, facilities are available free of charge. However, charges are applied for one of the two car parks at Fionnphort, and at one of the two car parks at Craignure, to help manage the high proportion of tourist traffic.

Free parking remains available in the other car park in each of these areas as has been the case for many years, and I have been informed that the Council are not aware of any objections from the local community. Crucially, the response from Argyll and Bute Council also states that they have no plans to introduce car parking charges at its ferry ports.

It may be of interest to the Committee to know that, as part of the decision not to progress, and to revoke, the TRO that would have seen the introduction of car parking charges at a number of car parks on Mull (where car parking had previously been free of charge), Council officers were instructed to review the council's TRO process. Officers considered, amongst other things, how community engagement will be undertaken prior to any future TRO.

This internal review made a number of recommendations including many relating to improvements to the consultation process, and was reported to the [Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee in March 2020](#).

Since this time, the Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 have come into effect. Argyll and Bute Council have told me that they are committed to applying this assessment to future changes.

It is positive to know that before this review was complete, the local authority adopted a very different approach to developing traffic management and parking solutions.

I have been advised that a co-design process has been adopted to design solutions that address traffic management issues - the most notable example being in Tobermory, Mull. Council officers are working with a committee of local community representatives to develop new car parking, introduce traffic regulations and consider charges to manage turnover. Whilst not relating to island lifeline ferry port parking, I hope you will agree that this shows a very positive and inclusive approach to service change.

North Ayrshire contains two island ferry ports - one on the Isle of Arran and one on the Isle of Cumbrae. I have had it confirmed that there are no proposals from North Ayrshire Council to introduce car parking charges in local authority operated car parks at either of these ports.

The response from North Ayrshire Council stated that they work closely with all their communities, including through established Locality Partnerships, and are not aware of any representations expressing concern in relation to the charging arrangements at either of the Ardrossan or Largs car parks.

North Ayrshire are of the view, however, that mainland ports represent a different situation and that there is a case for charging in some circumstances.

Although car parks at some on-island ports, such as Craignure on Mull, may present no option for island residents other than to travel by car and to park at the terminal, the situation is different at the mainland port of Ardrossan.

There are other free parking options within central Ardrossan that are within a reasonable walking distance of the ferry, while a significant proportion of travellers also travel by public transport.

The local authority have expressed that parking at Ardrossan Harbour may, therefore, not be classed as a lifeline facility

At Ardrossan, North Ayrshire Council have made a commitment to a significant financial contribution of £3.65 million to the proposed improvements to the harbour infrastructure. In line with the commercial case submitted to Transport Scotland by the Council in early 2017, that investment is largely based on borrowing against income from the car park and terminal building. Without this income, the Council have advised that they will not have an alternative source of income or capital to invest in the project.

Parking charges have been in place at Ardrossan for several years and the local authority inform me that the public are accustomed to that. Furthermore, the management and monitoring of the car park provides an increased level of security for those leaving their vehicles for an extended period.

The Council also operate a large car park at Largs sea front, which has approximately 150 spaces and a charging infrastructure in place, located near to the Cumbrae Ferry Terminal. Its consistently high occupancy rates, especially in summer, are a result of Largs' profile as a day-trip tourist destination. North Ayrshire Council feel, therefore, that the car park should be understood as a town centre car parking facility.

The average income generated from car park charging at this location in the three-year period to 2019/20 was £0.188 million. This income is entirely ring-fenced and is used to support a wide range of community and tourism based projects in the town. A number of these projects have annually recurring operating costs and therefore could not continue if the parking charges were abolished.

Orkney currently do not charge for parking in island ferry port car parks, where they exist and are designated as such.

However, such parking is extremely limited and not necessarily immediately adjacent to the ferry itself, and the local authority do charge pier users for parking on piers within the Harbour Authority areas via an annual permit system.

There are also a number of car parks operated by the Council in close proximity to Ferries where parking charges are imposed, such as at Stromness. Orkney Islands Council feel that such parking areas may be confused with designated Ferry parking by those unfamiliar with the island.

Shetland Islands Council does not charge for car parking at their inter-island ferry terminals, and is not considering imposing charges. Furthermore, the local authority have been provided me with some very helpful information as to why they are unlikely to do so.

The Council advised that one of the key drivers of the higher cost of living is the cost of transport, including ferry fares. The Minimum Income Standard for Remote and Rural Scotland identified that the cost of living in Shetland is 20-60% higher than the UK average.

Reflecting that ferries support islanders to commute, to attend health services, participate in education, training, sport and leisure activities and provide access for tourism and import and export of goods and services, the local authority stated that the cost of travel on the ferry is already a barrier to full participation for some islanders, and introducing a parking charge on top of the ferry fare would only increase the already higher living costs making it harder for people to live in the islands.

Shetland Islands Council also reported to me that ferries have limited deck capacity - meaning there is insufficient vehicle capacity at peak times. Islanders therefore have to leave their vehicles in the car park and travel as foot passengers to guarantee their travel at peak times.

Shetland Islands Council also stated that the development and implementation of a policy on car parking charges at Ferry Terminals, should it ever be considered, would require an Island Communities Impact Assessment.

The Council made a strong commitment that car parking charges at ferry terminals is not a change they would consider appropriate to recommend to the Council to balance a budget. This reflects their broader commitment to the social and economic wellbeing and sustainability of their islands.

I hope that the above information provides some reassurance to the Petitioner on Local Authorities' approach to parking charges at our island lifeline ports, and supports the Committee in its consideration of the petition.