

Scottish Youth Parliament’s Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee response to:
[Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Inquiry into a Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland](#)



Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament’s Transport, Environment, and Rural Affairs (TERA) Committee welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Inquiry into a Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

This document includes our response to questions in section A of the inquiry for which we have relevant policy and evidence demonstrating young people’s views. Our response is based on existing SYP policy and findings from an online survey we carried out with young people across Scotland in August 2022. 77 young people responded to our survey. Of these, 68 young people (89.5%) said they live in an island community.

About the Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratic voice of Scotland’s young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

Our Mission

SYP is a rights-based charity, with members supported by all of Scotland’s 32 local authorities and 11 National Voluntary Organisations.

SYP’s mission is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development and empowering them, using a youth work ethos.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

About SYP’s Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

The Committee of Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs (TERA) is one of SYP’s ten Subject Committees. Each committee focuses on an area relevant to young people. TERA’s past campaigns have ranged from reducing plastic pollution to making public transport sustainable and accessible. This session, we are focusing on ferry travel so young islanders can connect to their communities and access all opportunities available to them.

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Previous SYP work on ferries:

- In June 2021, we responded to a Scottish Government consultation looking at the Impact on Islands Communities of Free Bus Travel for Young People Under 22 (response available [here](#)). In our response, we highlighted concerns about the importance of ferries for accessing public transport.
- Through our [All Aboard](#) campaign research, we looked at the cost and accessibility of public transport, and at bus standards. We focused on buses because this was identified as the form of public transport used most often by young people. The Scotland-wide results are available [here](#).
 - Additional questions were asked to young people in Shetland about ferry services and travel to Orkney and Aberdeen. The ZetTrans region summary, which includes the results of the questions about ferries, is available [here](#).
 - We also summarised the findings by regional transport partnership (RTP) region - these are available on request - please contact Rosy Burgess at rosy.b@syp.org.uk.

Response to Inquiry Questions:

1. What do island residents, businesses, and other ferry users need in the short, medium and long term from Scottish Government-supported ferry services?

‘Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government should provide funding to support initiatives which make it easier, cheaper, and safer for young people to use active and sustainable travel options.’ (From Scotland’s Young People manifesto statement, 26th November 2020, 89% agree)

‘The Scottish Youth Parliament calls on ferry operators to introduce a discounted fare for people who use ferries as an essential method of transport.’ (Members’ Motion, passed 26th October 2020, 92% agree)

‘The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that ferry fares should be reduced to encourage tourism and economic growth as the Scottish islands recover from COVID-19.’ (Members’ Motion, passed 5th July 2021, 80% agree)

Throughout our survey, young people highlighted **concerns about the cost of using ferry services:**

“Let us off the island without breaking the bank, ferry vouchers help but you only get them for a couple of years 16-18 so really can’t realistically do much”

“It is hard enough having to travel off an island for everything including hospital appointments it should be free”

“People that travel everyday for school and basic needs shouldn’t have to pay for things like [travel to] education”

“Rural communities depend on these essential lifeline services. It is lovely to provide more crossings and a reliable service for visitors in the summer months but local residents need this kind of service all year round and should be given priority booking and a reduced rate.”

It was also highlighted that **young people living in island communities cannot make use of existing travel discounts, such as free bus travel for under 22s or reduced-price train fares, without using a ferry or plane to access these services:**

“can’t get the train unless I get a ferry”

“Other forms of transport are not available to where I stay”

In our response to the Scottish Government consultation on the impact on Islands Communities of Free Bus Travel for Young People Under 22 (full response available [here](#)) we highlighted a number of challenges, which we believe may affect young people in island communities differently to those in mainland Scotland. In summary, these are:

- In some island communities, small ferries are as essential as buses to enable young people to travel to school, extra curricular activities, volunteering or youth work opportunities, and medical appointments. Even if buses are subsidised for young people under the age of 22, some will still need to pay ferry fares which are not subsidised.
- There aren’t always buses on islands, or available to coincide with inter-island ferry timetables, so some young people may have to rely on a car journey for part of their journey despite the concessionary bus fare.

- In some island communities, bus timetables are scheduled to coincide with normal work / school hours, so there may only be one or two buses in or out of a village in a day. Therefore, young people don't have the flexibility to 'pop into town' or to visit their friends / take up a part time job / attend extra-curricular activities etc. unless they are able to get a lift in a car.

2. Are current services meeting the needs and sustainability of island and remote rural communities and businesses? This includes the provision of secure employment for those working for ferry services

In response to our survey question *'Do you feel current ferry services are meeting your needs?'* 44.1% of young people who live in island communities said no, 33.8% said yes, and 22.1% responded 'Unsure / Does not apply'.

Of those who responded **no**, the majority of comments in response to the question *'Why did you answer this way?'* referred to the reliability, cost, and availability of ferries.

Young people who commented on the reliability of ferries suggested the ferry regularly breaks down and there isn't a suitable alternative:

"Ferry's frequently get cancelled due to technical issues or the ferry gets moved onto a different route, therefore I have to miss school often due to there being no ferry."

"The ferry keeps breaking down and having to go into dry dock for repairs and an unsuitable ferry is used as replacement so can't dock sometimes and is often delayed"

"Staff always friendly but service is totally unreliable and not enough ferries to meet basic needs of locals. This is where peoples food comes off and when a cancelled ferry the food is often ruined affects local businesses and suffers greatly in the winter."

Young people who commented on the availability of ferries suggested they don't run at times young people need them, and that regular cancellations are a barrier to using ferries:

"Have to come into school Sunday night meaning we get less time at home, School finishes at 12.20 on a Friday and our boat leaves at 5 at the time of writing this, we have to hang around for ages before we get to go home"

"[T]he ferry's are often cancelled due to lack of staff"

"... a lot of the ferries keep getting cancelled, are fully booked with people visiting the island, or do not connect with busses and trains on the mainland"

Young people who commented on the cost of ferries suggested this may be a barrier to some young people being able to travel by ferry:

"I do not travel by ferry very often because I cannot afford it"

"I can not pay by cash on any ferry."

"it's pretty unaffordable meaning many locals leave"

Of those who responded **yes**, the majority of comments in response to the question *'Why did you answer this way?'* said they are happy with the service because it gets them to where they need to go, that their needs are met, and student discount helps to reduce the cost:

“Because it’s a very good service with a large selection of food & drinks, a gift shop and a children’s area”

“They do their job, therefore they meet my transport needs.”

“Because they try and be accommodating to everyone’s needs”

“I am able to get a student discount so the ferries are affordable for me.”

3. Are current services meeting the needs of mainland communities and businesses, including visitors?

No response

4. Are service needs different at different times of the year?

Our survey asked young people ‘*Do you need to use ferries differently, at different times of the year?*’ Of those who live in island communities, 61.8% said yes (16.2% said no, 8.8% were unsure, and 13.2% said they don’t need to use ferries).

The main reasons given for using ferries differently at different times of the year were:

Some young people may be more likely to travel between islands, and between islands and the mainland, to go on holiday:

“I have family who use them for getting places like to go on holiday. It is a lot easier because they have a lot of children they can more easily travel that way.”

“When going away on holiday or taking my sisters back to uni”

Young people who use ferries to travel to school may be less likely to use ferries during the holidays:

“Ferry timetable switches in winter compared to summer, I also use the ferry’s to get down to school so it means during holidays I usually use them less”

“Use them more personally through the holidays but during school it is just to get to the hostel and home”

“Usually i get home on a Saturday morning and have to leave not even a day later as there’s no ferry on a Friday.”

For some young people, their extra-curricular activities determine how and when they use ferries:

“I would use the ferry during the summer to go away to visit family and friends, however during the winter I would maybe have to go away for events regarding SYP, training days for Nycos etc”

“When leaving the island to get to mainland or on sporting tips to Orkney”

The weather affects how and when young people use ferries:

“When there is fog so I cannot get to [school]”

“during winter it can be a risk to go on the boat as they often get cancelled due to bad weather”

“Use ferries at Christmas which I always worry if it will run as often cancelled or disrupted in winter.”

Changes in ferry timetables at different times of year may also affect how and when young people use ferries:

“In winter there is only 4 boats a week”

“Winter timetables and summer etc summer is packed and then winter there isn’t enough on”

5. Which needs are better met by other modes of transport, e.g. air, where available?

No response

6. How should the Scottish Government support council-run ferry services?

No response

7. How can ferry users and island communities be involved in decision making at strategic and operational level?

‘The Scottish Youth Parliament believes public transport companies should ensure young people are being consulted on decisions affecting them, and make more effort to gather and regularly review feedback from passengers. For example, as a minimum, they could print a short rating question on the back of bus/train tickets, which passengers could put in a collection box as they exit the bus. This would enable companies to collect on the spot feedback, and to recycle used tickets.’ - [All Aboard](#) campaign recommendation, January 2019

In our survey, we asked young people ‘*How could ferry operators and the Scottish government make sure young people’s views are listened to and acted on?*’ Respondents to this question stressed it is important for young people in island communities to be asked for their views and experiences, and for their suggestions to be taken seriously and acted on:

“Ensure they take into account all young people’s circumstances and needs and often put out surveys like this one”

“Go and speak to those who live on the Isles to get their thoughts and opinions”

“Small surveys can be sent via PHoR or the school.”

“Take action straight away with requests that are possible”

“By treating them the same as any other adults views.”

“By remembering about us we are often forgotten”