



Island Communities Impact Assessment Review Decision Notice

Reference: ICIA 2026 001

Decision under review

The decision under review is the decision not to undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) for the changes to the Largs-Cumbrae timetable for Summer 2026. These timetable changes arose from the requirement to cease simultaneous loading and unloading of both passengers and vehicles on health and safety grounds, and to introduce planned maintenance periods for the vessels operating on the route.

Determination

The authority has determined:

The application for review is not upheld, and the original decision not to prepare an Island Communities Impact Assessment is confirmed.

Reasons

The review panel concluded that the evidence supports the original decision. Taken as a whole, the evidence indicates that the effects of the timetable changes on the Cumbrae community are not of a nature or scale that meets the statutory threshold of being significantly different from the effects on other communities. A full ICIA is therefore not required.

Introduction

This Notice constitutes the formal decision notice of David MacBrayne Limited in accordance with the Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.

An application for review was received on 29 March 2026 in relation to the decision that an Island Communities Impact Assessment was not required in respect of the proposed Summer 2026 timetable changes for the Largs-Cumbrae service.

The purpose of this review was to consider CalMac's decision that an Island Communities Impact Assessment was not required and the reasons given for that decision.

Review Application

The application for review was made on the ground that the applicant disagreed with CalMac's published explanation for not preparing an Island Communities Impact Assessment.

The applicant submitted that the published explanation focused primarily on operational and safety considerations and did not sufficiently assess the potential impacts on the island community. In particular, the applicant submitted that insufficient consideration had been given to transport connectivity, access to services, economic sustainability, tourism, population sustainability and community wellbeing.

Information Considered

In determining the review, the review panel considered:

- (i) The published explanation for not preparing an Island Communities Impact Assessment.
- (ii) The review application and supporting evidence.
- (iii) Fifty-four written representations received during the review process.
- (iv) Information relating to timetable development, consultation and engagement activities.
- (v) Transport connectivity analysis, including bus, rail and island bus connections.
- (vi) Passenger carrying and sailing data.
- (vii) Information relating to stakeholder engagement with transport providers and other relevant organisations.
- (viii) Correspondence and supporting information relating to the rationale for the proposed timetable changes.

Assessment

The panel considered the information available when the original decision was made, together with the representations and further evidence assembled through the review. Two recurring themes in the written representations were that the reduction in capacity and frequency had suppressed demand on the route, and that the revised timetable had reduced transport connectivity. The panel considered these matters against the available demand, capacity, and connectivity evidence.

Under section 8 of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, an Island Communities Impact Assessment is required where, in the authority's opinion, a policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities, including other island communities.

The connectivity analysis confirms that key commuter connections are retained, the on-island bus remains aligned with the ferry service, and rail integration is broadly maintained. Some connections and waiting times have improved, and Sunday bus connections have increased. However, the revised timetable provides fewer sailing and fewer mainland bus-to-ferry connections Monday to Saturday, resulting in longer travel or waiting times for some journeys.

The demand and capacity review found that demand was lower than in 2025 in some months, but the pattern was mixed and demand increased in July despite reduced available capacity. Vehicle capacity utilisation remained broadly consistent with previous years, available vehicle capacity continued to exceed demand, and comparable reductions were observed on other Clyde routes. Historic data also shows year-to-year fluctuation rather than a sustained growth trend. The panel therefore found insufficient evidence that the timetable change or reduced vessel capacity suppressed demand on the Largs-Cumbræ route.

Having considered the evidence as a whole, the panel recognises that the revised timetable adversely affects some journeys. However, the nature and scale of the identified effects do not meet the statutory threshold of being significantly different from the effects on other communities. The evidence therefore supports the original decision that a full ICIA is not required.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, the review is not upheld and the original decision not to prepare an Island Communities Impact Assessment is confirmed.

Further action

No further action will be taken under regulation 16.

This decision notice is issued in accordance with regulation 14 and will be published on Caledonian MacBrayne's website. Regulation 14 requires the decision notice to be issued and published within six months of the validation date.