Improving every journey

Delivery plan
Strategic vessel deployment, disposal and redelivery plan

Published 9th December 2025

Caledonian MacBrayne
Clyde & Hebridean Ferries

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Executive summary

Over the next four years, we are undertaking one of the most significant modernisation programmes in our fleet's history. This plan sets out how we will deploy new vessels, cascade existing ones to new routes, and responsibly retire older vessels — all with the aim of improving every journey across Scotland's west coast.

By 2028, more than a third of our fleet will be replaced. This investment will bring:

– Increased capacity on key routes.

– Improved reliability and resilience across the network.

– Reduced emissions and environmental impact.

– A more flexible and future-ready fleet.

As new vessels enter service, we will reassign existing vessels to routes where they can continue to add value, or return them to our asset owner, Caledonian Assets Maritime Limited (CMAL), where appropriate. These decisions will be made carefully, based on operational need, vessel condition, and community impact.

We are committed to engaging with communities throughout this process. In late 2025, we will begin a series of conversations with those potentially affected by vessel redeployments or retirements. These discussions will help shape final decisions and ensure that changes reflect local priorities.

This plan is not just about vessels — it's about delivering a better service. By aligning fleet deployment with demand, building in resilience, and planning for the future, we are laying the foundations for a more reliable, inclusive and sustainable ferry network.

1. Introduction

Scotland's west coast ferry network plays a vital role in connecting communities, supporting local economies, and enabling everyday life across our islands and coastal regions. As demand grows and our fleet ages, we must evolve — not just by introducing new vessels, but by deploying them in ways that maximise impact, improve reliability, and support long-term service resilience.

This plan sets out how we will manage fleet changes over the next four years. It outlines where new vessels will be deployed, how existing vessels will be reassigned or retired, and what principles guide these decisions.

Our approach is rooted in operational need, community engagement and environmental responsibility. It reflects our commitment to:

– Deliver a more reliable and resilient service.

– Support communities through thoughtful planning and consultation.

– Reduce emissions and improve sustainability.

– Ensure value for money is delivered across the network.

This is not a static plan. It will evolve as new vessels are delivered, as operational priorities shift, and as community needs change. Final decisions on vessel redeployment and disposal will be made closer to the time, informed by real-world conditions and stakeholder input.

Above all, this plan is about improving every journey — by making sure the right vessels are in the right places, at the right time, for the people who rely on them most.

Our fleet is the backbone of Scotland's west coast ferry network. It enables lifeline services, supports tourism, and connects communities across more than 50 ports and harbours. As we plan for future deployment, disposal and cascade activity, it's important to understand the current composition and condition of the fleet.

2. Fleet overview

As of 1 October 2025, our fleet includes:

– Major vessels serving longer crossings and higher passenger volumes.

– Small vessels operating shorter, lower-capacity routes.

– Resilience vessel(s) available to support planned maintenance or respond to unplanned outages.

Full details can be found in Appendix 1.

Each vessel is assigned to a specific route based on its size, capability, and suitability for local infrastructure. However, ageing vessels and increasing demand have placed pressure on reliability and flexibility across the network.

Fleet age and lifecycle position

Over half of the fleet is approaching or beyond the 25-year service mark. Several vessels are nearing the end of their operational lifecycle, with increasing maintenance needs and reduced deployment flexibility.

New vessels are being introduced to replace older ones, improve emissions performance, and support year-round service delivery.

We aim to initiate vessel replacement planning at the 25-year point, with full replacement by 30 years, ensuring continuity of service and reducing the risk of unplanned breakdowns.

Operational challenges

There are also several operational challenges associated with the current fleet:

– Limited interchangeability due to varied vessel designs and infrastructure compatibility.

– Maintenance pressures, particularly during annual maintenance overhauls.

– Resilience gaps, where vessel outages can significantly impact service delivery.

To address these challenges, we are moving towards common vessel designs and standardised infrastructure, enabling greater flexibility and reducing operational risk.

Preparing for change

The introduction of new vessels will allow us to:

– Reassign existing vessels to routes where they can continue to add value.

– Retire older vessels that no longer meet operational or environmental standards.

– Strengthen resilience by maintaining spare vessels in a state of readiness so they are available for deployment within 24 hours.

As outlined in our CHFS3 Corporate Plan 25-31, Improving Every Journey, we are also aligning with established industry standards by introducing scheduled vessel maintenance time within our timetables, with a view to further enhancing the reliability and resilience of our service. These maintenance periods will be gradually incorporated as timetables are developed for newly commissioned vessels, redeployed vessels across the network, or seasonal reviews are undertaken. Throughout this process, we will work closely with communities to ensure their needs and priorities are reflected in our approach, reaffirming our commitment to placing communities at the centre of our decisions.

This plan ensures that every vessel — whether new, reassigned or retired — contributes to a more reliable, responsive and sustainable ferry service.

3. Deployment plan

Over the next four years, we will deploy a series of new vessels across key routes to improve capacity, reliability and resilience. These deployments are carefully planned to align with infrastructure readiness, service demand, and community priorities.

Our vessel deployment strategy is designed to:

– Increase capacity on high-demand routes.

– Improve timetable reliability and reduce service disruption.

– Support environmental targets through lower-emission vessels.

– Enhance flexibility across the fleet through standardised design.

Each deployment is based on a detailed assessment of route needs, vessel capability, and operational readiness.

Deployment criteria

Vessel deployment decisions are guided by:

– Route demand and capacity requirements.

– Infrastructure compatibility (berthing, fuelling, turnaround times).

– Community feedback and service expectations.

– Operational efficiency and crew planning.

– Environmental performance and emissions targets.

We also consider seasonal variations, contingency planning, and the ability to support other routes during disruption.

Supporting infrastructure and readiness

Deployment is coordinated with port infrastructure upgrades, crew training, and service planning. For example:

– Temporary deployment to Troon–Brodick will be used while works are completed at Ardrossan.

– Crew familiarisation and technical commissioning will be scheduled ahead of each vessel's entry into service.

– Timetables will be adjusted to reflect new vessel capabilities and turnaround times.

For all new vessel classes, the first vessel will be trialled across the network upon arrival and prior to entering service. This will enable us to assess operational suitability across routes, thereby enhancing fleet resilience and deployment flexibility.

Berthing trials with existing vessels will continue to be undertaken on an ongoing basis whenever practicable, provided that such activities do not adversely affect the vessel's scheduled operations.

Planned vessel deployments

The following major vessels are scheduled to enter service between 2026 and 2028:

These deployments will enable:

– A two-vessel service year-round on both the Islay and Arran routes (except for periods of annual maintenance).

– Dedicated summer vessels for Uig–Tarbert and Uig–Lochmaddy, with a combined single vessel service in winter.

– Improved resilience and reliability across the network.

4. Redelivery plan

As part of our fleet modernisation programme, some existing vessels will be redelivered to our asset owner, CMAL, once they reach the end of their operational lifecycle or are no longer required for frontline service. Redelivery is a planned and considered process that ensures vessels are retired responsibly, with minimal disruption to communities and services.

What is redelivery?

Redelivery refers to the formal return of a vessel to CMAL following its withdrawal from active service. This may occur when:

– A new vessel enters service and replaces an older one.

– A vessel has reached the end of its planned operational life.

– The vessel is no longer suitable for deployment due to infrastructure, emissions or reliability constraints.

Redelivery decisions are made based on operational need, vessel condition, and wider service priorities.

Redelivery principles

Our approach to deciding vessel redelivery is guided by the following principles:

– Prioritise older vessels to reduce the risk of unplanned breakdowns and service disruption.

– Engage with affected communities to understand local impacts and explore alternative options.

– Maintain resilience by retaining vessels where needed to support maintenance or contingency planning.

– Ensure environmental compliance through responsible disposal or repurposing.

Redelivery is not a one-size-fits-all process. Each vessel is assessed individually, and decisions are made in the context of wider network needs.

Indicative redelivery programme

The following vessels are currently identified for potential redelivery between 2026 and 2028:

	2025		2026				2027				
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Indicative Redelivery Programme				MV Isle of Mull redelivered (TBC) ◆		MV Isle of Arran redelivered (TBC) ◆	MV Isle of Lewis redelivered (TBC) ◆				

These dates and vessels are indicative planning assumptions and are subject to change. Final decisions on redelivery will be made closer to the time, based on:

– Operational performance and reliability of existing vessels.

– Availability and commissioning of replacement vessels.

– Community needs and service continuity.

– Financial and environmental considerations.

No redelivery will take place without a full assessment of service impact and stakeholder engagement. Once this is completed a recommendation will be made to Ministers on vessel redelivery.

5. Cascade plan

As new vessels enter service, existing vessels may be reassigned — or cascaded — to other routes within the network. This process allows us to make the best use of available assets, improve service delivery in areas with ageing vessels, and support overall fleet resilience.

Cascade planning is a flexible and responsive approach to fleet management. It ensures that vessels with remaining operational value continue to serve communities, while enabling newer vessels to take on high-demand routes.

What do we mean by cascade planning?

Cascade planning refers to the redeployment of an existing vessel from one route to another, typically following the introduction of a new vessel. Cascaded vessels may:

– Replace older vessels on lower-demand routes.

– Provide additional capacity or seasonal support.

– Serve as contingency cover during maintenance or disruption.

– Operate in a reduced or modified role based on infrastructure compatibility.

Cascade decisions are made based on vessel capability, route needs, and community impact.

Cascade principles

Our approach to cascade planning is guided by:

– Maximising operational value of existing vessels.

– Improving service reliability on routes with older or less capable vessels.

– Supporting community needs through targeted redeployment.

– Maintaining flexibility to respond to changing demand or disruption.

We also consider infrastructure compatibility, crew availability, and seasonal service patterns when planning cascades.

Confirmed cascade activity

The following cascade movements are currently planned:

6. Resilience vessel provision

To support network-wide reliability, a resilience vessel will be maintained in a state of readiness so they are available for deployment within 24 hours. This vessel will be available to:

– Cover planned maintenance periods.

– Respond to unplanned outages.

– Support service continuity during peak demand.

This marks a significant step forward in improving operational resilience and reducing the impact of vessel breakdowns.

7. Community consultation and engagement

We recognise that vessel deployment, cascade and redelivery decisions have a direct impact on the communities we serve. That's why meaningful consultation is a core part of this plan.

Our approach to engagement is built on transparency, respect and responsiveness. We aim to ensure that every community affected by potential vessel changes has the opportunity to share their views, raise concerns, and help shape the final decisions.

The who

We will consult with:

– Ferries Community Board

– Communities potentially affected by vessel redelivery or reassignment.

– Local authorities and transport partnerships.

– Harbour authorities and infrastructure owners.

– Community councils and representative groups.

– Tourism bodies and local businesses.

The when and how

Initial engagement will begin in December 2025, with formal consultation to commence in January 2026, ahead of key vessel movements and then continue in line with key project milestones. We will publish full details of the consultation process on our website and social media pages in the coming weeks. Consultation formats will include public meetings, stakeholder briefings and direct outreach. Feedback will be collated, analysed and used to inform final deployment and redelivery decisions

We will publish a summary of consultation outcomes and explain how community input has influenced the plan.

The what

When we engage, we'll discuss:

– Proposed vessel cascades and redelivery timelines.

– Service continuity and resilience implications.

– Infrastructure readiness and operational feasibility.

– Community priorities and local service expectations.

Our goal is to ensure that vessel changes support not just operational efficiency, but also community wellbeing and connectivity.

8. Plan review and refresh

This plan will be formally reviewed annually, aligned with business planning and fleet strategy updates. Interim updates may be issued in response to significant changes, such as vessel delivery delays or infrastructure developments.

All updates will be published on our website and shared with stakeholders.

What triggers a refresh

– Changes to vessel build or delivery schedules.

– New infrastructure becoming operational.

– Emerging operational challenges or service disruptions.

– Community feedback or consultation outcomes.

– Financial or regulatory developments.

Governance and oversight

The plan is owned by our Planning and Performance team, with input from Customer Operations, Fleet Management and Standards & Performance. Updates are approved through our internal and external governance frameworks and aligned with CMAL and Transport Scotland priorities.

Stakeholder feedback is incorporated into each review cycle to ensure the plan remains inclusive and community focused.

By keeping the plan current and responsive, we ensure that our fleet strategy continues to deliver value, reliability and trust across the network.

9. Conclusion

This plan sets out how we will modernise our fleet, improve service delivery, and support communities across Scotland's west coast. Through the introduction of new vessels, the thoughtful reassignment of existing ones, and the responsible redelivery of older assets, we are building a more reliable, flexible and future-ready network.

Our approach is guided by operational need, environmental responsibility and community engagement. We are committed to transparency, consultation and continuous improvement — ensuring that every decision reflects the needs of the people who rely on our services.

As we move forward, we will continue to listen, adapt and invest — improving every journey, one vessel at a time.

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Appendix 1 – Current fleet

Major vessel fleet (oldest to youngest)

MV Isle of Arran	1984	CMAL
MV Isle of Mull	1988	CMAL
MV Lord of the Isles	1989	CMAL
MV Caledonian Isles	1993	CMAL
MV Isle of Lewis	1995	CMAL
MV Clansman	1998	CMAL
MV Lochnevis	2000	CMAL
MV Hebrides	2001	CMAL
MV Coruisk	2003	CMAL
MV Bute	2005	CMAL
MV Argyle	2007	CMAL
MV Finlaggan	2011	CMAL
MV Loch Seaforth	2014	CMAL
MV Glen Sannox	2025	CMAL

Small vessel fleet (oldest to newest)

MV Isle of Cumbrae	1977	CMAL
MV Loch Linnhe	1986	CMAL
MV Loch Riddon	1986	CMAL
MV Loch Striven	1986	CMAL
MV Loch Ranza	1987	CMAL
MV Loch Dunvegan	1991	CMAL
MV Loch Fyne	1991	CMAL
MV Loch Buie	1992	CMAL
MV Loch Tarbet	1992	CMAL
MV Loch Bhrusda	1996	CMAL
MV Loch Alainn	1997	CMAL
MV Loch Portain	2003	CMAL

MV Loch Shira	2007	CMAL
MV Hallaig	2013	CMAL
MV Lochinvar	2014	CMAL
MV Loch Frisa	2015	CMAL
MV Catriona	2016	CMAL

Passenger fleet (oldest to newest)

MV Ali Cat	2000	David MacBrayne Limited
MV Argyll Flyer	2001	David MacBrayne Limited
MV Chieftain	2007	Clyde Marine Services

Workboat fleet (oldest to newest)

MV Carvoria	2017	CMAL