

Improving every journey



Community Engagement Strategy

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Executive summary

Given the nature of the lifeline ferry services that Caledonian MacBrayne provides, our stakeholder landscape is broad and deeply rooted in the communities we serve. In practice, this means that everyone who lives in, works in, or travels to and from an island or peninsula on our network can be considered a stakeholder. This includes local residents, regular travellers, businesses, community organisations and visitors who rely on our services to support daily life, economic activity and connectivity.

This strategy sets out how we will place customers and communities at the heart of how services are developed and delivered services. It recognises the diverse needs of those travelling for personal reasons, commuting to work or education, supporting commercial activity, or visiting the islands as tourists. Through structured, inclusive and ongoing engagement, we aim to ensure that stakeholder insight meaningfully informs decision-making and service improvements.

This strategy provides a clear framework for delivering a safe, accessible and reliable ferry service, underpinned by effective stakeholder and community engagement. It aligns with the Scottish Government's Islands Connectivity Plan and National Standards for Community Engagement, reflecting our commitment to transparency, collaboration and continuous improvement in how we listen to and work with those affected by our services.

We maintain close and constructive relationships with stakeholders across the network, including local authorities, ferry committees, community councils, industry bodies, and tourism organisations. These relationships operate at both strategic and local levels, ensuring that engagement is consistent, responsive and informed by lived experience.

In this context, stakeholder and community engagement is not a discrete activity but an integral part of how we operate. Dialogue with customers and communities is ongoing and embedded across the organisation, from senior leadership through to local port and vessel teams. This strategy brings that activity together into a coherent and structured approach, ensuring it is aligned with our wider objectives and supports the delivery of a resilient ferry service for the communities we serve.

1. Strategic vision

We will adopt a co-ordinated stakeholder and community engagement approach that is underpinned by clear, centralised principles, systems and processes across the organisation. This will provide a consistent, high-quality experience for customers and communities when we engage and consult with them, while ensuring clarity, transparency and fairness in how engagement is carried out across the network.

This approach is essential to ensuring that we engage to a consistently high standard in every location, and that stakeholders and communities feel informed, listened to and meaningfully involved in shaping the ferry services on which they rely.

Under this co-ordinated approach, we will:



- Agree standard terms of reference for community representatives, such as ferry committees, to support consistent engagement and give communities confidence in how discussions are structured and decisions are informed. This will be supported by local engagement plans for each area.
- Establish a formal working group with the four local authorities across our network to strengthen local input and improve coherence between local priorities and strategic decision-making.
- Publish a clear issue escalation process, setting out an agreed and transparent route for communities and stakeholders to raise concerns where they are dissatisfied with how we have engaged or responded to an issue.

We recognise that we serve a diverse range of islands and coastal communities, each with distinct needs, priorities and expectations of lifeline ferry services. While our engagement framework will be consistent, it will be applied flexibly through route and region-specific engagement plans. These plans will place local context and place-based considerations at the centre of engagement, while ensuring that consultation activity is co-ordinated, proportionate and joined up across different service issues and initiatives.

2. Objectives

This strategy aims to:

- Build the confidence and trust of communities and stakeholders, ensuring they are informed and have meaningful opportunities to help shape the services they use.
- Deliver a consistent approach to stakeholder and community engagement across the Caledonian MacBrayne network, while empowering local teams to strengthen relationships with our communities, customers and partner organisations.
- Increase confidence in communities in our service, including during periods of disruption, through clearer and more effective communication.

3. Outcomes

Successful delivery of this strategy will:

- Improve overall satisfaction with Caledonian MacBrayne by strengthening how we engage and consult, and by supporting better service outcomes.
- Strengthen the sense of ownership that communities and stakeholders have in their lifeline ferry service.
- Contribute social and economic value to the islands and communities we serve.



4. Our principles for stakeholder and community engagement

At Caledonian MacBrayne, we are committed to delivering stakeholder and community engagement in line with recognised good practice. Our approach will be guided by the National Standards for Community Engagement, which provide Scotland's framework for effective, inclusive and high-quality engagement. These standards, which have been set out by the Scottish Government, support organisations to plan and deliver engagement in a way that is meaningful, transparent and impactful.

Developed to support and inform the community engagement process, the National Standards set out seven performance statements that help organisations to achieve high-quality outcomes and maximise the impact of engagement activity.

These principles, which will underpin how we will engage with stakeholders and communities across our network, are:

- Inclusion: we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement.
- Support: we will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.
- Planning: there is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.
- Working together: we will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.
- Methods: we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.
- Communication: we will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.
- Impact: we will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.

The seven principles will be reflected in all local engagement plans and applied in a way that is responsive to the specific context, issue or community involved. This will ensure that our engagement approach is both consistent across the network and flexible enough to reflect local circumstances.

Our engagement activity will be accessible, transparent, consistent. It will be place-based and two-way, with communities and stakeholders involved early in the process and kept informed as engagement progresses. We will also ensure that engagement leads to clear follow-through, so that participants can understand how their views have been considered and how activity will be taken forward.

To support this, we will adopt the following engagement principles (Table 1):



Table 1. Our engagement practices

Practices	How we will apply it
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In-person and online engagement events. – Online surveys and feedback forms. – Understand how to engage with 'hard-to-reach' individuals/groups at a local level.
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fully explain opportunities, constraints and the balance involved in decision making. – Publish activity and information when formally consulting – Advise when we must take a decision without consulting and fully explain why.
Early involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involve stakeholders and communities before decisions are taken wherever possible. – Collaborate with stakeholders and communities to ensure the long-term picture is understood.
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use our central framework to provide a consistent engagement experience across the network. – Establish regular, predictable engagement activity.
Place-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use data to understand local service needs and trends. – Use local CalMac staff expertise and local community/stakeholder needs to engage effectively. – Anticipate, plan for and support key local events.
Two-way dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take on board feedback and have open dialogue. – Listen to views from communities and stakeholders.
Follow-through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Feedback will be acknowledged and responded to. – Engagement will continue after any actions/steps are taken. – Information will be published/accessible where applicable.

5. Stakeholder mapping

At Caledonian MacBrayne, we will develop and maintain a robust stakeholder database to support consistent, informed and effective engagement across our network. This will be held within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform, providing a central record of stakeholder and community information and giving staff a clear, high-level view of the individuals, groups and organisations with whom we engage. The system will support a more co-ordinated approach by enabling engagement activity to be logged consistently, referenced easily and used to inform future planning and decision-making.

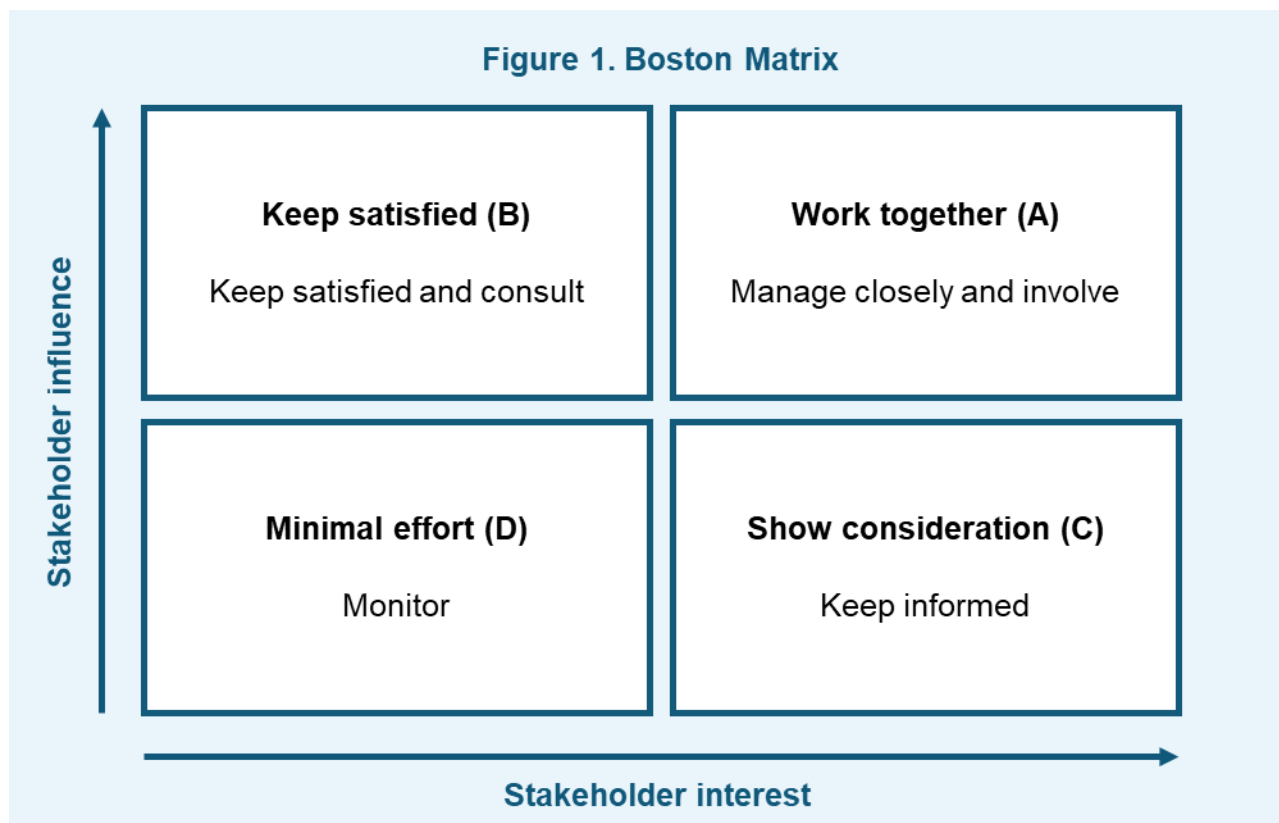
To support this, we will undertake an annual stakeholder and community mapping exercise. This will help ensure our information remains current and that our engagement approach continues to reflect the range of communities, interests and relationships across the network.

We recognise that the nature of our network means relationships may vary significantly between routes, locations and stakeholder groups. The needs, expectations and level of



engagement associated with one ferry user group may differ markedly from another. For that reason, comprehensive stakeholder mapping, supported by an annual review, is essential to maintaining effective, proportionate and meaningful engagement over time.

Our stakeholder mapping approach is informed by the Boston Matrix (Figure 1), which helps us assess stakeholders according to their level of interest and influence. This provides a structured way to understand stakeholder relationships and supports a more targeted approach to communication and engagement. A high-level overview of stakeholder positioning is set out below.



6. Key stakeholder and community groups

Caledonian MacBrayne engages with a broad and diverse range of stakeholders and community representatives across the network. These include hundreds of individuals, community groups, public bodies, businesses and industry partners, each of whom brings an important perspective on the delivery of lifeline ferry services.

For the purposes of this plan, our stakeholders and community representatives can be grouped as follows:

- Islanders and residents – typically represented through ferry and transport committees, community councils and other local representative groups.
- Ferries Community Board (FCB) – a strategic partner group which works with Caledonian MacBrayne, CMAL and Transport Scotland on strategic service delivery



issues across the west coast network. We support the FCB to deliver an annual work plan focused on network-wide improvement and closer collaborative working.

- Political representatives – elected councillors, MSPs and MPs across our network, as well as members of relevant Scottish Parliamentary Committees.
- Economic and industry stakeholders – including individual businesses and representative bodies from sectors that are central to island economies, such as agriculture, aquaculture, crofting, farming, haulage and whisky.
- Local service providers – including local authorities responsible for key public services such as education, social care and waste collection, alongside other providers such as the NHS.
- Marine regulators and partners – including regulatory bodies, harbour authorities and other organisations that help shape the policy, operational and regulatory environment in which we operate.
- Tourism/hospitality – including destination marketing organisations (DMOs), accommodation providers, and visitor attractions and others who support the visitor economy.

This broad stakeholder landscape reflects the range of communities, interests and organisations connected to lifeline ferry services. Understanding these different perspectives is essential to ensuring our engagement is targeted, proportionate and responsive to local and network-wide priorities.

7. Tiers of engagement

At Caledonian MacBrayne, we are committed to engaging fully, constructively and at the earliest appropriate opportunity wherever it is possible and practical to do so. The approach set out in this plan will inform all of our engagement activity and, through the development of local engagement plans, will support earlier more proactive and more consistent engagement with stakeholders and communities on ferry services.

We also recognise that there will be occasions when this is not possible. In some circumstances – such as urgent and widespread network disruption or other operational pressures – the time available for engagement may be limited, and our immediate priority will be to respond to the needs of the service and the communities who rely on it.

To support a clear and proportionate approach, we will adopt a three-tiered model of stakeholder and community engagement, as set out in Table 2 below.



Table 2 – Tiered Model

Tier	Rationale	When it might be used
Inform	Provide clear, timely information with full transparency when it has not been possible to consult.	Day-to-day operational changes; unplanned disruption; emergency situations.
Consult	Gather views and work with communities and stakeholders to shape services.	Service design (timetables; vessel deployment; scenario planning); future vessels or infrastructure (in partnership with e.g. CMAL).
Collaborate	Partnership working and supporting community/ stakeholder led initiatives.	Traffic prioritisation locally; deck space pilots; planning for key economic events and festivals.

8. Roles and responsibilities within Caledonian MacBrayne

Enhanced Engagement Model

In 2024-25, we introduced an Enhanced Engagement Model (EEM) to strengthen local engagement and improve responsiveness across the network. As part of this, we increased the number of Area Managers from three to six, reducing the geographic area covered by each role. Six Deputy Area Manager roles were also introduced to provide additional local support and capacity.

This was designed to increase capacity while giving Area Manager teams greater scope to lead local engagement, work proactively with communities and stakeholders in each region, identify local opportunities and challenges, and strengthen the quality, consistency and effectiveness of our dialogue.

The approach set out in this strategy will build on that model by combining centrally defined principles, structures and processes with strong local ownership through route- and region-specific engagement plans. This will support a more co-ordinated and consistent approach across the network, while also increasing local accountability and, where appropriate, enabling decision-making to be informed at the most relevant level.

Our Area Managers are our local experts. They bring detailed knowledge of the communities and routes they support and will play a central role in shaping and delivering local engagement plans. Their work will be supported by the wider organisation, drawing on specialist expertise where required to ensure engagement is informed, effective and responsive to the issues being considered.

For example, where engagement relates to a complex operational, regulatory or policy issues, Area Managers will be able to draw on colleagues with the relevant knowledge and experience to support informed discussion with stakeholders and communities. Working in this way will strengthen the quality of engagement, improve co-ordination across the



organisation, and help ensure that local insight is matched by the right organisational support.

Overall, this approach will greatly enhance the value of engagement for both Caledonian MacBrayne and the communities, businesses and stakeholders who rely on our services.

Roles and responsibilities

Our approach of centralising ways of working whilst empowering local experts means roles and responsibilities can be defined in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Engagement Team (Engagement Director; Head of Communications)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop and maintain the central framework, policies and processes that underpin consistent stakeholder and community engagement. – Ensure the CRM tool for stakeholders and communities is effectively updated. – Support the logistics of delivering local engagement plan activities such as drop-in events. – Support the publication of engagement activities and sharing of outcomes. – Using information from colleagues to refine channels used in community and stakeholder engagement. – Ensure the coordination of network-wide updates across all ‘stakeholder relationship owners’.
Area Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Own local engagement plans and ongoing, regular dialogue with communities and stakeholders in their area – Establish consistency in local engagement through diarised regular activity. – Track notes and actions regularly, working with CalMac colleagues where provided, to keep stakeholders and communities informed. – Represent the local ‘customer voice’ to CalMac to inform decision-making and long-term planning. – Lead development of service delivery on routes on their network.
Senior Customer Operations Management (COO; Head of Ops)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide support to Area Managers. – Lead relationships with industry bodies and national agencies, with Area Managers delegated localised issues. – Keep elected individuals such as Councillors, MSPs, MPs informed of local and network-wide developments and engagement activity.
Director of Public Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Act as CalMac’s main point of contact for political stakeholders.



Role	Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keep elected individuals such as Councillors, MSPs, MPs informed of local and network-wide developments and engagement activity.
Standards & Performance Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Act as CalMac’s point of contact with regulators and marine sector and ensure information which will be relevant to communities and stakeholders is shared with and the sharing of such, coordinated by the Engagement Team.
Marketing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Liaise with DMOs and tourism bodies. – Work with Area Managers to ensure ongoing activity with tourism/hospitality is captured in local engagement plans.

Tripartite working

We recognise that communities can experience ‘consultation fatigue’, particularly as new vessels and infrastructure upgrades are progressed across the network over the remainder of the decade. This is likely to result in regular engagement and consultation activity involving Caledonian MacBrayne, CMAL and Transport Scotland.

We will work closely with both organisations to streamline engagement wherever possible and to ensure that our approach reflects community needs, service impacts and any mitigations required when consultation is taking place on vessel or infrastructure developments.

9. Channels

At Caledonian MacBrayne, we use a range of channels (Table 4) to deliver targeted engagement activity with communities and stakeholders across the network. Some of this activity will be ongoing, including the regular and consistent engagement cycles established through local engagement plans. Other channels will remain under review and will be adapted to reflect local needs and circumstances. To ensure our approach is proportionate and effective, the use of these channels will be scaled up or down depending on the nature of the issue and the communities or locations involved.

Table 4. Communication channels

In-person/face-to-face	Digital/remote	Other channels
Diarised meetings.	Online events and webinars.	Targeted media releases and advertising.
Drop-in/town hall style events.	Email briefings and updates.	Website: hosting consultation and feedback information and performance reporting.



In-person/face-to-face	Digital/remote	Other channels
Focus groups.	Online surveys.	Third-party events and conferences.
Summits/events – by region or by sector – organised by us.	WhatsApp, text and social media.	

10. Measuring success

Success will be measured through:

- Trends in overall customer satisfaction scores linked to service delivery and communication, including during periods of disruption,
- Stakeholder and community feedback on whether engagement has been timely, meaningful and effective
- Increased levels of trust and confidence among communities and stakeholders.
- Evidence that engagement is taking place earlier, alongside a reduction in escalated complaints.
- Clear “You Said, We Did” reporting, where appropriate, to demonstrate how feedback has informed major decisions or consultations.

11. Conclusion

This stakeholder and community engagement strategy sets out how Caledonian MacBrayne will deliver a more consistent, transparent and locally responsive approach to engagement across the network. It reflects our commitment to placing communities, customers and stakeholders at the heart of how ferry services are developed, communicated and improved.

Through clear principles, stronger local engagement planning, improved coordination and a more structured approach to stakeholder relationships, this strategy will support earlier, more meaningful and more effective dialogue with the people and organisations who rely on our services. It also recognises the importance of balancing a consistent national framework with the flexibility needed to reflect local circumstances, priorities and lived experience across our island and coastal communities.

Successful delivery of this strategy will depend on strong local leadership, effective organisational support and a continued commitment to learning and improvement. By embedding engagement more fully into how we plan, communicate and respond, we will strengthen trust, improve understanding and support better outcomes for communities and stakeholders across the network.



We will continue to monitor progress through feedback, performance measures and regular review of our engagement activity. This will help ensure our approach remains proportionate, effective and aligned with the needs of the communities we serve.

By delivering this strategy, we will strengthen the role of engagement in supporting a safe, reliable and community-focused ferry service — one that is informed by local voices, responsive to changing needs and rooted in the principles of public service.