Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: PE1421

Main Petitioner: Gail Robertson on behalf of the Outer Hebrides Transport Group

Subject: Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government not to remove Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) for freight vehicles that would lead to an increase in fares for commercial traffic to and from the Western Isles and to conduct a socio-economic impact study before any policy changes.

Background

Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) is a method of calculating ferry fares. RET fares are normally calculated on a “pence per mile” basis plus a set fee. The aim is to ensure that ferry users pay broadly similar costs to those incurred by someone driving the same distance as the ferry route.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government announced the details of a pilot RET fares scheme on 26 February 2008. Pilot RET fares applied to all CalMac routes linking the Scottish mainland with the Western Isles from 19 October 2008 until late 2011.

Fares on the RET pilot routes were initially calculated as follows:

- Cars and small vehicles pay a flat fee of £5 plus 60p per mile
- Car drivers, vehicle passengers and foot passengers are charged at £2 plus 10p per mile
- Goods vehicles, including drivers, are charged at £20 plus 18p per lane metre per mile

A final evaluation of the RET pilot was published during July 2011. The pilot finally ended with a Scottish Government announcement on 29 November 2011, which indicated that the Scottish Government intended to:

- continue RET as a permanent feature on the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree for passengers and cars, including small commercial vehicles and coaches:
- replace RET for larger commercial vehicles (over five metres in length) on the Western Isles, Coll and Tiree, with an enhanced pre-RET discount scheme;
• provide greater inter-island connectivity by rolling out RET to services between islands including routes across the Sounds of Barra and Harris
• roll out a further RET pilot for passenger and cars including small commercial vehicles and coaches to Colonsay, Islay and Gigha from October 2012;
• roll out a further RET pilot for passenger and cars including small commercial vehicles and coaches to Arran from October 2014;
• roll out RET to other West Coast and Clyde islands within the term of this Parliament.

The Scottish Government announced on 7 February 2012 that RET fares would continue to apply to commercial vehicles of up to six metres in length, rather than the five meter limit originally announced.

The Scottish Government committed additional transitional relief for hauliers affected by the removal of RET fares for commercial vehicles in an announcement on 13 February 2012, limiting any fares increase to a maximum of 50% in any one year.

Scottish Parliament Action

The issue of the withdrawal of RET fares for commercial vehicles was the subject of a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 23 February 2012.

Keith Brown MSP (Minister for Housing and Transport) was asked about the Scottish Government’s plans for RET and ferry fares for commercial vehicles at the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee meeting of 25 January 2012.

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March 2012

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