RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
DRAFT BUDGET 2019-20

SUBMISSION FROM SIMON NORTON

Note that I do not live in Scotland but I have visited many times as a tourist and occasionally on business too, including on one occasion a conference at Sabhal Mor Ostaig College on Skye.

My answers to the consultation questions are as follows:

1. I don't know and have nothing to say.

2. I don't know but am concerned about the Scottish Government's priorities - while I strongly agree that the island economies need supporting I am not sure that Road Equivalent Tariff is a cost effective way of doing this.

3. A healthy island economy is essential for both local residents and visitors, and is in turn dependent on good connectivity, so it is very important to maintain a good ferry network.

4. I don't have anything to say about this, but I would like equivalent priority to be given to ensuring that there is good access for people without cars, whether they are local residents or visitors.

5. Top priority within the Scottish Government transport budget should be given to providing an integrated, comprehensive and connected public transport network that gives access to all communities, covering rail, bus and ferry. I believe that each of these modes of transport should be given roughly the same priority -- neither ferries without connecting buses nor buses without connecting ferries are satisfactory. The priority for the other modes mentioned should be lower. Walking and cycling facilities are important because of the contribution they can make to sustainability, health and quality of life, but they need to be supported by good public transport (e.g. so that people can get out of the cities).

I would like to make the following additional points, which include specific recommendations that exemplify the points I've made above.

(a) Ferry routes should be chosen with a view to using terminals where good connections are available and which serve local communities well. For that reason I strongly agree with the support that the Scottish Government is giving to the Gourock to Dunoon ferry even though there is a competing service between McInroy's Point and Hunter's Quay.

(b) Maintaining a diversity of ferry routes is of particular importance to tourists, many of whom prefer to use touring routes that don't require retracing their steps.

(c) An extension to Northern Ireland of the Ardrossan to Campbeltown and/or Kennacraig to Port Ellen routes -- probably to Ballycastle and Portrush respectively -- would be highly desirable at least on a seasonal basis, and when Northern Ireland devolved government is restored support should be sought from it for this purpose. The package should include reinstatement of the former Seacat route between Stranraer and Belfast Donegall Quay.
(which is much nearer the city centre than the current Stena Line terminal), using any suitable type of craft, and/or the traditional route between Stranraer and Larne which is rail connected at both ends, either of which would considerably facilitate public transport based tours covering both Scotland and Northern Ireland. I am aware of an existing Kintyre Express service which does provide a link between Campbeltown/Port Ellen and Ballycastle, but as it uses a small boat it is liable to cancellation in moderately windy conditions which makes it unsuitable for a planned tour. (When I used it I was delayed a whole day crossing to Ballycastle.)

(d) A few years ago I travelled on the Kerrera Ferry at schooltime, when there is a connecting bus service (West Coast Motors 417), and was surprised to find that it was not in fact used by schoolchildren living on the island -- I was told they have a private ferry to a terminal closer to Oban town centre. As the public ferry terminal is a long walk from the town and there are no buses at other times, I suggest that the private route be opened up to the public -- either the runs that carry the schoolchildren, associated return runs, or new runs outside schooltimes.

(e) The route from Oban to Coll and Tiree should stop at Tobermory and make connections via Kilchoan, Drimmin or a terminal on Loch Sunart for Fort William.

(f) I have a vision of a long distance coastal service similar to Norway's Hurtigruten which could give a major economic stimulus to Scotland's coastal and island communities. A possible route would run from Portrush to Port Ellen, Kennacraig, Port Askaig, Colonsay, Oban, Tobermory, Coll, Tiree, Barra, Lochboisdale, Mallaig, Glenelg, Kyle, Raasay, Portree, Tarbert, Stornoway, Lochinver then whatever stops are available to Scrabster, Kirkwall, one of the North Isles, North Ronaldsay, Fair Isle, Lerwick and Bergen where connection could be made with the real Hurtigruten. This would require considerable investment but if it became fractionally as popular as the Hurtigruten the economic returns should be more than adequate. At several calling points arrangements should be made to provide connections with Caledonian Sleeper services to/from London, using appropriate bus connections where required. Note that this route includes several links that either are currently provided infrequently or which I would like to see added -- some but not all of which are mentioned above.

(g) At the other end of the scale, I would like to see postbuses restored on some of the islands, so that incoming ferries would be met by vehicles that had picked up mail from or would be delivering mail to island addresses, and which would also take passengers to/from places on the relevant island.