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Willie Rennie MSP
Convener
Transport Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Sent by email: Transport.Committee@parliament.scot

Dear Convener

Loganair: Proposed Schedule Changes

Thank you for your letter of 26 June 2026 seeking Orkney Islands Council's views on the proposed reduction in air services between Orkney and Inverness and the wider implications for island connectivity.

The Council welcomes the Committee's interest in this issue and its recognition that these services are not simply commercial routes but provide essential connectivity for island communities. Air services play an important role in supporting access to healthcare, employment, education, public services and economic opportunity, and for many island residents they form part of the wider lifeline transport network upon which our communities depend.

1. Additional Costs and Impacts

While it is difficult at this stage to quantify the full financial impact of the service reduction, the Council expects there will be a range of direct and indirect consequences for residents and public services.

The Inverness service is used regularly by NHS patients travelling to specialist appointments, particularly for ophthalmology and podiatry services. As the service no longer provides the level of connectivity previously available, many patients will need to rely on alternative arrangements involving ferry and road travel, overnight accommodation, or support from family members and carers.

In our view, the key issue is not simply the loss of flights but the loss of practical same-day connectivity. The ability to travel to appointments, meetings or other commitments and return home on the same day reduces cost, inconvenience and disruption. Once overnight stays become necessary, the impact on individuals, families, employers and public services increases significantly. This is in line with what was highlighted at your Committee session where concerns were raised regarding the wider financial and social implications when same-day travel is no longer possible.

The route has also historically supported business travel and participation in regional meetings and partnership activity, including engagement with HITRANS and other organisations. The loss of a day-return option means that attendance at some meetings can now require several days away from the office or lengthy alternative journeys, reducing efficiency and increasing costs.

The Council is also concerned that reduced connectivity may constrain tourism and business travel and could have wider economic implications if continued over the longer term.

2. Contingencies and Future Arrangements

The Council's preference remains the retention and restoration of an Inverness service that provides meaningful connectivity for residents, businesses and public services.

Should the service be withdrawn permanently, we would work alongside Transport Scotland, HITRANS, NHS Orkney, Highlands and Islands Airports Limited and airline operators to explore options for maintaining essential connectivity.

Potential measures that may require consideration include Public Service Obligation arrangements, alternative service models, improved integration between different modes of transport, and targeted interventions to protect access to healthcare and other essential services.

The Council is also mindful of the wider resilience implications associated with reduced connectivity. Reliable transport links support the operation of public services, partnership working across the Northern Isles and Highlands and Islands, and wider emergency planning arrangements.

3. Islands Connectivity Plan

The current situation also highlights wider issues that the Council has consistently raised through consultation on the Islands Connectivity Plan.

In previous submissions, the Council stressed the importance of considering the complete journeys that island residents need to make, rather than viewing individual modes of transport in isolation. We highlighted the fact that many island journeys involve multiple connections and that, for some residents, particularly those living in Orkney's outer isles, access to a healthcare appointment, place of work or other essential service can already involve several stages of travel. A key concern raised by both the Council and the wider Orkney Partnership was the need to reduce the number of overnight stays required as part of such journeys wherever possible.

The reduction in Inverness services illustrates the type of challenge identified through that consultation process. While alternative routes may remain available, the loss of same-day connectivity significantly lengthens journeys, increases costs and places additional burdens on travellers and the organisations supporting them.

The Council notes that the Islands Connectivity Plan identifies reliability and resilience as its primary priority and recognises the importance of transport in enabling access to healthcare, employment, education and economic opportunity. We support that approach, but believe the current circumstances demonstrate that resilience must be considered across the whole transport system, including aviation, rather than within individual transport modes.

We have also previously highlighted the absence of a single national framework setting out Scotland's lifeline air and ferry services and the investment required to sustain them. The current situation reinforces the importance of developing a clearer picture of Scotland's lifeline connectivity network and ensuring that aviation is fully considered alongside ferry services, fixed links and onward travel connections.

Looking ahead, the Council believes that future work through the Islands Connectivity Plan should include:

- a stronger strategic framework for island aviation;
- greater focus on end-to-end journeys and connectivity outcomes for communities;
- consideration of minimum connectivity standards for island communities;
- recognition of the importance of affordable same-day return travel for healthcare, business and public services; and
- examination of international best practice, including the use of Public Service Obligations to support lifeline connectivity in remote and island areas.

While we recognise that a same-day return service seven days a week may not always be achievable, we believe a timetable that enables same-day return travel between Orkney and Inverness on at least three days each week would provide a reasonable minimum level of connectivity in support of healthcare access, business activity and public service delivery.

Conclusion

The Council believes that the current challenges present an opportunity not only to address the immediate issue of the Inverness service, but also to consider more fundamentally what level of connectivity island communities should reasonably expect in the future.

The proposed reductions have implications for healthcare access, public service delivery, economic activity and community resilience. They also reinforce concerns previously raised by the Council through the Islands Connectivity Plan process regarding integration, whole-journey connectivity and the importance of maintaining lifeline transport links.

We would therefore support further work led by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland, alongside local authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships, NHS Boards, operators and communities, to develop a shared long-term vision for island connectivity that recognises transport as essential infrastructure supporting sustainable island communities.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Waterson
Director of Enterprise and Resources / Deputising Chief Executive