

Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) – Summary of Community Impacts

Largs–Cumbrae Ferry Timetable Changes

Cumbrae Community Council, June 2026

Introduction

Written representations from island residents, businesses, commuters, and service users (54 submissions) demonstrate clear, consistent, and significant negative impacts arising from the revised timetable on the Largs–Cumbrae ferry route. These impacts were entirely predictable and provide clear evidence that an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) should have been undertaken before these changes were made, in accordance with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

The ferry is repeatedly described in the submissions as a lifeline service, and the changes have materially affected access to essential services, work, and daily living. The submissions present unanimous criticism of the changes, with the dominant feelings expressed being frustration, anxiety, and a sense of being ignored. People repeatedly describe the new timetable as unreliable, confusing, less frequent, and harmful to island life. They complain in particular about longer waits, missed connections, reduced reliability, and increased stress.

Many explicitly say the changes were imposed without meaningful consultation, leaving them feeling ignored by CalMac.

Medical access is being compromised

This is one of the most consistent and emotionally charged themes across the full set of representations. People repeatedly say the timetable change has made medical care harder to reach, less predictable and more stressful. Residents describe:

- Having to leave the island the night before early hospital appointments.
- Being forced onto earlier ferries, adding time to their journey.
- Missing appointments because of unreliable connections.
- Vulnerable people having long waits for buses.

Commuters are losing time, income, and reliability

Across dozens of submissions, commuters report:

- Only one viable morning sailing for work - if it fails, they're late.

- Having to start their days earlier and/or finish later to avoid reducing their working hours and losing pay.
- Missing connecting buses and trains.
- Long waits in poor weather due to mismatched timetables.

If they cannot commute reliably, working families may leave the island, with a knock-on impact on the economy and other services such as the school.

Employers report:

- Staff arriving late.
- Staff requesting shorter shifts.
- Knock-on effects on business operations.

Bus–ferry–train connections have broken down

The old system – the ferry left every 15 or 30 minutes and was always met by a bus - is repeatedly described as simple, reliable, and intuitive. The new system is described as chaotic, impossible to follow and a random number generator. This is one of the most universal complaints. People describe:

- Buses meeting only some ferries, with no clear information about which ones.
- Long waits in cold, wet shelters.
- Missed trains and other connections.
- Visitors being confused and left stranded.

Tourism and the local economy are already suffering

Across the full set of submissions, residents and business owners report:

- Reduced footfall.
- Reduced holiday-let bookings.
- Visitors staying away as they have heard the ferries are a nightmare.
- Businesses losing mainland customers.
- Increased car use because foot travel is unreliable.
- Damage to the island’s reputation.

Queues and capacity problems are worse, not better

People report the new system creates congestion rather than alleviating it:

- Long queues for ferries and buses, even when arriving early.
- Unpredictable waiting times making planning journeys difficult.
- A mismatch between ferry capacity and demand (too much at quiet times, too little at peak times).
- Smaller vessels filling instantly when big vehicles board.

Social and family life is being disrupted

Across the submissions, people repeatedly describe the timetable as isolating:

- Difficulty visiting family and friends on the mainland.

- Difficulty bringing family and friends to the island.
- Reduced ability to provide care support.
- Longer, more complicated journeys for everyday tasks.
- Problems attending social and sporting activities.

Older and vulnerable residents are disproportionately affected

There is a disproportionate burden on protected groups, with older and vulnerable residents describing:

- Anxiety about missing medical appointments.
- Difficulty navigating irregular schedules.
- Financial strain from needing overnight stays.
- Physical discomfort waiting in shelters or exposed in queues.

People feel ignored, dismissed, and not properly consulted

Across the full set of submissions, the sentiment is remarkably consistent:

- The consultation was token, a sham, meaningless and the outcome already decided.
- Nobody wanted these changes, and nobody had expressed a concern about safety.
- CalMac is described as unresponsive, unaccountable, and dismissive of island needs.
- Many feel the timetable was imposed on the community, not developed with it.
- It makes no sense - there are now three ferries an hour at times when there is only a need for two, and only three at times when there is a need for four.
- Ferries now generally load quickly, then sit at the slip for 5 minutes waiting for the new allotted departure time.
- There was no consideration of potential changes to infrastructure rather than operations, such as traffic lights to allow faster unloading at Largs.

Loss of trust in CalMac and Transport Scotland

People express a reputational impact with long-term consequences:

- Deep frustration with CalMac management.
- A belief that the safety rationale is unconvincing, as passengers have to cross the traffic anyway a few metres on beyond the slip at Largs.
- No evidence was presented for the alleged safety concerns.
- A sense that the service is being run for CalMac's convenience, not for the community.
- Unfavourable comparisons to Western Ferries.

Assessment Against Islands Act Criteria

The evidence demonstrates that the timetable changes have disproportionately and significantly affected island residents, particularly in relation to:

- Access to healthcare.

- Employment.
- Transport integration.
- Economic resilience.
- Social isolation.
- Vulnerable groups.

The impacts described are contrary to several National Islands Plan strategic objectives, including:

- Connectivity.
- Access to services.
- Tourism.
- Disability and accessibility.
- Health and social care.
- Resilience.
- Population retention.
- Community empowerment.

Submissions consistently call for improvements to or mitigation of the changes, including:

- Restoration of predictable 15 and 30-minute intervals.
- Reassessment of the safety rationale and turnaround times.
- Proper bus–ferry–train integration.
- Improved communication.
- Genuine consultation.
- Review of vessel allocation and capacity.
- Genuine consideration of alternative operational models.

Conclusion

The written representations provide clear, consistent, and compelling evidence that the timetable changes have had significant adverse impacts on the island community of Cumbrae. These impacts affect essential services, economic activity, social wellbeing, and the daily lives of residents. They are disproportionate, predictable, and ongoing, and they fall squarely within the scope of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

A full ICIA, in accordance with the Act would require the CalMac to:

- Reassess the timetable in light of these impacts.
- Consider alternative options.
- Identify and implement improvement and mitigation measures.
- Demonstrate meaningful engagement with the island community.