

Fix the Irish ferries

The main item here would be the restoration of direct services from Stranraer, and if there are any proposals to redevelop the area which would make this impossible in future they should be strongly opposed (I hope that nothing has already been done here).

I understand that the Scottish Government gives financial support to the passenger ferry between Gourock and Dunoon, which serves terminals more convenient for foot passengers than the competing Western Ferries service. A similar principle should apply to Stranraer–Belfast, except that the Northern Ireland government, too, would obviously have to be involved.

Relocating the terminal to Stranraer would have the following advantages:

A: It is directly accessible by rail, avoiding the need for a transfer from Stranraer or Ayr stations.

B: It would make it easier for daytrippers in either direction, including visitors staying in Stranraer as well as people from Ireland wanting a day out in Stranraer, or vice versa.

C: Local shops would benefit as people could use them while awaiting their ferry. (I am thinking here of a case that happened to me in 2008 when I was able to stock up at a supermarket in Tallinn while awaiting a ferry to Helsinki.)

The current Stena Line terminal in Belfast is just as inconveniently sited as Cairnryan -- indeed, it's even worse than P&O's Larne -- and we would also need to reopen the old Donegall Quay terminal formerly used by the Seacat service. I found this out to my cost when visiting Northern Ireland just prior to the closure of Stranraer.

Next, I would like to suggest the provision of a train ferry between Stranraer and Larne. It would carry gauge changing equipment so that trains could be shifted to or from the Irish broad gauge while en route. It would enable the development of railfreight between the whole of Ireland and the rest of Europe including Great Britain, and could also be used to provide, for the first time ever, through services between British and Irish cities. London to Belfast is an obvious example, but I think it should also be possible to provide an overnight train from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Dublin which would form part of a strategy to phase out short haul flying.

I would also like to mention the Kintyre Express between Campbeltown and Ballycastle operated by West Coast Motors. I used this as the outward leg for the trip to Northern Ireland from which I returned on Stena Line to Stranraer as mentioned above. The problem is that this service uses a small boat and can therefore be grounded by moderate levels of wind (I am not using the word

"moderate" in its technical sense, I don't know what the critical level is). On my own trip I was kept in Campbeltown for 24 hours for this reason.

Instead, I suggest extending to/from Ballycastle some of the larger Calmac ferries that currently serve Campbeltown 3 times a week in summer. Personally I would rather have an infrequent but reliable service than have to risk being kept in Campbeltown or Ballycastle by a bout of wind.

Another possible route extension might be Port Ellen to Portrush. Port Ellen has regular services from Kennacraig.

Beyond this I have a vision of a world class cruise facility right across Scotland equivalent to the Norwegian Hurtigruten -- and connecting with it at Bergen which would be the other end of the route from Portrush. When I say "cruise" I don't mean that the ships would be luxury cruisers -- personally the image of the social life which these ships try to cultivate turns me off; they would have basic overnight accommodation which would be the staple for most passengers. While transiting Scotland they would provide many local links that are currently unavailable, such as N Ronaldsay-Fair Isle, and some of their pickups and setdowns would connect with overnight services to/from London (see below). Tenders would of course be used at ports which were too small to accommodate the large ships that would be required on such a route.