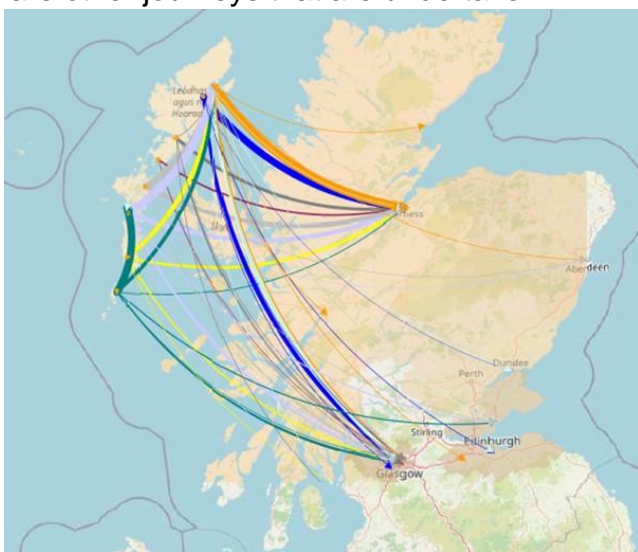


NHS Western Isles Travel Logistics, Effect on Health Delivery, Costs and Effect on our Patient Population As of November 2023

Background

NHS Western Isles are totally dependent on air and sea travel to move patients and staff internally from Barra, the Uists including Benbecula to Stornoway and patients (some staff) externally mostly to Inverness and Glasgow, though from the travel map taken from the Patient Travel Database over a two-month period there are other journeys that are undertaken.



Map 1 travel to and from Islands

To put it into context for a full calendar year 2022 (still with some Covid-19 recovering and good coverage using near me clinics) there were 9001 single journeys, with majority being return trips so approximately 18,000 people on flights or ferry (this excludes patients travelling on island by car). This is split approx. 13,450 seats required on flights and 4,550 passengers on ferries, majority with cars.

Internal NHS Western staff flights are around 590 a year with approximately the same via ferry. On top of that there are the visiting services flights from Raigmore and the flights for locum workers. Staff do travel to the mainland for training and some mainland meetings but with the use of teams, travel for conferences and meetings has reduced.

All food and medical supplies (including short life chemotherapy drugs) are brought on to the island and are dependent on a regular flight and ferry service. Majority of medical supplies, laundry and clinical waste is dependant internally on the interisland ferries to transport goods. NHS Western Isles run vans to and from the Southern Isles and we also use local contractors, specifically with regards to clinical waste.

Logistic Issues faced in the last 12-18 months.

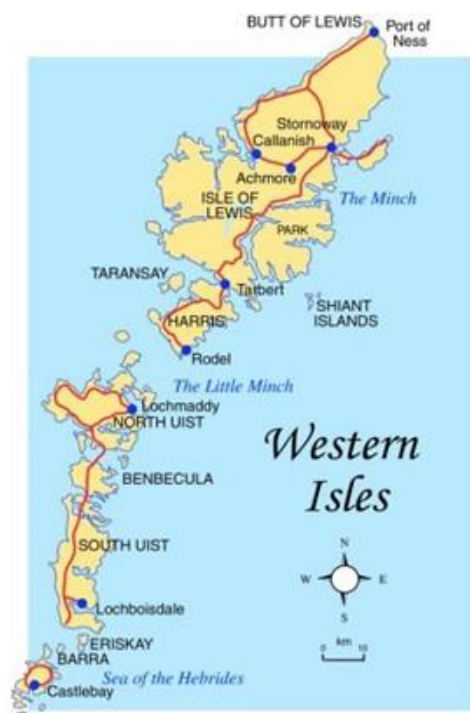
To note logistical issues, exclude weather related delays, as that is normal – though with climate change these incidents may increase. Unfortunately, due to the age of the CalMac fleet when you add days lost to breakdowns and technical issues on top of the days lost due to weather the logistical issues are becoming unsustainable.

Key Interisland Routes

Map 2 shows the Western Isles and how key it is for interisland connections via flights and ferries for the population of the Islands specifically with regards to movements of patients and staff from Barra to Uists and Barra Hospital in Benbecula and patients from Barra and The Uists (including Benbecula) travelling to The Western Isles Hospital in Stornoway. The key spinal connections also bring medical supplies, food, drugs etc from the main centres out to GP Practices, smaller Hospitals, Dental Units etc.

Ferry

- Closure of Uig Pier has resulted in the loss of the triangle route from North Uist to Harris or to Skye for 6 weeks – this has been exasperated by the break down of the Loch Portain, there has been some coverage by MV Alfred – **Increased overnight costs for patients and staff**
- Loch Portain is the small pump jet propulsion ferry (34 car capacity) that negotiates the Sound of Harris and is the main ferry connection for food, medical supplies, clinical staff, patients etc. The ferry is running on only 3 engines due to technical reasons and is only able to sail in very low wind speeds. The small relief vessel Loch Brushda, also pump jet propulsion (18 car capacity) has been brought in when winds are above what is safe for the Loch Portain to sail in – it is half the size. It is likely to take 3-4 months to repair the Loch Portain. The Loch Brushda was due to provide relief for the Barra to Eriskay ferry (again key connector for supplies, staff, patients etc) before the Loch Portain is due back on all engines and had transferred to Barra. However, the Loch Bhrusda has gone technical the



Map 2 Western Isles

morning of 13th November 2023 and a very old relief vessel has been brought in for the Barra to Eriskay run (only 12 car capacity) – **Increased overnight costs for patients and staff, hire cars required, loss of productive days**

- Break-down of the Loch Alainn – **although only for a few days it resulted in some Barra patients having to go to Stornoway via Glasgow, on the plane subject to tides. The relief vessel was the Loch Brusda which also broke-down**
- It is an aging fleet on the key inter island routes, Loch Portain being 20 years, the only relief vessel Loch Brushda is 27 years old and the Loch Alainn on the Barra to Eriskay route is 26 years old.

We are anticipating over the coming months and years more issues around technical breakdowns and lose of key services. **This will increase costs due to overnight accommodation required, effect the supply chain some supplies time limited and have a detrimental effect on patients' health.**

Flights

All flights both inter island and flights to the mainland are provided by Loganair. NHS Western Isles have a contract with Loganair (as do other Orkney and Shetland) which is for a fixed price ticket for patient travel only. This ticket price is subject to annual uplift using CPI.

Issues that have affected Travel Issues in last 18 months and will continue:

- Winter timetable for Benbecula to Glasgow brought in early and does not allow any day return resulting in an overnight and in some cases 2 overnights where previously would be a return trip.
- PSO contract with Loganair for the Benbecula to Stornoway run is becoming unaffordable for the local authority. The contract was only let for a year until 31/03/2024 and maybe subject to budget cuts. At present only 2 return flights for the week, Tuesday and Thursday which is increasing overnight accommodation costs and worse case travelling on to Inverness 3-4 days of accommodation as no connecting flights any other day.
- There has been no PSO plane link between Barra and Benbecula for nearly 10 years as it was proved to be financial unviable.
- There have been a number of recent technical issues with the planes which have resulted in cancellations of the Thursday plane resulting in very long delays for sometimes frail patients and having to travel late to Glasgow, an over night in Glasgow and travelling back on the lunchtime plane to Benbecula. Previously reliable interisland ferry could be used but

ferry travel is not reliable due to technical issues which is going to last months.

- Christmas timetable – flights for Benbecula to Stornoway will be non-existent over the Christmas Holiday period last plane is 21st December, next scheduled flight not until 4th January 2024. If patients need to travel urgently or discharges are required before Christmas from Raigmore or Stornoway, then we may have to rely on an unreliable ferry service if patients are well enough to travel by ferry or fly via Glasgow at a premium cost.

Revenue Costs

There have been increased costs relating to the ever-increasing poor travel service available to the Western Isles, specifically the inter-island connections and the high increase in ticket prices. This are summarised in Table 1 and are a projection of costs. These are pure NHS Western Isles increased costs and do not consider, some patient lost earnings or increased childcare costs, loss of productive time by staff and loss of key clinics.

The poor travel logistics along with the extreme pressures seen nationally within NHS Aseptic services, are having an effect on our chemotherapy service; short drug shelf life means wastage of chemotherapy drugs when patients are unable to travel to clinics or if delivery of medicines is delayed. To try and reduce drug wastage and ensure vital chemotherapy clinics can continue, chemo drugs have been bought from a Pharma at a higher cost but with a longer shelf-life. To note there is a verbal agreement with Loganair and the Royal Mail to use the commissioned mail plane to bring chemotherapy over from Raigmore. Without this agreement or any changes are made between Loganair and Royal Mail this would have a detrimental effect on the ability to run the service and the cost of the service.

Table 1

Issues 23/24	Inc Cost £
BEB>GLA Sep - Mar Accomodation PT	4,284
BEB>Inverness Accomodation PT	3,629
BEB > SY Y Accomodation PT	9,475
Cancelled Inter Island Flight PT	9,198
Barra via Glagow PT	4,200
Ferry Loch Portain Break-down PT	7,200
Strike Action Patients	15,760
Strike Action Staff	5,040
SY Y> To Southern Isles Staff	36,000
Above Average Flight Inflation	249,941
Consultant Costs poor connectivity	10,000
Locum Costs cancelled clinics	75,000
Chemotherapy Write-Off	65,000
Chemotherapy Supplier Change	125,000
	619,727

Summary

Poor Transport issues are having an effect on the follows:

- Patient Health and Wellbeing and recovery time from major operations with extended travel days.
- Ability to provide services closer to home for the islanders.
- Staff recruitment – jobs are being turned down due to poor travel logistics.
- Increasing de-population – transport issues are an ever increasing problems in enticing young families onto the island.
- Financial position of Western Isles Health Board – overspends due to; above base inflation of 12% in 2022/2023; increased overnights; increase in travel costs and travel time for visiting consultants; use of some locums to provide clinics where Raigmore consultants have been unable to be released for extending times; chemo therapy wastage and change of supplier.

END