

# **TROTTERNISH BUS SURVEY**

**A Report for the Dùthchas Project**

by Skye & Lochalsh  
Council for Voluntary Organisations

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## Summary

A survey of a cross section of people in Trotternish, North Skye, found that most respondents are not dependent upon buses, being car owners. However certain sections of the communities who are not car owners or who don't have access to the family car during the week are regular bus users. This includes older people, young people, people with young children at home and people who are unemployed or on low incomes. In addition approximately 25% of tourists also have no other mode of transport.

The survey found that the majority of bus users are dissatisfied with the existing limited service. The main reason for not using the service is that buses do not operate at times when people want to travel. Other common concerns were the non inclusion of side roads on routes, the cost of fares, the condition of buses and overcrowding on the school runs.

A significant number of bus users and non users affirmed that they would use evening and weekend services, that smaller buses would be more adequate on non school runs, both to accommodate the number of passengers and to negotiate the side roads, and that a flexible feeder service is required.

It was generally felt that timetables and information on fares and concession tickets should be displayed more widely in local shops and public places, be available on board buses and distributed to local households and tourist establishments. They should also be regularly updated and accurate in content.

## Recommendations

The survey concludes that:

- The existing buses (operating under dual purpose school and public service contracts) are clearly not providing a satisfactory service, being old stock, subject to frequent breakdowns.
- For people in a rural area an inflexible service that can't take them where they want to go when they want to go is tantamount to no service at all.
- It is difficult to comprehend how existing underused services and defective vehicles can be cost effective.
- The safety of school pupils and the contract to transport them to school on time are being compromised by the use of defective vehicles and the increase of passengers in the peak tourist season.
- What is needed is a fresh approach and a reformation of the bus network. The primary consideration in awarding tenders should not be the lowest costs but the ability to meet certain standards and requirements.
- People would welcome an improved service and would use it.

It is therefore recommended:

- That contractors operating school runs to Portree be required to provide safe and adequate transport for school pupils and that extra measures be taken to accommodate the increase in passengers and their luggage during peak season times.
- That Dùthchas apply for funding from the Scottish Rural Community Transport Initiative to establish a flexible feeder service in the Trotternish area using existing local providers.
- That existing local contractors be invited to tender for the provision of a small bus/ subsidised taxi feeder service(s), using low floor vehicles, operating on a dial-a-bus basis and including an evening and weekend service (perhaps limited to evenings at weekends) in addition to existing services.
- That liaison be set up with the bus companies and Highland Council to discuss co-ordination between core and feeder services.

It is also recommended that bus and ferry companies should co-ordinate their timetables: buses should meet arriving ferries at Uig pier; local buses should connect with intercity coaches.

It is further recommended that fare pricing and ticket concessions be rationally overhauled and that information be more openly disseminated via a central point in Portree (in addition to the Tourist Office), in public places in Trotternish and on board the buses.

## Objectives

In August 2000 the S&L CVO was approached through its Community Transport Co-ordinator, Kate Nellist, by the Dùthchas Project's Transport Steering Group to help further the Project by conducting a survey.

The aim of the survey was to investigate Demonstration Action 3.1:

- a. Find out under what conditions would people use a bus.
- b. Encourage wider promotion of bus services.

The first priority was to find out the existing level of bus usage including:

- the restrictions imposed on people by the limited service
- the reasons for non usage and problems with the service

Secondly an attempt was made to establish what improvements are needed:

- how people would like to see local services developed
- how people would prefer to see services being promoted

## Methods

A simple standardised Questionnaire/Prompt and Recording sheet was drawn up and used in contact with a representative cross-section of the Trotternish population.

Questionnaires were delivered to 88 Households by Primary School children.

Response: Uig 17/28, Kilmuir 6/25, Staffin 3/35

Telephone or face to face interviews were held with:

7 Tourist establishments (Uig Youth Hostel, Dun Flodigarry bunkhouse, an Uig B&B, Kilmuir Guest House, Flodigarry Hotel, Whitewave Outdoor Centre, Columba 1400)

3 Community Council representatives

2 Youth Leaders

1 Church of Scotland Minister

1 Primary School Headteacher

1 Unemployed person

1 Jobsearch Programme Centre Manager

1 Minibus contractor

Portree Medical Centre reception staff

Highland Country Buses information staff

Caledonian Macbrayne staff

Highland Council Transport Development, Inverness

A Group discussion was held with Kilmuir Lunch Club (24 older people)

A Group discussion was held with Staffin Youth Club (12 young people)

Comments have been included in the relevant sections. They have been attributed to the respondents only in cases where they represent group interest rather than individual opinion.

## Results

### 1. EXISTING USAGE OF TROTTERNISH BUS SERVICES.

#### **1.1 Frequency, purpose and times of bus journeys amongst different user groups**

Respondents were asked how frequently they use the buses: every day, once a week, occasionally or not at all. Tourist operators were asked on behalf of their guests.

Most householders travel by bus occasionally. Some specified that this was only when they had no other option, i.e family car unavailable. A minority use the bus once a week and these stated they are reliant on the bus service, having no other transport or being non-drivers. Most bus journeys are to Portree and back. The main purpose of these journeys, apart from school, was for shopping, with an almost equal number stating the purpose was for leisure/social activities. Very few stated work as their reason for travelling. Those respondents who specified times of travel mostly leave Trotternish at 08.00/08.30 or 12.30/12.45 and return between 15.00 and 17.00. Only 3 respondents use a bus regularly on Saturdays: one for work, the others for leisure purposes.

Most older people do not own their own vehicles. They use buses to travel to Portree occasionally for shopping, to attend Portree Medical Centre or for social purposes.

School pupils travel by bus every week day. Some also use the early evening buses when attending after school activities and Saturday services.

Less than 10% of unemployed people using the job searching Programme Centre in Portree own their own transport. The majority of people who are unemployed or on low incomes cannot afford to run a car; the bus is their only means of transport. They travel once a week (Thursdays) to Portree to attend the Programme Centre. They also rely on the bus for shopping, leisure activities and for transport to work when they find it.

Hostel, bunkhouse and B&B operators affirmed that approximately 25% of guests use buses; guest house and hotel managers cited the percentage as much less. Bus users mostly travel to and from Portree, to connect with other services. They mainly arrive on afternoon buses from Monday to Saturday, stay overnight and leave on the school bus the following morning. This is summer trade, and there is no Sunday service.

#### Comments:

- People arrange their own transport and have always helped each other. They don't rely on public transport.
- I think the bus service is a good one, although I know it is not used enough. I think it would be a shame if the service was cut back because of the people who do use it and depend on it.
- The bus driver is always helpful with buggies, shopping, kids' lost school bags and books.
- Drivers provide an excellent service and are extremely helpful.

- The fare structure is very good and makes bus travel economically more sensible than using the car for trips between Uig and Portree.
- The extra extension evening run from Portree has been welcome.
- It is a very obliging service.
- Elderly people are comfortable travelling on school buses; the children are very polite/good/'delightful'. (Lunch Club)
- Services have improved over the last few years with the additional early evening bus and there is now an extra Saturday service through the winter.

## **1.2 The effect of a limited service on bus users.**

All bus users have to make alternative arrangements during school holidays, on Sundays and in the winter period when there is a more limited service.

Householders either put off their journey until they can use the family car (weekends) or accept lifts from friends and relatives. A tiny minority cancel their journey altogether.

Comments:

- The winter timetable is unhelpful to local people who rely on buses all year round and find services curtailed at the end of the tourist season.

Older people mainly rely on lifts, hire taxis and for their monthly Lunch Club in Kilmuir are collected by the Duntulm Hotel or Columba 1400 courtesy minibuses. Sometimes they have to cancel their journeys; Saturdays and Sundays are difficult for getting out and about. Sunday travel is a problem for churchgoers.

Comments:

- Older people cannot get buses at times for the GP surgery in Uig or clinics in Portree Medical Centre, and as they are not offered lifts under the Ambulance Service voluntary car scheme, they have to resort to taxis. They quoted £40 for a taxi from Duntulm to Portree and return. It had been noted by a GP that elderly people were failing to attend appointments at the Portree Medical Centre and enquiries revealed this was because they could not afford the taxi fare.
- Older people need to get to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness for appointments. They cannot meet early morning appointments by bus but if they ask for afternoon appointments they can have difficulty catching the 17.00 bus from Inverness to Skye if they are given an appointment after 14.00. They often have to stay overnight. If they do return on the 17.00 bus there is no connection from Portree to Trotternish and they have to prearrange lifts.

Young people rely on their parents for lifts; the older ones hitch and hire taxis in order to attend evening and weekend social events and activities.

The Church of Scotland hires minibuses and cars to transport young people to the Sunday Youth Meeting in Staffin.

Jobsearch Programme Centre clients cited school holidays as a particular problem. One unemployed job seeker mentioned hitching as an alternative.

Tourists are collected by their accommodation operators in private cars and minibuses; some hire taxis.

Comments:

- Some tourists refuse to fill their booking if there is no bus available. Often it means they arrive the following day. Others, from all types of accommodation, refuse to come unless picked up by the accommodation owner when there is no bus.
- On Sundays tourists can't arrive by bus; often they don't come at all, or they leave a day early; sometimes they stay for the weekend but are unable to go sightseeing by bus. Sometimes the fact that they cannot travel around Skye by bus on Sundays affects their decision not to come. Some B&B owners offer to drive their guests around sightseeing if there is no public transport available.
- The Uig to Dunvegan day trip is impossible; guests are lost to Dunvegan. If dropped off early enough B&B guests can get an afternoon bus from Dunvegan to Portree and then from Portree back to Uig.

### **1.3 Distance to the nearest bus stop.**

Existing bus services operate on a circular route and do not travel down the side roads into the glens to pick up passengers.

A minority of respondents are picked up at the door by buses. A few cited 'the road end' as their nearest pick up point without stating how far this is from the door. The majority of respondents walk to the bus stop: this ranges from one to 20 minutes, 10 metres to 100 metres, 150 yards to 300 yards, or a quarter of a mile to three miles. Both '20 minutes' and 'three miles' were replies by and on behalf of elderly people.

School pupils frequently walk to the nearest stop; sometimes lifts are available in bad weather, often they are hanging about in the rain.

Householders stressed that in bad weather they can get a lift by car to the stop

Comments:

- At the Lunch Club some older people said not only do they have to walk long distances in all weathers to the nearest bus stop, they have to do the same on return carrying shopping bags and in some cases there is no bus shelter to wait in. Balmaqueen had a shelter which was vandalised 'five or six' years ago and has not yet been replaced.

- The Community Council representative for Uig affirmed that most houses are close to the road but those living in Glen Conon, Sheader, Hinnisdal, etc have a 'fair walk'.
- The Community Council representative for Kilmuir commented that some elderly people living in townships and villages off the bus route cannot use the buses. Some hire a minibus at a cost of £20 each way to shop in Portree.
- A minibus contractor affirmed that he had occasionally taken elderly people from 'the side roads' into Portree shopping but that this was an ad hoc arrangement.
- The Community Council representative for Staffin commented that those people who don't live on the route have two to three miles to walk to the nearest bus stop.
- The Church of Scotland Minister said many elderly people don't use the bus because of the long walks to the bus stops; they rely on lifts to Portree. He also commented that, generally, if elderly people are able to shop in Portree they can get to the bus stop by walking.

#### **1.4 Connections with coaches and ferries.**

The majority of respondents did not think that local Trotternish bus services connected well with long distance bus and coach services or with the Uig ferry to the Outer Isles.

Some respondents commented that connections worked in the summer but not in the winter.

Most local residents were concerned about poor connections when they travelled off the island; the point was repeatedly made that there are no early buses to connect with the 7.10 from Portree to Glasgow and other mainland buses leaving Portree (the first bus from Uig to Portree leaves at 08.20). Similarly, there are no connections for travellers coming back from Inverness or Glasgow by bus in the evening (buses from Glasgow and Inverness arrive in Portree around 21.00).

Tourist accommodation and facility owners were mainly concerned about connections with the Uig ferry. The last ferry from the Outer Isles arrives in Uig at 10.10 but there is no bus to meet it. Accommodation providers said they have to pick up passengers from the late ferry.

Caledonian Macbrayne reported that bus and ferry connections are poor. Highland Country Buses don't stop at Uig pier; passengers disembark at the Police Station, half a mile away. This is a particular problem for tourists and backpackers who want to head north. Often, by the time they find out that they have to walk to the Police Station to catch a bus it is too late. Citylink buses that run direct to Glasgow and Inverness meet the ferries, excepting the 15.30 ferry, when the bus leaves fifteen minutes earlier. There is no bus to meet the late evening arrival.

A lot of hostelling tourists travel by rail and consequently go to Mallaig, then across by ferry to Armadale, but find there is no bus connecting Armadale ferry to Uig. Guests report a two hour wait for a train connection at Kyle.

## 2. REASONS FOR NON USAGE AND PROBLEMS WITH THE EXISTING SERVICES

Respondents were asked to comment on a number of suggested reasons for not using the bus services and also encouraged to supply their own.

Most respondents own cars and some made the point that they prefer to use their car and don't have a need for buses.

Some respondents who own cars do or would use buses occasionally and some of these respondents identified 'reasons for non usage' as problems with existing services.

Bus users who rely on buses also identified 'reasons for non usage' as problems with existing services.

The most common reason for not using a local bus was the lack of buses at times when people want to travel. This was affirmed by respondents from all sections of the community: householders from all three areas, community council representatives, older people, young people, unemployed people and tourist operators.

People cited the fare structure (mainly householders), the poor condition of buses (mainly householders and tourist operators) and that there are no buses to take them where they want to travel (mainly tourists) as further reasons for non usage in about equal measure.

Older people and mothers with buggies and young children cited difficulty of access as a reason for non usage.

A minority of respondents stated that people feel uncomfortable travelling on school buses.

Young people had a catalogue of complaints about the school buses. They are subject to frequent breakdowns and they cited a breakdown on three consecutive mornings at exam time as an example. The buses are old and sub standard; they leak and the rear window had been known to fall out. These faults were rectified by 'patching with glue' on the spot. The buses were described as dirty, unsafe and overcrowded. The situation was worse at present because 13 new pupils were attending the High School and only three had left. School pupils were resorting to sitting three to a seat and said they would 'sit on the floor if it was clean'. The problem was exacerbated on the afternoon run because backpackers boarded the bus in Somerled Square before it got to the High School and took up too much space with their packs, consequently the pupils were being squeezed even further.

Comments:

- We don't use buses because of the convenience of the car.
- Personally I find the car more convenient on routes where the buses don't run; i.e. short distance runs
- Highland Buses are dreadful.

- Owing to the nature of our business the bus system does not fit in with our personal needs, but which is why we always use our private car. Personally, I would use evening buses to events in Portree..
- I don't use the bus service myself because I have a young family and find the car an easier mode of transport.
- No amount of campaigning for better services would stop people from using existing ad hoc arrangements - people prefer their own car or lifts.
- The problem is getting more local people to use the service; most prefer their cars and only use the bus when they have a breakdown (Staffin Community Council).
- People don't use the buses because they don't pick up at the door (Kilmuir Community Council).
- People don't use the buses because they won't pick them up at the door/ down the side roads, and once in Portree they drop them off in the centre and they have to walk up to the Co-op (Minibus contractor).
- Some services charge £3.20 for a child for a single fare (Uig to Portree). As a parent of 3 children (who would use the service frequently if the fare was reasonable) it is cheaper for me to drive them to Portree and collect them.
- There is no area or company wide fare structure. Clients from different parts of Skye report a great variety of fares for comparative distances travelled. In Trotternish Highland Bus is cheaper (£3 return Uig to Portree) but it doesn't run a service as early as Citylink. Buses are expensive (Jobsearch Programme Centre).
- Buses are too old and decrepit.
- These big old buses can't negotiate the side roads and therefore provide an inflexible service (Minibus contractor).
- Breakdowns on the school services are common.
- The buses (Highland Country Buses) are quite old stock; they are poorly heated and poorly maintained. It has been known for there to be three breakdowns in two days and for pupils to be left standing in the rain while a bus is being repaired as there is no back up vehicle (Staffin Community Council).
- There was a breakdown on the way to Portree and a girl was lucky she was able to contact her parents by mobile phone to pick her up and take her to school, otherwise she would have been late for her exam. Pupils have missed sports events due to bus breakdowns. (Staffin Youth Club).
- The present company is cutting costs and just patching up old vehicles.
- Highland Buses are smelly old boneshakers. Where the Council is subsidising them it should insist on a minimum standard.
- Services are atrocious; foreign tourists learn the 'black art' of using local services and timetables (Tourist operator).
- It's extremely awkward with a buggy; there is nowhere to leave it but behind a seat and it's hard trying to get on with a baby in one arm and a buggy in the other. It means relying on others to help, especially when it comes to paying the driver. I know other mums have both these problems too.
- There is no-one to help mothers and toddlers with buggies.

- There is no storage space on board for buggies, which roll about the aisle.
- Although smoking is meant to be prohibited, most times I use the bus there is someone smoking on it. It puts me off using buses especially if I have the children with me.
- The non smoking rule is not observed; the driver can't control this because he is concentrating on driving.
- Schoolchildren are badly behaved on buses.
- Schoolchildren on buses are boisterous.
- There have been complaints from the public about badly behaved pupils on buses (Staffin Community Council).
- School buses can be crowded, but it is the children who suffer, not the public.
- Our youth representative reports that the bus presently on the Portree-Kilmaluag route is too small and pupils are having to sit three to a seat. This overcrowding is at its worst in August on the afternoon run when hostellers and backpackers board the bus in Somerled Square in Portree and so by the time the bus arrives at Portree High School there are not enough seats for the school pupils (Staffin Community Council).
- Often the buses used for school travel are in poor condition and during the wet winter months seats which children have to sit on are often wet or damp, resulting in clothing being wet or damp on arrival at school.
- It surprises me that a designated school bus is also used by members of the public. Any member of the public working in schools has to be checked by the police, yet anyone can get on a bus full of school children. It is also impossible for a school to hire a bus for a 09.00 to 09.30 departure - all buses are used for school transport (Primary School Headteacher).
- The rule that primary school children living within three miles of the school may not use school buses is archaic; in these days of fast traffic it is dangerous to enforce it for no good reason.
- The drivers are 'a law unto themselves' and don't always complete the run to Flodigarry; young people had sometimes to call out their parents to pick them up along the way (Staffin Youth Club).
- The driver sometimes only goes as far as the last person already on the bus wants to travel and won't take on new passengers who want to go further (Staffin Youth Club).
- Tourists report that individual drivers make their own decisions about where they will stop, e.g. dropping people at the Old Man of Storr; there do not appear to be regular stops or consistent rules (Portree Tourist Office).
- The lack of buses prioritises people living in or near Portree; people who can't take up jobs offered to them because of a lack of transport stop applying for work; some leave the area, especially the young. It leads to increased frustration and depression (Jobsearch Programme Centre).
- Probably all the suggested factors need improving, but if people have no other option they use the bus and put up with a poor service.
- We have been complaining to the School and the Education Department about the condition of the school buses but nothing gets changed; we are told it is a matter of costs (Staffin Youth Club).

### **3. HOW PEOPLE WOULD LIKE THE BUS SERVICES TO DEVELOP**

#### **3.1 Desired extensions to the timetable**

All sections of the local communities in Uig, Kilmuir and Staffin: householders, older people and young people specified evening services as the main extension they would like to see.

People want to be able to catch an early evening bus into Portree and return to Trotternish in the late evening. This is so that they can attend events and functions in Portree and connect with buses returning from the mainland, i.e. Inverness and Glasgow.

It was also stated that early evening buses from Portree would allow local people to take up jobs in Portree.

Comments:

- Early evening 18.00 to Portree, returning 21.30 to 22.00 (Uig).
- A bus service later in the evening: after 18.20 there are no buses at all in any direction (Kilmuir).
- Late service from Portree i.e. 19.00 or 20.00, or to connect with the Inverness service (Staffin).
- An evening bus would be very handy for travelling to Portree to attend functions, evening classes, the cinema at AROS, etc and a return bus home. Possibly leaving 19.00-19.30 and returning 22.00-22.30.
- An evening service once or twice a week would be good. We would like to attend events and functions in Portree in the evenings (Lunch Club).
- Buses in the evening so we can go into Portree after 18.00 and return around 22.00 (Staffin Youth Club).
- Local people, especially young people, would also use evening services for social purposes (Tourist operator).
- An evening service is needed, especially for use by young people: for particular events and occasions the bus companies could put on a special service, co-ordinated with events organisers; a smaller, flexible bus service could do it (Uig Community Council).
- The concerns of young people are for after school transport; they are not able to use their bus passes on early evening buses (Youth Leader).
- At present young people are unable to use their bus passes on the early evening bus; pupils who want to take part in after school activities either have to pay full fare or are given lifts home by their parents (Staffin Community Council).
- It is impossible to use public transport to get to work (in Uig) or home (from Braes) on time. I would use it if it was available: Monday to Friday, to be at work for 08.45 and home between 16.00 and 17.00. My family has to have two cars in order for me to get to work: very costly! As a worker I can see how difficult it is for people in Uig to go into Portree in an evening.
- Services should be extended, 8.30-17.00 weekdays to allow people to take up jobs in Portree (Jobsearch Programme Centre).
- Things have gone backwards: there used to be a Saturday evening service.

Tourist operators also responded that 'late night buses' were desired.

Comments:

- Late evening bus to connect with last Outer Isles ferry.
- Late night buses especially for functions in the summer; winter visitors tend to have their own transport.
- At present we lose clients to Portree as they need to stay in Portree if they want to see a film or go to a concert.
- If there were evening services guests would be able to go to Portree for social events and still return to stay overnight in Trotternish. At present trade is lost; people book a night in Portree if they want to attend an event.
- It is impossible to attend evening events, therefore guests stay in Portree instead and Trotternish loses trade.

An increase in 'weekend' services, including Sunday services, was mainly desired by those without access to a car: older people, young people, some householders and tourists.

Comments:

- Weekends are a problem if anything is happening in Portree on Saturdays (Lunch Club).
- We would like to see buses at weekends (Staffin Youth Club).
- The circular bus is excellent; it can be used to visit attractions and museums, except on Sundays (Tourist operator).
- Sunday bus services would encourage commercialisation which is considered a backward step (Church of Scotland).

Several respondents made the point that they would like to see a general increase in bus services, both summer and winter.

Comments:

- 'It is very important to have the same timetable all year round.'
- It's a good service that we have just now, but in a few weeks it will change. I understand that it can't be like that in the winter, as there are few and far between less tourists about, but why for them! Us locals are here year round. Some of us depend on our local bus service.
- The Uig service is more or less non-existent.
- There aren't enough buses.
- On Tuesdays and Fridays there is a GP surgery in Uig from 9.30-11.00 but no bus service to get to it (Lunch Club).
- Could a local bus (from Staffin) run to Uig to catch the Glasgow bus, or could a new service be introduced?
- Extensions to services are not economically viable or practical as people have made alternative arrangements and there are so few potential customers (Church of Scotland).
- Elderly people enjoy travelling by bus for the social experience and would use buses more if they were running at times they want them to (Lunch Club).

### **3.2 Suggestions for a more flexible service**

Respondents were concerned that buses are overcrowded for the school runs but underused during the daytime. It was felt that this was an uneconomical service.

It was also thought that a more flexible service, both in terms of times and pick up points/routes, would be better used.

Comments:

- The bus service needs to be totally reformed.
- A minibus size bus would be more adequate, not the big old bus as at present.
- A smaller bus would be more economical.
- Low floor buses are needed; elderly people can't step down from existing buses.
- Low floor buses with a space to put buggies are needed.
- People would like to see buses going to townships down the side roads (Kilmuir Community Council).
- A bus going to Quiraing over the hill road for tourists would be a good extension.
- Now that Columba 1400 is established there is a need for a direct link between Uig and Staffin over the hill road.
- The big buses are too big to go down the side roads where there are no suitable turning facilities; a minibus size would be more adequate for this purpose (Staffin Community Council).
- A feeder service to the townships and side roads is needed. Elderly people find it difficult to get to bus stops and would prefer a door to door service such as that provided by the Skye Old Peoples' Welfare minibus which takes them shopping to Portree once a month (Lunch Club).
- The existing service is inflexible and the present service buses are too big. The limited timetable means a lot of passengers' time is wasted hanging about. People use the service when there is no other option. Most people living in the glens have to walk 1-1.5 miles to catch the bus at the main road. It is a difficult problem but a door to door, smaller, flexible bus cum taxi service, operating more frequently, on a core service with fixed routes and times, but which could also take bookings down the side roads, would be used by more people. A service that picks up down the side roads would be more viable for the elderly. It is very exceptional to have the existing service bus full, except with school children; most of the time a 12-15 seater minibus would suffice and would pay for itself (Uig Community Council).
- During the summer months it is often necessary for children to have to sit three to a seat because of extra tourists using the school bus in the afternoon. From a safety point of view this is not acceptable. Perhaps an extra smaller bus could be available when the school bus is full.
- There needs to be a big bus for school pupils, but perhaps there should be a separate smaller bus for backpackers (Staffin Youth Club).
- The buses contracted to do the primary school runs (i.e. minibus size) could be better utilised: they could provide a feeder service between school runs.

## **4. PROMOTION OF SERVICES**

### **4.1 Usage of concessionary travel**

No householder respondents use any form of concessionary travel card other than a school bus pass. However three wished for information on concessionary travel cards and had difficulty obtaining it.

Older people at the Lunch Club use Highland Council Travel Cards.

The Staffin Community Council representative remarked that people using Senior Citizens cards find bus travel is cheaper. However it was surprising how many people hire taxis to go shopping in Portree rather than use the Senior Citizens cards; perhaps some are put off by having to pay the initial £3, which lasts for five years.

Members of the Kilmuir Lunch Club said they had no information on Visually Handicapped Travel Cards or Companion Cards, and were interested in these.

The Church of Scotland Minister also testified that elderly people would like this information and have difficulty obtaining it.

Staffin Youth Club members said they can now use their bus passes on the early evening bus if they attend after school activities. However when travelling on a bus at other times out of school hours some were charged full fare if the driver thought they looked 16 plus, whether they were or not.

Young people had no knowledge of the Skye Rover tickets which they could obtain for half price and use in school holidays.

### **4.2 Accessing timetables and travel information**

Respondents were evenly divided on whether timetables are easy to access and understand, with most local people stating that they were, except for owners of tourist establishments who all replied that they weren't.

One householder who does B&B said that visitors to the area use the bus but find travel information hard to get.

Two householders replied that timetables are easy to understand when you can find one and that fares should be included.

Tourist establishments all affirmed that they supply their guests with timetables on local services. However, up to date timetables are difficult to obtain; they rely on photocopies from the Tourist Office which soon run out.

Comments:

- Understanding the timetable is 'a skill' which is difficult enough for English readers, but especially so for foreigners; most timetable users are foreigners (Tourist operator).
- What is needed is a clear timetable that can be read off straightforwardly without having to go up and down columns (Tourist operator).

#### **4.3 Preferred information access points**

The local communities would prefer to have timetables and travel information displayed at bus stops/shelters, in the local shops and post offices, on board buses and delivered to the door.

Other suggestions: the local newspaper, the Portree Co-op, Portree Post Office, the Village Hall (Uig), the Calmac office, the GP surgery (Staffin), Scottish Citylink Linkline, Skyeways Office (Kyle) and through Community Councils.

Comments:

- Information for elderly people is obtainable on the bus but not information about concessions for young people (Staffin Youth Club).

All the tourist operators interviewed would prefer to have the information delivered to the door so that they are able to advise visitors and available at the Tourist Information Centre in Portree.

Other suggestions: at local bus stops, ferry terminals and in local tea rooms and pubs.

Comments:

- Most visitors seem to have all their travel information before they get here (Tourist operator).
- Local timetables should be available at Inverness Bus Station which seems to be where most tourists get their information (Tourist operator).
- The information should be available on the Internet where it could be accessed easily by tourists (Tourist operator).
- Information is the key; it should be disseminated to everybody.

## Appendix

### 1. HIGHLAND COUNTRY BUSES

Information obtained from Highland Country Bus company reveals a lack of a uniform fare structure, an inconsistency in the rules regarding day returns, and a haphazard approach to disseminating information.

#### **Fares and concessions**

Enquiries regarding fares and concessions to the Highland Country Bus depot in Portree were answered on three separate occasions by an answering machine recommending the caller contact an Inverness number (Rapson's coaches), where personnel suggested ringing Portree again; by a mechanic who was unable to help; and by the information officer at the depot.

Fares quoted by Highland Country Bus were as follows:

Portree to Uig £1.95, day return £3  
Portree to Kilmuir £2.50, day return £3.90  
Portree to Duntulm £2.60, (no day return)  
Portree to Valtos £1.95, day return £3  
Portree to Stenscholl £2.30, day return £3.55  
Portree to Digg £2.50, (no day return)  
Portree to Flodigarry £2.80, day return £4.35  
Portree to Portree £4.50

A three day ticket is obtainable for £15, but it is cheaper to buy a day return if available.

Senior citizens are eligible for the Highland Council Travel Card.

Children can travel 'half price' but a child becomes adult 'about 16' years of age.

Day returns are obtainable from 'selected places' only. This is because day returns were decided upon 'a long time ago depending upon where the majority of regular bus users lived'.

In the summer there are Skye Day Rover tickets which can be used to travel on any bus all day for £6. Children can travel at half price on these. They are mainly used by tourists but can be useful for local children in the school holidays.

#### **Timetables**

The information on summer timetables was gained from the *Public Transport Travel Guide: Skye and the Western Isles* published by Highland Council, valid until 21 October. An effort was made to obtain the new winter timetable on 30 October. The notice displayed in the bus shelter in Somerled Square, Portree, gave the winter timetable for Citylink services but was still displaying the summer times for Highland Country Bus, and for both services times of buses leaving Trotternish were not included. A telephone enquiry to the Highland Country Bus depot in Portree concerning the availability of winter timetables brought the reply that they were obtainable from the Tourist Office. However the new leaflets had not arrived there although a photocopy was available. On advising the bus company of this a pile of newly printed timetables was promptly delivered to CVO in person. Further questioning revealed that for people seeking information in Trotternish timetables are available on the buses and 'most people know the two drivers and get the information direct from them'. Clearly this is not satisfactory and would seem to be neglecting the local community's need for up to date information, although tourists were being better informed. There is 'a cubbyhole tucked away at the back' of the Portree depot but no sign at the entrance or other indication that the public is encouraged or welcome to seek information there.

### **Passenger numbers**

Highland Council Transport Development Department provided some information on average numbers of passengers using the Highland Country Bus Trotternish Circular route.

The Council keeps constant figures year in year out, but these do not go back further than January 1997. Part of the contract is to supply passenger numbers and revenue figures per service on a monthly basis. The Council then converts these into averages per day. However enquiries revealed that no figures are available for March 2000 to the present because of 'blips' and 'anomalies' in the system which are being investigated. Some drivers are 'recording wrongly'. A machine records each ticket, but does not record journeys on return tickets nor the specific run.

Average numbers of passengers per day for the month of January:

1998	44
1999	49
2000	51

Average numbers of passengers per day for the month of August:

1998	157
1999	147

Details of passenger numbers and revenue for Contracts 142 (Portree-Flodigarry Circular) and SL.05 (Flodigarry-Uig winter Saturday service) are attached.

## **2. PORTREE MEDICAL CENTRE**

There are three Outreach Surgeries. These are held from 9.30 to 11.30, in Uig on Tuesdays and Fridays and in Staffin on Wednesdays.

Transport is not organised by the Medical Centre for GP appointments, whether in Uig, Staffin or Portree, but it is organised to assist people to attend a clinic or for an appointment with a visiting consultant in Portree.

However only older people and people with disabilities are eligible; the onus is on them to ask the GP for assistance. It is up to the GP to sanction the request. In answer to a query regarding take up of the service it was said that many older people are 'too independent to ask' for this help. However older people interviewed during the survey seemed to be unaware of this service.

## **3. AFTER SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

In November 2000, as a result of joint working between Highland Council Roads and Transport and the Area Education departments, tenders have been invited for contractors to provide after school bus services for pupils at Portree High School. The arrangements include an agreement that pupils may use bus passes on existing early evening buses. This had been a major concern of young people encountered during the survey.

## **4. TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE**

The following infrastructure related comments were made during the survey.

### **Roads**

The existing roads and lay bys round the north end of Trotternish are inadequate. They were made in the 1930s and modern service buses and foreign tour buses are too big to pass each other. It is also a problem when there are local weddings and funerals: the number of cars in procession create a bottleneck. Lay bys need to be increased in number and extended in size. Service providers should ensure that traffic can safely negotiate these roads.

### **Uig Pier**

Tourists arrive at Uig pier expecting to find petrol, cash machines etc, and have to return to Portree: this is a regular cause of bottlenecks on the roads.

A proper safe harbour is needed at Uig. The present pier is inadequate for larger vessels. Recently a vessel was unable to dock and had to discharge at Ullapool. The Council receives revenue in the form of pier dues and should invest money into upgrading the facilities.

## **5. SCOTTISH RURAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INITIATIVE FUND**

At a meeting with Community Transport co-workers and representatives from Highland Council Transport Development, the Scottish Executive and the Community Transport Association, an opportunity was presented to raise some of the concerns encountered during this survey. Jim Richardson of the Scottish Executive intimated that there is scope under the SRCTI Fund for transport projects which involve local communities, and in particular for 'multiple combination situations'. 18 million pounds is available over the next three years but application for 2001 have to be in by 11 December 2000.