OVERVIEW;
The Island of Jura lies in close proximity to the Argyll mainland. Although having a large landmass the fluctuating population is now only in the region of 200, which is a slight increase but as in other islands demographics point to a non-sustaining population. At the present time there is a considerable amount of new build on the island, which is seen as positive by islanders. Much of this has been within the crofting settlements but also Association houses for rent. Due to the interest from early and partial retirees, house prices have increased in the last decade. Some of these purchasers have moved to the island but others use their houses as holiday homes. The main industries are distilling, sporting/farming estates and a limited amount of tourism. Employment levels are high and as such the business sector complains about the lack of available labour. Cost of living is high with many necessary items in excess of a third more expensive than the mainland. This is burdensome to residents and restrictive to tourism and new development.

FERRY ROUTES;
Access to the mainland from Jura by vehicle is via a ferry trip to the neighbouring Island of Islay and then a second ferry to the mainland. Independent mainland water taxis operate passenger services to various points on the island. The Jura IaTE group and Jura Development Trust are now implementing a subsidized pilot passenger service. The ro-ro journey between Feolin on Jura and Port Askaig on Islay involves a sailing time of five minutes. The vessel is owned by Argyll & Bute Council but operated by ASP Ship Management Ltd. The Islay to mainland connection is provided by Cal-Mac from Port Askaig and Port Ellen to Kennacraig in north Kintyre. For Jura residents the preferred port is Port Askaig, which is easier to access and provides a shorter sea trip than Port Ellen. The journey from Jura to the mainland takes a minimum of 3 ½ hours. The cost for a family of four traveling by car, £170 return. This fare structure needs to be looked at seriously as it has a major impact on the viability of life on the islands. It is a major disappointment to the south islands that they are excluded from the RET Pilot Scheme. We would suggest that the existing service to Islay should concentrate more on servicing Port Askaig as it provides a shorter trip which is time saving to travelers and should have a lower running cost.

FREQUENCY & TIMETABLES;
Shorter sea crossings allow a higher degree of frequency. Jura receives more sailings per day than any other island on the west coast. (Albeit to the neighbouring island.) In summer the 18 scheduled runs start at 07.35 till 23.00. The winter timetable is slightly reduced. This allows commuting between the two islands by secondary school children, teachers, nurses and builders. The service could be considered an ideal model for development elsewhere on the western seaboard. However for what is just a five-minute sailing the cost of £14 day return for a car and driver is considered high.

Cal-Mac have recently started running 4 trips a day to Islay, we would encourage the continuance of this as it allows greater flexibility in departure and return times for resident islanders and visitors.

Shockingly the ‘improvements’ to Port Askaig pier have actually reduced the number of sailings between Jura and Islay, despite the vast sums of public money spent on refurbishment. At the time of writing the 21.30 and 23.00 sailings have all been cancelled because of the problems with Port Askaig pier. As the representatives of the island, Jura Community Council finds this
unacceptable and hope that the inquiry will take heed of this problem and perhaps encourage further investigation to clarify why this project has gone drastically wrong.

CAPACITY;
Even with four ferry connections out of Islay during the summer, there are a number of occasions when no spaces are available. The same can be true at peak periods during the winter. Clearly there is a need at times for further runs or perhaps one run should be made for commercials, thereby freeing up space on the other trips for cars and vans.
Lack of capacity restricts travel opportunity for residents, businesses and visitors alike. It cannot be underestimated how much it affects new residents not being able to travel when they wish or require to. The barriers of distance and peripherality make it difficult to retain populations. Comment will often be made that people who feel that way should not stay on an island. The simple fact is, if we want the islands repopulated we have to provide transport systems, which allow the flexibility that modern man requires.

The Jura to Islay ferry is also constrained by capacity (8 standard cars) and on many occasions has to make several trips on a scheduled run to clear the backlog. This extends the possible travel period and can cause difficulties for people who have medical appointments etc. The present vessel is also susceptible to specific weather conditions and can be cancelled accordingly. If as predicted we are going to see a change in weather patterns, with an increase in stormy weather during the winter further sailings may well be lost. Argyll & Bute Council indicates that a replacement will not be due for another decade. Jura Community Council feel that action is required long before that as the existing vessel is unlikely to be able to cope with any significant increase in traffic or changing weather conditions.

INTEGRATION;
Jura has a privately run bus service, which is supported financially by Argyll & Bute Council. This service provides for both primary and secondary school children as well as linking to the main Islay to mainland ferry times. In the main it has to be said that the integration of the Jura Bus service, Jura-Islay Ferry, Islay bus services, Cal-Mac ferry service and Kennacraig to Glasgow bus link work incredibly well. (At times there are glitches.) It must be difficult for the providers to arrange their timetables to correspond with the rigidity demanded by regulations and funding restrictions, however the relevant groups responsible for implementing each service should be encouraged to correspond frequently when timetables are being changed or altered. Cooperation works best with a bit of common sense on the ground. A point in case would be the link between Islay Airport and the Islay/Jura ferry. If the last plane is delayed the airport let the ferry know that Jura passengers will be late so the crew can delay departure for a few minutes. Just a simple telephone call but reliant on flexibility.

In sparsely populated and weather dependent areas it is people that make things work not a static rule book.

RECOMMENDATIONS;
- Fares need to be reduced.
- The majority of Cal-Mac sailings should run to Port Askaig.
- The frequency of the Islay to Jura ferry must be maintained.
- A continuation of increased sailings between Islay and the mainland should be encouraged.
- Alterations have to be made to the new Port Askaig pier to avoid further disruption of the Jura-Islay connection as the service provided has now gone back a decade.
- An early replacement should be sought for the Jura to Islay (MV Eileen Dhiura) ferry.