



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Alison Irvine
Interim Chief Executive
Transport Scotland

Public Audit Committee
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

By email only

Email:
publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot

24 March 2023

Dear Ms Irvine,

New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides: Arrangements to deliver vessels 801 and 802

I note your recent appointment as Interim Chief Executive of Transport Scotland. I write regarding correspondence your predecessor recently issued to the Public Audit Committee on 17 March 2023, which was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.

The Committee notes that this correspondence provides new evidence about the preferred bidder announcement for vessels 801 and 802 following a recent Freedom of Information (FOI) review. As indicated in the letter, this information was previously sought by the Committee back in November 2022 to inform our scrutiny work.

The Committee believes it is unacceptable that this information has only just been uncovered, some four months after it was originally requested, and just one day after the Committee finalised its report. The Committee is also disappointed that the same level of rigour involved in this FOI review was not applied to a parliamentary committee's request for the same information.

It is also regrettable that it was not possible to include this new information in our report which was published yesterday. Had this evidence been made available when requested, it would have informed our report findings on the preferred bidder

announcement. We therefore consider that the late receipt of this information has hampered our scrutiny work.

As you will be aware, our report raises concerns about the way in which Transport Scotland has engaged with the Committee during our scrutiny of the 801 and 802 vessels project. We faced challenges in securing Accountable Officer attendance to give oral evidence and received late and incomplete information with little or no explanation. This caused the Committee to question the level of respect and regard for accountability to the Scottish Parliament that is held by your organisation. The late sharing of this new evidence has further compounded this view.

As you will be aware, the [Protocol](#) agreed by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government states that the Scottish Government should provide a response within two months of the publication of a Scottish Parliamentary committee report. As the Scottish Government's executive agency for transport, we expect Transport Scotland to be central to the preparation of this response. The Committee urges Transport Scotland to reflect carefully on the many concerns we raise in our report, and set out what action it intends to take to ensure that its obligations to the Scottish Parliament, as set out in the [Scottish Public Finance Manual](#), are fully understood and respected.

For your information, the deadline for this information is **18 May 2023**.

Yours sincerely

**Richard Leonard MSP,
Convener**