

Outcomes 2024/25

Sailing into the digital future – super-fast connectivity aboard Orkney Ferries

Background

For the thousands of passengers who rely on ferries in Orkney, whether commuting, traveling for leisure, or delivering vital island services, staying connected at sea has long been a luxury rather than a reality. But in early 2025, that changed.

A groundbreaking public sector-led pilot project, spearheaded by our **Digital Connectivity team** and funded by the **Scottish Government**, is transforming the travel experience for islanders and tourists alike. The result: **free, super-fast satellite internet** now available on three Orkney Ferries vessels, marking a UK-first in maritime connectivity.

The Challenge

Island communities in Scotland face unique connectivity challenges. Traditional internet infrastructure struggles to reach these regions, and passengers on ferries, some with journeys lasting up to three hours, had limited or no access to the digital world.

This digital disconnect affected not only the quality of travel but also impacted business productivity, service delivery, and operational efficiency.

PRIMARY OUTCOME



1

A clear picture of
Scotland's future
infrastructure needs



CORPORATE PRIORITIES



NET
ZERO



SUSTAINABLE
PLACES



INCLUSIVE
GROWTH

The Solution

To address these challenges, the **Digital Connectivity team** collaborated with a range of public and private partners, including **CloudNet IT Solutions**, **Orkney Islands Council**, **Orkney Ferries**, and **Highlands & Islands Enterprise**, to launch a pilot using cutting-edge **Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite technology**.

Passengers now enjoy internet speeds of **at least 200 Mbps**, enabling them to:

- Work remotely
- Stream music and movies
- Shop online
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Access real-time travel and weather updates

The system uses a constellation of over **7,000 LEO satellites**, with ferry terminals dynamically connecting to satellites orbiting just 800 miles above the Earth, each traveling overhead at over 17,000 mph. These signals are distributed throughout the vessels via onboard Wi-Fi.



PRIMARY OUTCOME

1

A clear picture of
Scotland's future
infrastructure needs



Sailing into the digital future – super-fast connectivity aboard Orkney Ferries

Wider Impacts

Beyond passenger convenience, the service is also benefiting ferry staff. Enhanced connectivity has:

- Improved back-office operations
- Supported digital maintenance and scheduling
- Enabled safer navigation with real-time weather and sea data

This initiative supports wider **Scottish Government objectives** to repopulate rural areas, strengthen island resilience, and bridge the rural digital divide.

Richard Lochhead, Business Minister, Scottish Government: *"This technology has tremendous potential to transform the travel experience for island communities. It's about making journeys more productive and helping rural Scotland thrive in the digital age."*

Councillor Mellissa Thomson, Chair, Orkney Ferries: *"Some of our routes can last up to three hours. This service allows our passengers to stay connected, whether for business or to keep in touch with loved ones."*

Greg Whitton, Director, CloudNet IT Solutions: *"We're proud to lead this digital leap forward. This project is not just about connectivity, it's about inclusivity, innovation, and raising standards across Scotland's transport system."*

Neil Rutherford, Senior Associate Director, Scottish Futures Trust: *"From mainland to marine, we're committed to pioneering sustainable digital solutions. This pilot proves world-class connectivity can reach every corner of Scotland, even the sea."*

Looking Ahead

This Orkney-based pilot is a **testbed for future expansion**. Its success could pave the way for high-speed internet across Scotland's entire ferry network, enabling smarter transport and more connected communities.

As the project continues to gather data, evaluate performance, and demonstrate impact, Scotland is navigating full speed ahead toward a digitally inclusive future, **on land and at sea**.

SCOTTISH
FUTURES
TRUST

