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Hovercraft would bring new meaning to 'doon the watter'

IT'S NAE BOWVER WITH OUR HOVER

A PROPOSED hovercraft service linking Greenock with Glasgow could benefit commuters and act as a major tonic for tourism.

Trials for the service got under way yesterday — and key players behind the scheme say it would be a huge boost to the regeneration of Inverclyde.

Greenock would be a key part of call on the first hovercraft service on the Clyde since the 1960s if the ambitious project can be taken forward.

It is the brainchild of Langbank businessman Alistair Macleod, who believes the move would be a splash hit.

Mr Macleod, chief executive of Clydefast, told the *Tele*: "It is very exciting indeed and I have had great encouragement from Riverside Inverclyde, SPT, and Inverclyde and Glasgow City councils — everyone is on side."

"The hovercraft has an iconic draw, so it would be good from a tourism point of view, as well as a commuting one."

"For example, we have travelled down from the Glasgow Science Centre in 35 minutes and the slowest train takes 42 minutes."

Regeneration agency Riverside Inverclyde is backing the hovercraft initiative and bosses believe it would help put the district on the map for the right reasons, boosting the local economy.

Bill Nicol, chief executive of Riverside Inverclyde, said: "We are delighted the trials are under way. Alistair Macleod, of



NEW JOURNEY: The hovercraft leaves the slipway at Ferguson's shipyard as tests get under way.

Clydefast, is a local businessman and it is important we support him. The hovercraft would be a great way of connecting Inverclyde to the west metropolitan region. Anything positive that gets the Inverclyde area talked about and a bit of kudos is important. The spin-offs for the area could be fantastic."

If the scheme takes off, craft capable of carrying 180 passen-

gers would operate on a route which would also take in Dunoon, Rothesay and Braehead.

Robert Moran, of Inverclyde Council, said: "The people behind this have done their homework. I believe there is a market for it."

Alistair Watson, chair of SPT, added: "This has potential to tie in with the liners that come into Greenock and keep them on the Clyde, rather than going off to

excursions in Edinburgh."

Tony McGoldrick, a volunteer with the Inverclyde Tourist Group, said: "A hovercraft is an attractive feature in its own right and this would be a brilliant innovation for us to have here. This would give tourists a chance to see more of the views coming up the Clyde and it would mean commuters could cut out the difficulties on the M8."

'The hovercraft has an iconic draw, so it would be good from a tourism point of view, as well as a commuting one'



CRAFTY PLAN: Inverclyde Council's Robert Moran believes the hovercraft initiative has huge potential.



HOVER HEAVEN: Alistair Macleod, of Clydefast, and Riverside Inverclyde's Bill Nicol, at the hovercraft service trials.



SMILES AHEAD: Tony McGoldrick, of Inverclyde Tourist Group, says the venture would be great news for Inverclyde.

Report: Russell Steele

Pictures: Douglas Hendry

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HOVERCRAFT WILL BE A SPLASH HIT
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Picture: Douglas Hendry

Tele view

Will plan become reality?

A HOVERCRAFT service between Greenock and Glasgow could be good news for Inverclyde, or it could turn out to be just pie in the sky.

Only a few years ago there was a lot of talk about a hydrofoil service from Rothesay to Dunoon, Custom House Quay, Braehead and the city centre, but that came to nothing.

So while the latest scheme sounds exciting, perhaps we should wait for a full feasibility study before dreaming of hordes of tourists clambering ashore at Greenock every day.

The bread and butter users of the service throughout the year — including the dark winter months — would have to be people travelling on a regular basis to and from Glasgow.

Would the hovercraft be cheap enough and quick enough to tempt them out of their cars and away from the trains?

It remains to be seen.