



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 09.25.2013

Time: 11.30am

Location: Mackays Hotel, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Marketing & Communications, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Sandra McCaughey	Business Development, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
John Green	Caithness Partnership
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority
Chris Cartmel	Stagecoach North Scotland
Steve Walker	Stagecoach North Scotland
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
William Sutherland	Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL
Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Coreen Campbell	Caithness Rural Transport
Christine Dodd	Highland Council
Willie Manson	Thurso Community Council
Iain Mackay	Thurso Community Council
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Kevin Campbell	BEAR Scotland
Edwin Stewart	BEAR Scotland

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all present for attending.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

	Iain Macdonald
Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd	Ken Nicol
Highland Council	David Sutherland
Highland Council	Gail Ross
Highland Council	Iain Moncrieff
North Line Action Group	Mark Norton
Scrabster Harbour	Sandy Mackie
Serco NorthLink Ferries	James Linklater
Serco NorthLink Ferries	Kris Bevan

2. Approval of minutes of last CTF meeting 08.03.13

2.1 The minutes were unanimously approved

3. Review of actions from last meeting

CTF(2012)M001/A007 – Chamber to contact new Transport Scotland area manager and invite to next meeting – **Ongoing**. David Swanson emailed Malcolm Wilson on August 7th, no response as yet.

CTF(2013)M001/A001 – Gail Ross to feed back to Scottish Government regarding shovel-readiness of Berriedale Braes – **Complete**. Gail has fed back to the Scottish Government, but has had no answer yet. The situation has now moved on, with inspection works due to start.

CTF(2013)M001/A010 – Chamber to work with Mark Norton to input on First ScotRail franchising process – **Ongoing**. Email received 25th September 2013 consulting on Caledonian Sleeper Franchise.

CTF(2013)M002/A001 – Chamber to arrange meeting with Graham Phillips, Drew Hendry, HITRANS, HIAL to discuss B876 – **Complete**. Confirmation / availability received from HITRANS, HIAL, Subsea 7. No response from Graham Phillips. Further discussion with Drew Hendry required. See **CTF(2013)M003/A001**.

CTF(2013)M002/A002 – Chamber to follow up with DRS regarding a timeline for implementation of traffic calming measures at Georgemas – **Complete**. Tom Curry confirmed that this will not be implemented until commercial freight begins to use the railhead.

CTF(2013)M002/A003 – Trudy Morris to circulate draft objectives from Berriedale Braes study to the Forum – **Complete**.

CTF(2013)M002/A004 – Trudy Morris to write to Rob Gibson, Keith Brown, Fergus Ewing regarding the Berriedale Braes – **Complete**. Responses were circulated to attendees.

CTF(2013)M002/A005 – Eann Sinclair to feed back to Gail Ross regarding the Berriedale Braes – **Complete**.

CTF(2013)M002/A006 – David Swanson to liaise with Iain Moncrieff regarding lack of attendance / update – **Complete**. Report and apologies received from Iain.

CTF(2013)M002/A007 – David Swanson to ask Cathel Macaskill for more information on structural maintenance work and road south of Achnavanich – **Complete**. Limited information was received from Cathel.

CTF(2013)M002/A008 – Transport Forum to write to Mark Harper, Fergus Ewing and John Thurso to raise concerns over new Border Force Agency checking regime – **Complete**. Responses from John Thurso and Kenny Macaskill circulated to attendees. This has also been raised with Scottish Chambers who will be taking this up.

Trudy noted that she has a contact with Forth Ports and will be discussing this with them.

Eann Sinclair asked if there was any feedback from Scrabster as to how the scheme has worked this summer. Trudy Morris noted that the first check under the new regime had taken place just after the previous meeting and had gone OK, but that the issue is the cost of checks could be transferring to cruise operators – feedback from Kirkwall and Lerwick suggests this is deterring cruise traffic.

CTF(2013)M002/A009 – Chamber to investigate TEN-T funding options for Scrabster Harbour (**COMPLETE** – Deadline for the 2012 TEN-T call for proposals was 26th March 2013. It appears the TEN-T budget is being folded into the Connecting Europe Facility for the 2014-2020 budget period.)

CTF(2013)M002/A010 – Chamber to draft letter to Keith Brown and talk to Scottish Chambers regarding concerns with the Serco NorthLink contract – **Complete**. Letter sent to Keith Brown, no response received. This has also been taken up with Scottish Chambers.

CTF(2013)M002/A011 – David Swanson to follow up with Wick Harbour regarding non-attendance / lack of update – **Complete**. Apology received, Wick Harbour representative present.

CTF(2013)M002/A012 – David Swanson to follow up with HITRANS regarding non-attendance / lack of update – **Complete**. Possible progress following meeting with James Wilkin – see rail update.

CTF(2013)M002/A013 – Chamber to follow up with Highland Council regarding lack of airport signage – **Complete**. Signage up, reported in local news.

David Flear raised his concern with the rate of progress on **CTF(2013)M002/A001**. Trudy explained that the Chamber would be getting in touch with Drew Hendry to clarify what was requested. Eann Sinclair said he could take this back to the council. It was agreed that Eann and David Swanson would liaise on this.

CTF(2013)M003/A001 – Eann Sinclair and David Swanson to liaise on organising meeting regarding B876

The update from BEAR Scotland was moved up in the agenda to allow time for their presentation.

4. BEAR Scotland

Kevin Campbell delivered a presentation on behalf of BEAR Scotland. Of note:

- BEAR committed to self-delivery – they do everything possible in-house
- They have local centres / depots at Inverness, Dunbeath, Brora & Kingussie
- They use two weather monitoring tools – a detailed road weather forecast provided by MeteoGroup UK and current surface temperature and condition monitoring through the Vaisala Road Weather Information System
- In poor weather conditions, they will set up satellite control rooms in e.g. Inverness or Dunbeath
- There is a total of 32,000 tonnes of salt in the North West unit – they aim to have this covered over by mid-October
- They additionally hold stocks of alternative de-icing materials that can be used in extremely low temperatures
- The Traffic Scotland website will show if a route has been salted and how much has been used – a mobile app is also available
- They are now capable of putting down a “bonding layer” of 40g of salt in a single pass
- They have seven gritters /ploughs between Thurso and Inveralmond dedicated to the A9

Trudy thanked Kevin for the update and asked for questions from the Forum.

David Flear asked if the depot in Dunbeath is covered – Kevin confirmed. David enquired where the gritters are maintained, as vehicles must be serviceable locally. Kevin stated that BEAR work with the garage in Dunbeath which is capable of vehicle repairs and maintenance – Edwin noted that there is a spare gritter in Thurso.

Anna MacConnell asked whether ground staff assist with weather forecasting. Kevin explained that Meteo provide a forecast which staff interpret according to a treatment matrix – this is all fed back to the control room.

Christine Dodd asked whether BEAR get local information and where the nearest source to Caithness is – this was confirmed and Edwin noted they get information from a sensor between Wick and Dunbeath. Kevin added that they also get information from Helmsdale.

David Flear stated concerns regarding weather variability in Caithness – Kevin noted that operatives have local knowledge, which is of great assistance.

Trudy raised the issues in February when Transerv were responsible for the road and queried whether the same problems would arise. Kevin noted that winter maintenance is their main priority but they cannot keep the roads clear 100% of the time. William Sutherland noted that he has similar issues at the airport.

Edwin explained that operatives have constant radio contact with the control room using Airwave systems – Kevin added that this also allows them to keep in touch with police.

5. Berriedale Braes

Trudy Morris and Anna MacConnell attended (via videoconference) two workshops on the upcoming Berriedale Braes works. Of note:

- A number of options were added at the workshops
- One option – to install traffic lights at a cost of £50K – was taken out of consideration
- The most popular option is similar to the original preferred option, but further on and with a shallower curve
- Option 2 came out as the best value for money at £0.75M – Trudy raised concerns that it would not meet objectives

John Green asked whether option 4A / 4B is the preferred option – Trudy noted that a hybrid of options 4 and 5 was also under consideration.

Anna noted that the choice of options has been narrowed down to the most sensible ones.

David Flear asked if the process was necessary due to the possibility of a challenge – Trudy confirmed, noting that it is a statutory requirement.

Anna reported that the outcome was satisfactory – the preferred option is the one that was hoped for.

Willie Manson enquired as to the cost of the option – Trudy confirmed that it would be £3.4M

There was some discussion of the flyover option and general agreement that it is not suitable.

John noted that the gradient on option 4B – 7% – is better than the other options. Trudy noted that the standard is around 8%. Gradients higher than this wouldn't normally be considered, but in this case could be an improvement on the current gradient.

It was noted that HITRANS felt that ruling out high-cost options would result in a challenge – David Flear noted that community councils in the area have adopted the stance that it is best to go for an affordable, achievable option.

Trudy stated that there is still a push to get the studies complete for next year's budget. Anna added that the NDA brought in their programme manager to look at the programme, but only a few weeks could be saved – not enough to bring it into consideration for next year's budget.

It was raised that there are a number of advantages in place with regards to lobbying. David Flear noted that Roger Hardy (Babcock) and Willie Watt (Subsea 7) have made statements that the current state of affairs regarding the Berriedale Braes is having a commercial impact on Caithness. Trudy added that she understands there is extra money available for capital projects and that the Forum should continue to lobby.

John raised the B876 Killimster Moss – Trudy confirmed that this would be discussed later.

Anna noted that Andy Anderson and two people from URS would be visiting the Dounreay site in the near future. She said they were supposed to have contacted Trudy and David Flear – both confirmed that no contact had been made. Anna will follow up with them.

6. Transport Updates

6.1 Road – Highland Council TECS

No Highland Council TECS representative was present. A written update was submitted after the meeting (see Appendix A).

Trudy noted that the B876 was originally raised by Iain at a Transport Forum meeting.

CTF(2013)M003/A002 – *David Swanson to follow up with Iain Moncrieff regarding B876.*

5.2 Road – Stagecoach

Steve Walker delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach. Of note:

- They have a new operations manager for Caithness
- Issues raised at the Caithness Bus Users Group are being progressed
- Numbers on the X99 service continue to grow – they have put a longer vehicle (holding 20 extra passengers) on the service
- They have now moved in to the Thurso depot, which has a bus wash
- The X99 service will be changing to the winter timetable soon

Trudy raised an issue with an X97 bus leaving Gills Bay without picking up ferry passengers and asked if there was a way drivers could liaise with ground handlers – Steve said they could put something in place.

CTF(2013)M003/A003 – *Steve Walker to ensure drivers liaise with ground handlers at Gills Bay ferry terminal*

David Flear asked if Stagecoach still own ground at t3|UK (near Janetstown) and, if so, what their plans are for it now that the depot is complete. Steve noted that they use the ground as overspill and that they are leasing it.

Trudy asked if Neil Young from Highland Council had been in touch regarding issues with timetables (as discussed at Caithness Bus Users Group), as numbers are needed from Stagecoach to find out whether there are busy stops without timetable boards – Steve said no contact had been made.

CTF(2013)M003/A004 – *David Swanson to follow up with Neil Young on issues with timetables*

Trudy briefly updated the Forum on an action from Caithness Bus Users Group regarding liaising with the NHS on patient transport issues.

6.1 Sea – Wick Harbour

Gordon Doull delivered an update on behalf of Wick Harbour Authority (see Appendix B).

Trudy noted that it is good to see developments at the harbour coming on stream.

6.2 Sea – Scrabster Harbour

No attendee from Scrabster Harbour was present and no written update submitted. It was noted that the Scrabster representatives were currently in Hamburg attending the Seatrade Europe exhibition.

6.3 Sea – Serco NorthLink Ferries

No attendees from Serco NorthLink were present. A written update was submitted after the meeting (see Appendix C).

7.1 Air – HIAL / Wick John O’Groats Airport

William Sutherland delivered an update on behalf of Wick John O’Groats Airport. Of note:

- There are thousands of additional passengers compared to last year – traffic has doubled
- They are actively seeking new contracts and other business in the oil and gas sector
- They are also focused on growing tourism traffic, with the Natural Retreats development at John O’Groats and Ackergill Tower
- The Airport Consultative Committee meeting was encouraging – business traffic is up
- Loganair have introduced an extra service on Fridays, arriving in Wick at 3.15pm and departing at 3.45pm
- Business in the offshore renewables sector is encouraging – HIE will be setting up another visit to Lowestoft (see Appendix B)
- Enercon are looking to store 12 wind turbines at the airfield

Trudy raised the concern that the Air Discount Scheme (ADS) is not widely used in the area, as noted at the Airport Consultative Committee. Coreen Campbell noted that Flybe’s site has changed and the ADS option is not as visible. Trudy agreed that it is not easy to see but noted that Flybe will be sending her a direct link to the ADS section.

It was agreed to add this to an Airport Consultative Committee press release and circulate to the Forum.

CTF(2013)M003/A005 – *David Swanson to circulate Flybe ADS link / WJACC press release to Forum*

8.1 Rail – First ScotRail

John Yellowlees delivered a written update from First ScotRail (Appendix D).

David Swanson delivered a brief update on his meeting with James Wilkin of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP). Of note:

- There are currently two ACoRP representatives in Scotland – Scottish Government is keen to see Community Rail Partnerships in Scotland
- James is currently focusing on the West Highland Line – he hopes to have a Partnership in place by early 2014
- David had agreed to start laying groundwork towards a potential Partnership in the area e.g. liaising between ScotRail and community groups on station improvement funds
- James will be attending the first Transport Forum meeting in 2014 to update on his progress and to discuss the potential for a Partnership in Caithness
- James has close links to HITRANS and ScotRail and will follow up with them regarding lack of engagement with Caithness Transport Forum

Trudy noted that ScotRail would be meeting with Scottish Chambers of Commerce and that any issues raised would be forwarded to David Swanson.

Christine Dodd raised an issue with the Club 55 scheme, asking if dates could be published at the beginning of the year as senior citizens want to use it but need to know dates in advance. She also raised that there is no information available on Edinburgh – Berwick services. It was agreed that David Swanson would feed this back to ScotRail

CTF(2013)M003/A006 – *David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services*

Willie Manson praised ScotRail for their excellent service.

9. Any Other Business

David Swanson noted that he had received an update from Serco that morning and that he would circulate it to the Forum as soon as possible.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 4th December in Thurso, venue TBC.

Actions on-going from previous meetings

CTF(2012)M001/A007 – Chamber to contact new Transport Scotland area manager and invite to next meeting – **Ongoing**. David Swanson emailed Malcolm Wilson on August 7th, no response as yet.

CTF(2013)M001/A010 – Chamber to work with Mark Norton to input on First ScotRail franchising process – **Ongoing**. Email received 25th September 2013 consulting on Caledonian Sleeper Franchise.

CTF(2013)M002/A001 – Chamber to arrange meeting with Graham Phillips, Drew Hendry, HITRANS, HIAL to discuss B876 – **Ongoing**. Confirmation / availability received from HITRANS, HIAL, Subsea 7. No response from Graham Phillips. Further discussion with Drew Hendry required.

Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2013)M003/A001 – Eann Sinclair and David Swanson to liaise on organising meeting regarding B876

CTF(2013)M003/A002 – David Swanson to follow up with Iain Moncrieff regarding B876.

CTF(2013)M003/A003 – Steve Walker to ensure drivers liaise with ground handlers at Gills Bay ferry terminal

CTF(2013)M003/A004 – David Swanson to follow up with Neil Young on issues with timetables

CTF(2013)M003/A005 – David Swanson to circulate Flybe ADS link / WJACC press release to Forum

CTF(2013)M003/A006 – David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services

Appendix A – TECS Report

Caithness Transport Forum

TECS Report

30 Sep 13

B876 Killimster Moss

Trial holes have been excavated to inspect the steel mesh which was found to have been heavily corroded with significant loss of strength.

An options appraisal is being prepared and construction methods will be established for trialling over the coming year.

A traffic survey will be undertaken in October to establish the HGV content of the traffic flows.

No other strategic works noted.

DRAFT

Appendix B – Wick Harbour Report

Fishing: Activity continues as normal, mostly shellfish, with all landings consigned south by road.

Cargoes: Imported cargoes of coal, lime, road salt, steel pipe, and fertiliser, are expected to continue as normal. Export of timber is expected to resume later this year.

Onshore Wind Turbines: Further imports are expected later this year for Stroupster, Lyth, and Burn of Whilk.

Oil Related: Recent activity at Subsea7 is reflected in increased imports of steel pipe and towheads, and shipping movements. Confirmed contracts through 2013/14 should continue this activity.

Marina New high quality showers, toilets, and drying room were completed in Spring for summer season. Visitor reaction has been very positive and complimentary. Visitor numbers to 15th September are back to 2011 levels at approx 295 vessels, but the yacht days have increased to 467, which bolsters spend in the local community. Starting at the end of September, Varis Engineering will be starting installation of three extra 12 metre berthing fingers to accommodate larger visiting yachts and create six extra resident berths. This has been done with the help of EU Axis 4 funding.

Infrastructure: After the major storm on 15th December, the Scottish Government released £250k to us for the first tranche of repairs, and this was completed in six weeks for 31st March deadline. Further report being submitted for funds for follow-on works to repair the remaining storm damage and prevent further flooding. One redundant Ice Plant has recently been demolished, and the other will follow soon, in preparation for potential redevelopment of the Telford Jetty for renewables support.

Future infrastructure: Design work has been completed and tenders will be issued soon for a new £0.5m 'Heavy Lift' pad on Commercial Quay 1 in the River Basin to augment our existing pad on the North River Pier. Construction of the 500 tonne facility is planned for early 2014. This is required for future heavy plant imports, and because the town bridges limit movement of long/heavy loads. WHA are grateful to HIE for £200k funding assistance, which along with a WHA £200k loan and £100k from private sources, means this vital development can proceed. £250k has also been awarded from the NDA for dredging to the River Basin and approaches.

Potential Business: The two major offshore windfarms currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick are currently awaiting construction consent from Marine Scotland, hopefully by the end of the year. Discussions continue with both developers, and a delegation from WHA and local businesses visited the SSE Lowestoft O&M base earlier this month on an information gathering exercise, which proved to be invaluable for all concerned. Thanks to HIE who subsequently hosted a reciprocal visit to Wick/Thurso by the Lowestoft Base Manager to assess the local infrastructure and facilities.

The job potential from hosting an O&M base in Wick with a twenty five year lease is exciting, with perhaps 200 high quality posts being created from just one of the developments, with spin-offs to many local businesses and training providers.

Future Plans: The business case for potential breakwater options, deep water berths and laydown areas, to expand the Harbour into Wick Bay, is currently being examined by our Business Consultants. This would be a major investment, and would cater for renewables construction, larger cargo vessels, oil and gas servicing, and offshore decommissioning. Renewables O&M can be done from our current facilities, but this would open up opportunities for larger construction vessels.

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman, WHA.
September 2013

Appendix C – Serco NorthLink Report



Bringing service to life



Caithness Transport Forum

Serco NorthLink Ferries Update

25th September 2013

Our peak season timetable between Stromness and Scrabster began on Tuesday 11th June and ran through till to Saturday August 17th. This provided 3 return sailings per day Monday to Saturday with 2 return sailings on a Sunday.

Due to adverse weather conditions on Monday 16th September we cancelled the 1645 and 1900 hrs sailings, customers were moved to the next available sailing and there we no knock on capacity issues.

There have been no technical issues.

Our advanced booking figures are positive and our analysis shows less than 5% abstraction in passenger volumes during the operation of the off-peak timetable.

We are celebrating National Customer Service week from 7th to 11th October and plan to hold a series of community engagement events, should any member of the forum wish to attend please contact either; james.linklater@northlinkferries.co.uk or kris.bevan@northlinkferries.co.uk for details.

Our 2014 timetable and fares will be published shortly.

Appendix D – First ScotRail Report

Club 55's new offer period commenced 1 September and ends on 30 November.

Product offering remains the same, but is supported with a new TV advertisement.

A new "Roll with Us" campaign launched on 19 August is running across TV, Online, Outdoor and Cinema with the focus on celebrating the joy and freedom that rail travel offers and using a roller-skating theme as a train metaphor.

A new customer relationship database in place behind ScotRail's online retail engine allows more targeted direct marketing based on online behaviour and also offer improved customer service messaging - e.g. engineering operations. Work is in progress to see ScotRail website fully optimised across all mobile devices - phone, tablet, iPad etc - by December.

You are in touch with James Wilkin of ACoRP about scope for a Community Rail Partnership.

Transport Scotland have issued Invitations to Tender to the three shortlisted bidders for the new Caledonian Sleeper franchise. Bidders for the new daytime ScotRail franchise submitted their Pre Qualification Questionnaires last month. It is anticipated that preferred bidders will be named by next autumn for both franchises to commence on 1 April 2015,