



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 06.03.14

Time: 11:30am

Location: Mackays Hotel, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
Sandra McCaughey	Business Development, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority
Gail Ross	Highland Council
Alastair Somerville	Transport Scotland
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd / Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Roger Saxon	Highland Council
David McCallum	Stagecoach
Iain Moncrieff	Highland Council Transport, Environmental & Community Services
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
William Sutherland	Wick John O'Groats Airport / Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd.

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:

Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
James Wilkin	Association of Community Rail Partnerships
Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
John Yellowlees	First ScotRail
John Green	Gills Harbour

David Summers	Highland Council
Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Neil Young	Highland Council
Mark Norton	North Line Action Group
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Steve Walker	Stagecoach
Chris Cartmel	Stagecoach
Iain MacDonald	

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 14.12.12

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* – **Complete**. Alastair Somerville, trunk road Area Manager for the A9 (north of Perth) was present at the meeting.

CTF(2013)M003/A004 – *David Swanson to follow up with Neil Young on issues with timetables*. **Complete** – Neil was in the area on January to deal with the timetable issues raised. He met with David Swanson and provided a brief update on this and future efforts in the area.

CTF(2013)M003/A006 – *David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services*. **Complete**. John Yellowlees confirmed that Club 55 is valid between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed on services operated by Cross Country Trains but not those of East Coast. That is the position which will apply during the next period of availability, from 13th January – 31st March

Gordon Doull noted that he had recently tried to book a ticket from Inverness – Berwick using the Club 55 deal and it was not available.

CTF(2014)M001/A001 – *David Swanson to feed back again to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services*

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – *David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts*. **Ongoing**. A list of contacts was received from Transport Scotland. Mark Norton is currently working on a response to a letter of consultation received from one of the bidders (MTR) and once this is finished David will redraft the response to FirstGroup's consultation and submit it to all bidders.

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – *Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road*. **Ongoing**. Highland Council are completing an options study on the road, to be followed by discussions on funding options.

Eann noted that discussions were held in December with Drew Hendry and Willie Watt of Subsea 7 to determine the level of investment in Subsea 7's Wester site and the need to address the issues with the road.

He further noted that he has been in discussion with the Council's new Development and Infrastructure service about the link between economic drivers and infrastructure needs.

Trudy asked whether the options study had been completed – Iain noted that they are still looking at different solutions.

Gail Ross noted that the cost for works on the road may exceed the local budget, but that money would be sought from central funds.

CTF(2013)M004/A003 – *Chamber to write to Neil Gillies, Iain Moncrieff regarding flood defences in Thurso. Complete.* A response was received from Campbell Stewart and the Chamber has been in contact with Riverside Replicas, who were affected by the flooding.

Trudy noted her surprise that the response from Campbell Stewart indicated that a decision was initially taken not to put the defences in place due to the possibility of damaging a boat moored on the slipway.

Iain Moncrieff noted that it was felt there was potential for significant financial impact on the Council if the boat had been damaged as a result of their actions and that it was not certain that the coastal surge would result in flooding.

He further noted that the current solution is designed to deal with significant coastal surges and that an off-the-shelf or bespoke solution would not offer better protection.

There was some further discussion on the possibility of installing permanent flood defences, and it was agreed that Iain would check with the Harbours Authority as to whether the slipway is owned by the Council.

CTF(2014)M001/A002 – *Iain Moncrieff to check with Harbours Authority whether the Thurso slipway is Council-owned*

CTF(2013)M004/A004 – *David Swanson to contact Iain McDonald at BEAR Scotland and invite to next meeting / ask for an update on the A9 in Thurso. Complete.* David made contact with Iain, who promised to follow up on issues raised.

Alastair Somerville advised that it would be best to raise issues with the operating company as and when they arise, rather than waiting for a meeting of the Transport Forum.

CTF(2013)M004/A005 – *David Flear to feed back to the Dounreay Stakeholder Group regarding the Dounreay bus contract. Complete.*

June Love confirmed this has been actioned. The contract will be with DSRL from 1st April – they do not foresee any changes being made for the first year, at the end of which will be a review.

CTF(2013)M004/A006 – Chamber to write to John Thurso to request clarification on the Fuel Discount Scheme. **Complete** – A response was received from John Thurso and he met with Trudy Morris to discuss these issues.

Trudy noted that it had been intimated that Halkirk would be eligible while Bettyhill would not and that this was due to postcode areas. John Thurso is in discussions about the anomalies as a result of this postcode-based system. She further noted that Halkirk does not have fuel pumps any longer.

CTF(2013)M004/A007 – Chamber to seek clarification from Sandy Mackie on the effect on Scrabster of Serco's dry-docking arrangements. **Complete**. The Chamber has spoken to Sandy regarding this. A letter was written to Keith Brown and a response received.

There was some discussion of the response and it was felt that the length of time before the next dry dock of the *Hamnavoe* should give enough time to find a suitable replacement. It was agreed that the Chamber would write to Keith Brown and Serco NorthLink regarding this.

CTF(2014)M001/A003 – Chamber to write to Keith Brown and Serco NorthLink seeking assurances that a suitable vessel will be found for planned outages in 2016

CTF(2013)M004/A008 – Eann Sinclair to discuss A9 access route with Sandy Mackie. **Complete**. Planning permission has been applied for and no issues were raised. A decision is expected by the end of the month.

CTF(2013)M004/A009 – Chamber to follow up with John Thurso regarding lack of response from Mark Harper. **Complete**. The original letter was re-sent to Mark Harper and a letter was also sent to John Thurso requesting that he raise the issues. A response was received from Charles Montgomery of the Border Force.

Trudy noted that this is an ongoing issue and one which is being discussed in the cruise industry as a whole, and that the Border Force is in discussions with the Chamber of Shipping. The Chamber has also flagged this issue up with the Scottish Government and with Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

William Sutherland noted that the airport has discussed this with the Border Force and hopes to have a standard operating procedure in place soon.

CTF(2013)M004/A010 – William Sutherland to talk to Wick Harbour regarding turbine transportation. **Complete**. William has spoken to the Harbour and discussions are ongoing with Enercon.

There was some discussion of Enercon's plans for turbine transportation and potential routes through Wick. It was agreed that this would be discussed further once the situation was clarified.

CTF(2013)M004/A011 – David Swanson to circulate FirstGroup consultation and draft ITT summary. **Complete**. This was circulated.

CTF(2013)M004/A012 – Chamber to write to David Sutherland, Gail Ross regarding airport access road. **Complete.** Letters were sent and William Sutherland confirmed that this has now been actioned.

4. Transport Updates

Trudy Morris gave a brief update on the Berriedale Braes. Of note:

- Discussions have been held with URS regarding the two options for upgrade (4A / 5B)
- The Forum had initially expressed a preference for option 5B. Following discussions with URS regarding various technical and cost issues, 4A has emerged as the more preferable option
- The Forum has thus withdrawn its statement in support of option 5B

Trudy noted that the key issue remains the removal of the hairpin bend and that it is important that a cost-effective solution is found to this and that the Forum should continue to lobby for this.

There was some discussion of the planned public exhibition – Alastair Somerville said he believed this would be held in March.

4.1 Roads – Transport Scotland / BEAR Scotland

Alastair Somerville delivered an update on behalf of Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland. Of note:

- The 2014-15 programme starts in April
- Day-to-day matters regarding the condition of trunk roads should be reported through the Traffic Customer Care Line on 0800 028 1414
- More specific matters should be emailed to BEAR's Operations Manager, Iain McDonald, and copied to Alastair

He noted that they would prefer that any communications from the Forum come via a single representative. It was agreed that this responsibility would fall to David Swanson.

Trudy raised that the Causewaymire is in poor condition and that this is an ongoing issue. June Love noted that DSRL will be transporting 3,000 containers over the next five years, so potential impact on the road will be high.

4.2 Roads – Highland Council TECS

Iain Moncrieff delivered an update from Highland Council TEC Services. Of note:

- As noted at earlier meetings, the B876 at Killimster Moss is in need of repair
 - They have carried out temporary repairs which should help for about a year – this came in at a cost of £20K
 - Annual patching – at a cost of roughly £10K / year – could be done for 8/10 years before significant work needs to be done
 - A longer-term solution could cost up to £240K

- The road is not unsafe, and its current condition will not prevent HGVs using it for the foreseeable future
- Work on the Keiss - North Keiss section of the A99 will be postponed for at least a year

There was some discussion of the short, medium and long-term options for the B876. Eann Sinclair enquired about a timescale for completion of the options appraisal. Iain noted that this is driven by the Council's roads programme but that the short-term solution will continue in the interim.

It was asked whether a speed or weight restriction would extend the life of the road – Iain felt that it would not.

4.3 Bus – Stagecoach

David McCallum delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach. He noted that there is little change since the last meeting, but that the late service the X99 service will be coming back in on 7th April.

Gail Ross asked whether Stagecoach have plans to run a service to the new community campus. It was agreed that David would pass this question on and that Gail would also raise it with Steve Walker.

Gail also noted that she has had feedback regarding the unpredictable availability of low-level buses suitable for e.g. passengers with limited mobility or parents with pushchairs and asked whether it would be possible to put a low-level bus on a specified route. David noted that from next year most buses will be low-level.

Roger Saxon noted that the reduction of services linked to Dounreay will impact on other bus services in the county. It was agreed that this was something the Forum should focus on as work at Dounreay comes to an end.

4.4 Sea – Scrabster Harbour

No representative from Scrabster was present, but Trudy Morris read out a written update she had received (Appendix A).

4.5 Sea – Wick Harbour

Gordon Doull delivered an update on behalf of Wick Harbour, a copy of which is appended to these minutes (Appendix B).

It was noted that the Beatrice offshore windfarm has been moved from position 11 to 10 on the DECC's list of provisionally affordable offshore wind projects and therefore may go ahead.

4.6 Sea – Serco NorthLink Ferries

No Serco NorthLink representative was present and no written report was delivered.

4.7 Air – HIAL

William Sutherland delivered an update on behalf of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and Wick John O’Groats Airport. Of note:

- Passenger numbers from Eastern Airways / Loganair are encouraging
- The Chevron contract is now finished but the airport are actively seeking other business
 - There are opportunities due to changes in legislation regarding the number of passengers able to be carried in helicopters
- The airport has been involved in two crew changes for vessels docked at Scrabster
- The issues with the dilapidated building at the airport continue – the Council will be carrying out a risk assessment
 - Trudy noted that there is an action from the Airport Consultative Committee regarding this
- There is ongoing recruitment at the airport, including for Air Traffic Controllers
- A new Global Navigational Satellite (GNS) system is going to be installed at the airport – there will be consultations on this.

It was agreed that the Chamber would circulate information regarding the public consultations on the GNS system to the Forum.

CTF(2014)M001/A004 – *Chamber to circulate information on GNS consultations to Forum*

4.8 Rail – First ScotRail

A written update was received from First ScotRail and is appended to these minutes (Appendix C).

Eann Sinclair raised the issue of wi-fi provision on trains to the north, noting that it is provided as far as Inverness but no further north. It was agreed that the Chamber would write to ScotRail for more information on this.

CTF(2014)M001/A005 – *Chamber to write to ScotRail to find out when wi-fi will be available on the Inverness – Wick / Thurso trains*

4.9 Rail – Direct Rail Services (DRS)

Trudy Morris read out a written update from Anna MacConnell regarding Direct Rail Services (DRS). Of note:

- DRS has been restructured – this has changed the way DRS interacts with clients
- Representatives plan to attend a meeting of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group in the near future
- They plan to publish an advert in Executive Magazine focusing on Caithness

CTF(2014)M001/A006 – *Chamber to liaise with Dounreay Stakeholder Group on arranging a meeting with DRS*

9. Any Other Business

Gail Ross noted that the Council have published their “Safer Routes to Schools” plans, laying out potential changes to the road system to ensure the safety of pupils travelling to the two new planned campuses in Wick. She agreed to send information on this to David Swanson for circulation.

CTF(2014)M001/A007 – *David Swanson to circulate Safer Routes to Schools information to Forum.*

William Sutherland noted that he wished to extend his thanks to Highland Council for clearing up the approach road to the airport, and that it has made a huge difference.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 11th June at Naver Business Centre in Thurso from 11am – 12.30pm.

11. Actions on-going from previous meetings

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – *David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts.* **Ongoing.** A list of contacts was received from Transport Scotland. Mark Norton is currently working on a response to a letter of consultation received from one of the bidders (MTR) and once this is finished David will redraft the response to FirstGroup’s consultation and submit it to all bidders.

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – *Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road.* **Ongoing.** Highland Council are completing an options study on the road, to be followed by discussions on funding options. Further updates to be given as the situation progresses.

Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2014)M001/A001 – *David Swanson to feed back again to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services*

CTF(2014)M001/A002 – *Iain Moncrieff to check with Harbours Authority whether the Thurso slipway is Council-owned*

CTF(2014)M001/A003 – *Chamber to write to Keith Brown and Serco NorthLink seeking assurances that a suitable vessel will be found for planned outages in 2016*

CTF(2014)M001/A004 – *Chamber to circulate information on GNS consultations to Forum*

CTF(2014)M001/A005 – *Chamber to write to ScotRail to find out when wi-fi will be available on the Inverness – Wick / Thurso trains*

CTF(2014)M001/A006 – *Chamber to liaise with Dounreay Stakeholder Group on arranging a meeting with DRS*

CTF(2014)M001/A007 – *David Swanson to circulate Safer Routes to Schools information to Forum.*

Appendix A – Scrabster Harbour report for CTF 6th March 2014

Overall activity continues to be strong at Scrabster following the new quay becoming operational last year.

- Fishing - Landings through the port are 10% higher than last year with vessels now making maximum use of the chilling facilities in the fish market giving much greater flexibility to their landing times.
- Oil/Gas - activity has been strong since the beginning of 2014. Perceptions regarding the A9 continue to hamper marketing efforts.
- Cruise - Scrabster will again be exhibiting at Seatrade Miami later this month. Eight cruise arrivals are expected in 2014. The Trust is again grateful to Highland Council for the continued provision of courtesy buses.
- Renewables - It is encouraging to see Scotrenewables again using Scrabster for maintenance. AWS continue to store their device at the port.
- Infrastructure Plans - the planning application for the enterprise area at Scrabster farm was submitted on 31st January 2014.
- General Cargo - Timber exports continued to take place on a regular basis with 33,000 tonnes being exported in 2013. Indications are that this level of activity will continue for the next couple of years. Other general cargoes - fertilisers and Rock Salt remained in line with previous years. Fish cargo on the twice weekly cargo service from the Faroe Islands has remained steady.

Appendix B – Wick Harbour report for CTF 6th March 2014

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 large tonnages of timber is expected this year from site clearances for local windfarms.

Onshore Wind Turbines: Imports are planned this summer for Burn of Whilk and Stroupster. For Stroupster, nPower are having some issues with the Highland Council designated road routing from Wick Harbour, which is concerning us for our viability for future developments in the north east of the county.

Oil Related: Recent activity at Subsea7 is reflected in increased imports of steel pipe and towheads, and shipping movements. Confirmed contracts through 2014/15 should continue this activity.

Marina: Three longer berthing fingers are now in place as per last report and the old ones slotted in elsewhere bringing the total berths up to 80. Last season's visitor total was 298, coming mainly from all over the UK, France, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Infrastructure: Work has begun on constructing the new Heavy Lift Areas on Commercial Quay 1, with the contract awarded to Gunns, Lybster, Ltd. Completion is expected mid-May.

Henderson's have also started on repairs to the nearby concrete deck and wave wall and extending the wall to reduce overtopping on to the Martha Terrace and the quay during stormy weather.

Henderson's will also replace the damaged concrete roadway at Shaltigoe.

Hendersons contracts have been enabled by Scottish Government funding for Storm Damage from December 2012.

£250k has also been awarded from the NDA for dredging to the River Basin and approaches, and a Dredging Plan is currently being prepared.

Potential Business: The two major offshore windfarms currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick are still awaiting construction consent from Marine Scotland, and the latest expectation is for a favourable announcement this month.

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 and service vessels.

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman, WHA.

March 2014

Appendix C – First ScotRail report for CTF 6th March 2014

A new national railcard – Two Together – has been launched, offering people of working age 30% off train journeys if they travel together.

Very sadly, Alastair McPherson who was the first managing director of the privatised ScotRail between 1997 and 2001 passed away on 28 February aged just 62. He abolished the £3 cycle charge, presided over the Far North Line's 125th anniversary celebrations in July 1999 and will be mainly remembered in Caithness for the introduction of the Class 158 trains and the Line's first-ever all-year Sunday service.