



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

**Date:** 29/05/2015

**Time:** 10:30am

**Location:** Naver Business Centre, Thurso

## Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
Fiona Levack	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Ken Nicol	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Christine Dodd	Highland Council
Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Gillian Coghill	Highland Council
Iain Moncrieff	Highland Council
Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Peter Agnew	Network Rail Scotland
Mark Norton	North Rail Line Action Group
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Callum Chomczuk	Pagoda PR (representing ScotRail)
Gerry Scott	ScotRail (Area Manager, North)
Derek Mackintosh	ScotRail (Depot Production Manager)
Dominic Mellan	Scottish Chambers of Commerce

Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Authority
Claire Laybourne	Serco NorthLink Ferries
James Linklater	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Steve Walker	Stagecoach North 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:

Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority
Gail Ross	Highland Council
William Sutherland	Wick John O’Groats Airport

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 05.03.2015

2.1 James Linklater requested a minor alteration to page 9 – where the Hamnavoe B&B was mentioned, this referred specifically to the Landbridge offer

2.2 There being no other changes or additions, and subject to this amendment being made, the minutes were unanimously approved

## 3. Review of actions from last meeting

3.1 **CTF(2015)M001/A001** – *Trudy Morris to discuss funding for Caithness Transport Forum with CNSRP partners. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned. She noted that £2,000 had been secured from the Highland Council. Steve Walker confirmed that, per previous discussions, he would match this funding. With the existing funding from Dounreay, a total of £14,000 of funding has now been secured.

Trudy noted that she had also discussed with ScotRail the possibility of a Rail User's Group, along similar lines to the Bus User's Group. She noted that she would be following this up with Iain Wilson later in the week.

As a consequence of the reduction in funding, Trudy noted that meetings would be cut back to three times per year. With regards to other work, for example responding to consultations, Trudy noted that time could be cut down through working with CNSRP.

Mark Norton enquired as to whether a special meeting could be called should a situation arise which warranted special consideration. Trudy confirmed that this was the case.

David Flear enquired as to whether, given the change in Highland Council administration, there was a possibility for the councillors to reiterate the value of the Transport Forum to see if further funding can be secured.

Gillian Coghill took an action to go back to the Highland Council with regards to this.

**CTF(2015)M002/A001** – *Gillian Coghill to investigate the possibility of further funding for the CTF from Highland Council.*

It was asked whether transport operators put any funding towards the Forum. Trudy noted that, as discussed, Stagecoach have committed to matching the Highland Council funding and that discussions are being held with ScotRail on this matter.

**CTF(2015)M002/A002** – *ScotRail to advise whether they will contribute to a Rail Users Group.*

Trudy noted that the priorities for the Forum will remain. She further noted that Gail Ross has confirmed that the Forum will be able to use the Highland Council facilities in Wick and that these will also be available for the Wick John O'Groats Airport Consultative Committee. The Caithness Bus Users Group will continue to alternate between Wick and Thurso.

3.2 **CTF(2015)M001/A002** – *Steve Walker to forward contact information for Lochaber Transport Forum to David Swanson. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned and that she had made contact via Lochaber Chamber of Commerce. Given that this action was with regards to funding, and that the matter has been addressed, she proposed that this action be closed off.

3.3 **CTF(2015)M001/A003** – *David Swanson to liaise with operators and stakeholders to get letters of support by 13<sup>th</sup> March. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned and the letters forwarded to Gail Ross and Eann Sinclair.

- 3.4 **CTF(2015)M001/A004** – *Following completion of A003, Gail Ross to feed back to Highland Council regarding funding for the Caithness Transport Forum. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned

- 3.5 **CTF(2015)M001/A005** – *Trudy Morris and Eann Sinclair to get information on difficulties local contractors have with Highland Council procurement system. Ongoing*

Trudy noted that the Chamber has been conducting work on this matter and that this was also being taken up via Scottish Chambers of Commerce. The Chamber intends to discuss this further with Highland Council.

- 3.6 **CTF(2015)M001/A006** – *David Swanson to feed back to BEAR on issues with A9. Ongoing*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned, but that there was an ongoing issue with regards to non-attendance from BEAR Scotland. A letter has been sent to BEAR with regards to this matter and copied to Alastair Somerville at Transport Scotland.

Gillian Coghill noted that the Highland Council had the same issue and that Gail Ross will be taking this up with the Transport Minister.

Trudy noted that the Chamber will keep this on their agenda, as engagement from BEAR is important

- 3.7 **CTF(2015)M001/A007** – *David Swanson to liaise with James Linklater on encouraging local organisations to take up NorthLink marketing opportunities. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned – it was noted that James had brought copies of the onboard magazine and would be discussing with Fiona Levack how the Chamber could feed into this.

- 3.8 **CTF(2015)M001/A008** – *James Linklater to forward details of free business listings on NorthLink website to David Swanson. Complete*

James confirmed that this had been actioned. Trudy noted that this information would be put in the Chamber's e-newsletters to ensure the message gets out to businesses.

- 3.9 **CTF(2015)M001/A009** – *Trudy Morris to send contact for Venture North to James Linklater. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

- 3.10 **CTF(2015)M001/A010** – *David Swanson to contact Abellio regarding issues raised at the meeting. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned and noted that representatives from Network Rail and ScotRail were present. Issues raised were as follows:

- Proposed improvements to rolling stock on the line
- Whether it will be possible to travel first-class to Wick
- Concern that Abellio's stakeholder briefing focused primarily on Inverness station, and what plans there are for investment in other stations on the line
- Local concerns about the practice of discharging sewage on the lines
- Plans for community liaison in Caithness and the role the Chamber can play in this

Trudy noted that a further email had been received from Mike Lunan, Convener of Friends of the Far North Line, which stated that as far as he is aware Class 158 stock does not discharge waste on the Far North Line. He would be keen to know if this has changed.

Trudy proposed that as ScotRail were on the agenda to give an update to the Forum, all discussion be held until this point.

- 3.11 **CTF(2015)M001/A011** – *David Swanson to circulate presentations from Abellio, DRS and HITRANS events. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

- 3.12 **CTF(2015)M001/A012** – *Chamber to organise meeting with Abellio to discuss the Far North Line. Complete*

Trudy noted that this has been superseded by ScotRail's representation at the current meeting.

- 3.13 **CTF(2015)M001/A013** – *Eann Sinclair to feed discussions on rail to HITRANS Rail Stakeholder Group through CNSRP. Complete*

Eann noted that he had raised issues discussed with Stuart Black at the last CNSRP Advisory Board meeting. He noted that he is still not aware of who represents the Council on the above group.

- 3.14 **CTF(2015)M001/A014** – *Christine Dodd to provide contacts for Highland Council procurement issues. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

## 4. Matters arising

- 4.1 Trudy raised that Iain Grant had asked her to table to the Forum whether members felt meetings should be open to the public and the press. She noted her concerns that the Forum would not get the same level of engagement from transport operators should this be the case.
- 4.2 Mark Norton noted his feeling that the Forum represents the views of the wider transport-using public, but agreed with Trudy regarding the level of engagement at meetings. He suggested that the press be invited only to certain meetings.
- 4.3 Anna MacConnell noted that the Forum has been successful for many years and that she felt it would be a shame to do something that would undermine that success. She noted that if the minutes were made available, this would provide a level of transparency. Trudy confirmed that minutes are published on the Chamber website.
- 4.4 Eann noted that CNSRP Advisory Board meetings are not open to the press, for the reasons stated above. He noted that they publish minutes of the meeting on their website.
- 4.5 James Linklater noted his feeling that the format of the meetings as it stands has worked to date.
- 4.6 Willie Mackay felt that press should be in attendance at the meetings. He felt that if the Forum had a sensitive matter to discuss, this could be kept to the end of the meeting and the press asked to leave at that point. John Rosie noted his agreement with this.
- 4.7 David Flear noted his concern that the interests of the Forum and the interests of the press with regards to transport issues may be at odds. He felt that press releases could be issued regarding items of interest to the wider public.
- 4.8 There was some discussion of the possibility of making certain agenda items open and holding the rest of the meeting *in camera*, or of having private subgroups of the Forum. Sandy Mackie noted his concerns with the difficulty of managing an agenda in this fashion.
- 4.9 The members present voted by show of hands as to whether a press representative should be invited to meetings, with the caveat that sensitive information be discussed *in camera*. The majority of members voted that no press representative should be invited, with no abstentions.
- 4.10 David Flear suggested that the councilors present should liaise with their respective Community Councils to ensure that issues of interest to the public are brought to the table in Forum meetings.
- 4.11 It was noted that the Association of Caithness Community Councils is represented on the Forum and that issues are being brought forward to meetings.

- 4.12 It was agreed that a copy of the approved minutes of each meeting should be sent to the local press.
- 4.13 It was agreed that the Forum should discuss press communications prior to the end of each meeting

**CTF(2015)M002/A003** – *David Swanson to initiate approval of minutes promptly after each meeting and then issue to the press and upload to the Chamber website.*

**CTF(2015)M002/A004** – *David Swanson to add a new item to the agenda before Any Other Business, 'Press Communications'.*

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 The ScotRail Alliance

- 5.1.1 Callum Chomczuk noted the importance of engagement with local groups like the Caithness Transport Forum to ScotRail.
- 5.1.2 Gerry Scott delivered an update with regards to reliability and journey time. At the last Forum meeting, it was reported that in the last 70 days of the previous timetable (pre-December 2014) only 32% of trains on the line departed at the right time, but that within the first 70 days of the new timetable, this had risen to 60%.
- 5.1.3 Within the 70 days prior to the current meeting, this figure has continued to show improvement, with 63% of trains departing at the right time.
- 5.1.4 With regards to PPM, which measures how many trains arrive at their destination within five minutes of the scheduled time, this was 58% in the last 70 days of the previous timetable, rising to 79% within the first 70 days of the new timetable. Within the 70 days prior to the current meeting, the figure dropped to 75%
- 5.1.5 Out of 1598 trains which ran in the last 70 days, less than 1% (11 trains) were cancelled. 2 of these were weather-related, 3 were due to train failures, 4 as a result of infrastructure issues and 2 due to staffing challenges.
- 5.1.6 It was felt that these figures demonstrated that the new timetable was delivering a more reliable service.
- 5.1.7 Trudy asked whether the Forum could receive these figures on a regular basis from ScotRail. It was noted that it may be possible to provide figures on a periodic basis, and will be considered.

**CTF(2015)M002/A005 – ScotRail to provide running time statistics at each meeting.**

- 5.1.8 Eann Sinclair enquired as to what ScotRail's aspirations are for these statistics, noting that they still appear relatively low. Gerry noted that the national target is in the region of 93% and that ScotRail hope to see further improvement in these figures.
- 5.1.9 Peter Agnew noted that the Radio Electronic Token Block signalling system is being renewed this year, and it is hoped that the renewal will lead to further improvements in performance.
- 5.1.10 Half-barrier level crossings are being installed, driven by safety concerns, but this will have a knock-on effect on train performance.
- 5.1.11 Additional resources are being devoted to improving track condition, which should improve train performance due to lessened disruption. Capability to respond to incidents will also improve, mitigating the effects of any disruption.
- 5.1.12 It was noted at the previous Forum meeting that there are around 25 opportunities (short, medium and long-term) for improvement to the track. This is a work in progress, and no update could be given at this time.
- 5.1.14 Mark Norton noted that he welcomes the work being done by Network Rail on track infrastructure. He asked whether there are any plans to increase the provision of continuous welded rail on the Far North Line or similar major track improvements aimed at journey time reduction.
- 5.1.15 Peter noted that a number of opportunities for reducing line speed have been identified, but that the focus at present is on increasing the robustness of the timetable rather than reducing journey times.
- 5.1.16 Gillian Coghill noted that the current train timetable is not suitable for those travelling to Inverness for meetings, appointments, etc. She felt that people would use the train more if this issue was addressed.
- 5.1.17 Mark raised the issue of the change from Club 55 to Club 50, and noted that this will in effect lead to a net increase in ticket price for many rail users. He questioned how this would encourage more train travel, given that pensioners in Scotland currently enjoy free bus travel.
- 5.1.18 Callum noted that Club 55 was a seasonal product, whereas Club 50 is a continual, year-round service, which will have additional promotions (yet to be determined). The feeling was that the Club 55 scheme was not working as a national service. The Highland Railcard will continue, and a new intercity service is being introduced.



- 5.1.19 Eann Sinclair noted that Club 55 was responsible for a lot of incoming tourist travel to Caithness – he asked whether Club 50 would be likely to have the same effect.
- 5.1.20 Callum noted that the details of Club 50 have yet to be finalised, but the hope is that it will result in similar patronage on the northern sections of the railway.
- 5.1.21 It was agreed that Callum would provide information on Club 50 when available

**CTF(2015)M002/A006** – *ScotRail to provide further information regarding details of 'Club 50' which replaces 'Club 55'.*

- 5.1.22 David Flear noted his concern that the Club 55 scheme, which is well-known and understood, is being replaced by a promotion which is at present ill-defined.
- 5.1.23 Callum again emphasized that Club 50 will get continual promotion and his hope that Caithness will see increased patronage and footfall year-round.
- 5.1.24 Eann noted that this is a potentially positive outcome for Caithness, and that one of the original proposals from Abellio was to promote the Far North Line as a recreational and tourist opportunity. He noted that journey time remains a concern.
- 5.1.25 Callum noted that Abellio have committed to the provision of tourism trains across the country
- 5.1.26 Christine Dodd noted that Club 50 will require the payment of an annual fee, and felt that this would dissuade infrequent travelers. ScotRail advised that, as part of the launch, it will be contacting people who have expressed an interest in the scheme, to offer to join without paying the initial annual subscription rate.
- 5.1.27 John Rosie raised that journey times have not seen any significant improvement essentially in the last 100 years.
- 5.1.28 It was noted that the network is limited north of Inverness, as a single line with a number of crossing points. In addition to line speed restrictions, capacity is an issue, and it was felt that the business case to change this would be a difficult one to develop.
- 5.1.29 David Flear noted his feeling that the service as it stands does not suit the needs of the travelling public, and that this must change if a business case is to be developed.
- 5.1.30 Mark Norton noted that the line must be useful to the local community, as well as to tourists, and that if journey time does not improve the usefulness will be eroded.
- 5.1.31 With regards to rolling stock improvements, Derek Mackintosh noted that it has been 10 years since the Class 158s were refurbished and that this is due again. The Class 158s will receive a refurbished interior, including seat covers, carpets, finishes and toilets. There will

also be passenger sockets, new CCTV and additional facilities for passengers with restricted mobility. The trains will also get the new “Saltire” exterior livery. At the moment there are no plans for a designated first-class area.

With regards to timescale for this, Derek noted that the Inverness depot holds 25 sets of rolling stock and that these are scheduled to be refurbished first. It is expected that 10 or so refurbished sets will be operating on the Far North Line by next summer and all will be completed within one year.

Refurbishments are also expected to result in reliability improvements.

- 5.1.32 Derek noted that Inverness depot was the home for the Caledonian Sleeper fleet, but the responsibility for this has now changed with the handover to Serco. This should result in a greater focus on the Far North Line, with two members of staff now based out of Wick to help prevent delays on the early service
- 5.1.33 With regards to discharging of sewage on the line, it was confirmed that Class 158s have been fitted with closed-emission toilet tanks and that ScotRail services do not discharge sewage onto the Far North Line.
- 5.1.33 With regards to investment in stations, Callum noted that a lot of the focus on meeting the franchise requirements has initially focused on Inverness. He further noted that station improvement programmes will be reviewed going forward. He felt it would be useful to hear from local stakeholders with regards to their priorities for station improvements.
- 5.1.34 Trudy noted that one of the key issues is with picking up tickets bought online, as local stations do not have ticket machines available.
- 5.1.35 David Flear felt that it was ScotRail’s responsibility as the operator to make assessments of station requirements, and that they should not rely on local communities flagging up issues.
- 5.1.36 Callum confirmed that ScotRail do carry out their own assessments, but that there is added value in having local communities feed in directly to this process.
- 5.1.37 It was raised that there are issues with poor trolley service on the Far North Line
- 5.1.38 It was agreed that the ScotRail representatives would look into this and feed back to the Forum

**CTF(2015)M002/A007 – ScotRail to provide feedback on trolley services on the Far North Line.**

- 5.1.39 Mark Norton asked whether developments further South e.g. electrification of lines would result in movement of rolling stock to the Far North Line

- 5.1.40 It was confirmed that the plan is to run Class 158s on the Far North Line for the duration of the current franchise
- 5.1.41 Callum noted that with regards to community liaison, as of Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June ScotRail will be employing two community liaison executives, who will meet with local groups to investigate the possibility of setting up a Community Rail Partnership for the area.
- 5.1.42 Trudy raised an issue with an incident on 28<sup>th</sup> May and the provision of alternative transport.
- CTF(2015)M002/A008** - *ScotRail to provide information on Wick engine problems on 28<sup>th</sup> May.*

## 5.2 Direct Rail Services

- 5.2.1 There was no update from Direct Rail Services

## 5.3 Berriedale Braes

- 5.3.1 Trudy noted that Transport Scotland have one objection to the proposed works which remains to be resolved – it is hoped that a resolution will be found quickly.
- 5.3.2 With regards to funding for the work, the Chamber has gone back to Derek Mackay to see if this can be progressed. Eann Sinclair noted that it is hoped that projects such as Berriedale may be included as part of the Inverness City-Region Deal.

Trudy noted that as this funding is provided through the UK Government, it may be possible to secure match funding from Scottish Government to progress the project and asked Dominic Mellan to feed this back via Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

**CTF(2015)M002/A009** – *Dominic Mellan to feed back about possibility of match funding for Berriedale from Inverness City-Region deal*

Trudy noted that the Forum is keen to get a commitment from the Scottish Government that the Berriedale work will be included in the Spending Review.

- 5.3.3 Eann noted that CNSRP will be working over the summer to ensure that Berriedale is a high priority prior to the Spending Review. Trudy noted that the Chamber will be taking this up as an election issue.
- 5.3.4 It was noted that Berriedale is now effectively a shovel-ready project.
- 5.3.5 Trudy noted that Berriedale remains a high priority for the Forum

## 5.4 Highland Council

- 5.4.1 Trudy raised the issue of traffic calming measures near the police station and hospital in Wick and asked where the decision was made to implement these
- 5.4.2 Iain Moncrieff noted that these measures came about as part of the Safer Routes to School programme for the new Wick High School campus. He noted that there was an issue with this particular area with regards to schoolchildren crossing the road where the footway ends, and that this led to the placement of traffic calming measures at this point.
- 5.4.3 Iain noted that, following the points raised in the press with regards to access to the caravan site, he is not aware first-hand of any difficulties with caravans accessing the site. He noted that they need to examine what the issue is (e.g. oncoming traffic failing to slow) before concluding that the design is flawed.
- 5.4.4. David Flear noted that the caravan site owner has raised issues with the placement, and that he personally has had issues with the fact that the measure is placed on a blind corner.
- 5.4.5 Iain agreed to feed those issues back.

### **CTF(2015)M002/A010 – Iain Moncrieff to feed back issues with placement of traffic calming measure in Wick**

- 5.4.6 Willie Mackay noted that Wick has an issue with “boy racers” and that he is fully in support of the calming measure.
- 5.4.7 There was some further discussion of the placement of the measure.
- 5.4.8 Ken Nicol asked whether there are any other proposals on the table for traffic calming measures either around Wick or Thurso High School.
- 5.4.9 Iain noted that he does not believe there are any other physical measures in planning, but that more traffic orders (e.g. 20mph zones) are planned.
- 5.4.5 John Rosie felt that Miller Academy on Castlegreen Road in Thurso needs to be looked at. He queried why nothing has been done there while work in Wick took precedence.
- 5.4.6 Iain noted that the traffic calming measures in Wick are part of the budget for the construction of the new schools, provided through Scottish Government, and that the Council does not have the budget for minor works such as this. The money for this is part of the Safer Routes to Schools programme, and Iain suggested that the school apply through this budget.
- 5.4.7 It was agreed that Iain would feed back to the Forum the engineer’s audit report on the traffic calming measures in Wick

**CTF(2015)M002/A011** – *Iain Moncrieff to provide information regarding the Engineer’s audit report on Wick traffic calming measures near the Police Station/caravan park entrance.*

- 5.4.8 With regards to road defects and drainage, Iain noted that BT installed a cabinet in Halkirk and made a poor job of reinstatement – Highland Council will follow up on this
- 5.4.9 With regards to the JetPatcher discussed at previous meetings, Iain noted it is unlikely this will be purchased
- 5.4.10 With regards to bridges, works are scheduled for Murkle, Lyth, Haster, Duncansby, Reay and Forss.
- 5.4.11 With regards to infrastructure projects, Westerdale road is going out to works in the early part of next month and funding has been secured from the Forestry Commission for this. The A99 Keiss-North Keiss is progressing and it is hoped to be tarred by summer. Killimster Moss remains with Development & Infrastructure
- 5.4.12 The surface dressing programme continues
- 5.4.13 With regards to traffic orders, the Thurso disabled bay is progressing, as is the Thurso traffic sign review.
- 5.4.14 The timber project on the Melvich-Helmsdale road is starting to gear up, which is likely to lead to delays on the road
- 5.4.15 David Flear raised an issue with timber traffic in Halkirk, and noted that some of the trucks are passing through Glengolly and Halkirk at speed.
- 5.4.16 Gillian Coghill noted a similar issue with waste trucks for the Seater site
- 5.4.17 Iain noted that if the haulage company could be identified, this could be taken up with them.

**CTF(2015)M002/A012** – *Names of haulage contractors hauling wood at speed through villages to be fed back to Iain Moncrieff*

## **5.5 BEAR Scotland**

- 5.5.1 Trudy noted that no update was received from BEAR but that, as previously discussed, the Chamber would continue to push for engagement with the Forum

## **5.6 Stagecoach**

- 5.6.1 Trudy noted that a recent press statement said that Stagecoach had launched a smart travel card in the area, but it does not appear accessible in the area.

- 5.6.2 Steve noted that the present situation is that the four-weekly, etc. tickets that can be bought online have been replaced with smart cards.
- 5.6.3 Trudy noted that the issue appears to be a lack of advertising for the product
- 5.6.4 Steve explained that they have done a soft launch across the North of Scotland so they can ensure the system works before they launch a full promotion. He noted that weekly tickets will also be replaced with smart cards.
- He further explained that the Stagecoach Group website is currently being overhauled and is expected to be relaunched in July.
- 5.6.5 Steve noted that they are currently testing the Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system, which will allow real-time information to be made available.
- 5.6.6 Trudy noted that, through the Caithness Bus Users Group, the Chamber had taken an action to look at the possibility of installing real-time information (RTI) displays at key stops in Caithness. HITRANS are currently looking at installing two of these, one at the Norseman Hotel in Wick and one at Orlig Street in Thurso
- 5.6.7 Steve noted that there is currently no real-time system in place in Caithness, but that the Caithness fleet is due for an upgrade. He noted that the system is about more than just displays at bus stops – it is aimed at allowing real-time information to be accessed from anywhere e.g. via smartphone.
- 5.6.8 Trudy noted that this has come up before at the Bus Users Group and that a number of the bus users do not own or use smartphones, necessitating the use of RTI displays at key bus stops.
- 5.6.9 Steve clarified that within six months, the AVL system will be rolled out in the Caithness area.
- 5.6.10 Trudy noted that the Chamber will be seeking funding for further RTI displays, in addition to the two planned by HITRANS.
- 5.6.11 With regards to reliability, Steve noted that this is improving but is still not where he wants it to be. They are currently advertising for a new engineering manager but have not had any applicants as yet.
- 5.6.12 Trudy asked what barriers have been identified to recruitment
- 5.6.13 Steve explained that finding good bus engineering managers is difficult anywhere and that it can be hard to get people to move north of Perth.
- 5.6.14 It was agreed that Steve would forward the details of the job to Trudy, so that the Chamber can try to assist with promotion of the position.

**CTF(2015)M002/A013** – *Steve Walker to send details to the Chamber of the vacancy notice and job description for the vacant Engineering Manager’s position.*

- 5.6.15 It was asked when Stagecoach expect to bring newer buses up to the region.
- 5.6.16 Steve noted that there are two newer buses scheduled to be moved to the region, which are currently being overhauled. With regards to the age profile of buses in the area, he noted that the coaches are generally less than ten years old, the X99 vehicles are less than four years old and the vehicles used on the 82 are around four years old. He noted that the key issue is reliability, rather than age.
- 5.6.17 It was agreed that Steve would forward a fleet age profile to the Chamber for circulation to the Forum

**CTF(2015)M002/A014** - *Steve Walker to forward fleet age profile to the Chamber for circulation*

- 5.6.18 David Flear noted that there has been an improvement since Stagecoach took over provision of bus services in the region.

## **5.7 Scrabster Harbour Trust**

- 5.7.1 A written report was submitted by Scrabster Harbour Trust (Appendix A). In addition, Sandy Mackie delivered a verbal update to the Forum.
- 5.7.2 The previous financial year was a very successful one with regards to revenues, which puts Scrabster in a good position for further investment in regenerating the Harbour.
- 5.7.3 There is a meeting of the Northern Isles Ferry Forum scheduled for the end of June. Sandy will attend this on behalf of Scrabster Harbour Trust.
- 5.7.4 While Scrabster is keen to get involved in work in the energy sector, it remains committed to the ferries and fishing sectors. The previous increase in fishing has increased throughout 2014-15 and fishing remains Scrabster’s second-largest revenue sector.

There are concerns with new legislation surrounding discarding of fish and the socio-economic impact this may have on remote and rural areas. Scrabster Harbour are lobbying to ensure that there is appropriate support and transitional measures to lessen the impact.

- 5.7.5 With regards to oil and gas, Scrabster continues to see the effects of the oil price reduction. However, the position west of Shetland continues to be optimistic, and the Solan field is expected to go into production shortly. These developments should benefit Scrabster.

Sandy noted that they are making efforts to promote the port to the oil and gas industry, but that one of the negative messages they have received is the perception of the A9. He felt

that there is a need to push for improvements to the road and to develop rail freight to the area.

- 5.7.6 With regards to renewables, the port has been busy with Strathy North, which has made extensive use of the new quay and laydown area. It is expected that there will be more work in this sector in 2016.
- 5.7.7 The cruise programme is relatively limited this year, but the position for 2016 is better.
- 5.7.8 A new website and brand have been created, and these went live recently.
- 5.7.9 Scrabster's position remains that devolution of Crown Estate assets should include the possibility of management by port authorities, and the latest report from the Scottish Parliament reflects this.
- 5.7.10 Gordon Mackenzie, the Harbour Master, is leaving Scrabster at the end of June and his deputy, Jason Hamilton, will be stepping up to take over.
- 5.7.11 David Flear asked a question regarding problems with the export of brown crab to China
- 5.7.12 Sandy noted that there are no indications this will be resolved
- 5.7.13 James Linklater wished to record his thanks to Gordon Mackenzie for his support over the years and wished him all the best in his new role
- 5.7.14 Trudy noted that the Forum as a whole wished to also record its thanks to Gordon
- 5.7.15 Sandy noted that representatives from Scrabster would shortly be meeting with the Transport Minister

## **5.8 Wick Harbour Authority**

- 5.8.1 A written report was submitted by Wick Harbour Authority (Appendix B)

## **5.9 Serco NorthLink Ferries**

- 5.9.1 James Linklater delivered an update on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries
- 5.9.2 The new timetable started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May – there will now be three daily sailings until the end of August. There will be six dates between now and the end of August where the timetable will revert back to two daily sailings.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> June
  - 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> June



- 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> August

- 5.9.3 Passenger numbers for the year to date are 0.9% up and the figures for April 2015 are up 3% on the previous year
- 5.9.4 James noted that they have a new Landbridge offer, designed to encourage people going to or from Shetland to travel via Caithness. This was introduced a short time ago and there have been 160 passengers who have travelled or booked to travel on this route.
- 5.9.5 It was asked whether this route will take freight as well
- 5.9.6 James noted that this route already takes freight, but no corresponding pricing structure for freight. This promotion is passenger travel only.
- 5.9.7 James noted that in the onboard magazine they are trying to promote Caithness as well as other destinations. He hopes that this can be developed through collaboration with local venues. They hope that the third issue will feature a more in-depth piece on Caithness.
- 5.9.8 James noted that, in addition to the free business listings already discussed, they hope to develop the “What’s On” section of the website to include events in Caithness and Sutherland.
- 5.9.9 There were no sailing disruptions in April and May and it is hoped that this will continue. They continue to work with Transport Scotland on ways to enhance the route.
- 5.9.10 With regards to the provision of alternative tonnage for the 2016 drydock of the *MV Hamnavoe*, they continue to look at this but there is nothing guaranteed at present.
- 5.9.11 Trudy noted that this is a key issue for the Forum and it would be a disappointment if alternative tonnage cannot be provided.
- 5.9.12 James noted that provision of alternative tonnage is the preferred option but that it is reliant on a suitable vessel being available.
- 5.9.13 Trudy noted that failure to provide a suitable replacement effort could hamper the good efforts NorthLink are making to promote Caithness.
- 5.9.14 James reiterated that discussions are ongoing with Transport Scotland and that alternative tonnage is the preferred option.
- 5.9.15 David Flear asked if Sandy Mackie could raise this issue with the Transport Minister
- 5.9.16 James noted that he would be more than happy for anyone from the area to make representations to the Minister on this matter.

5.9.17 It was agreed that James would feed back to the Forum when information is available on arrangements for dry-docking.

**CTF(2015)M002/A015** – *James Linklater to feed back information, when available, on arrangements for 2016 dry docking.*

5.9.18 Willie Mackay noted his compliments to NorthLink following a visit from the Council's Disability Access Group – he noted that the group was very impressed with NorthLink's arrangements

5.9.19 James noted that this is something that NorthLink take pride in and that he is now sitting on the steering group for the Scottish Government's transport strategy for passengers with disabilities.

## 5.10 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

5.10.1 No representative of Wick John O'Groats Airport was present, but monthly statistics for April were provided to the Forum.

5.10.2 Trudy noted it was good to see that passenger numbers are up.

5.10.3 Trudy noted that she had had a conversation with Inglis Lyon at HIAL regarding air traffic control provision, as there have been some issues with this recently due to the retirement of an air traffic controller.

She noted that HIAL have procedures in place for this, including recruitment of a controller from Sweden. She noted that this controller will still need to undertake a conversion course but is expected to be operational by November.

It was expected that there would be five operational ATCs by June, but that due to unforeseen circumstances this is not the case.

She noted that HIAL do have a process for training new staff but that due to limited traffic at Wick they can only train a limited number at one time. Wick also operates a different system to other airports, making recruitment more difficult.

5.10.4 John Rosie queried whether recently erected windmills were causing issues at the airport.

5.10.5 Trudy noted that she had not heard anything about this and noted that prior to windmills getting consented, HIAL are one of the consultees to ensure that there is no impact on the airport. As a result, she felt this was probably not an issue.

She further noted that this has not come up at the airport consultative committee or at any meetings with the airport or airlines.

## 6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 Trudy noted that Jean Lipa of Thurso Community Council had highlighted an issue with BEAR Scotland's resurfacing of the A9 in Thurso and renovation of a building on Prince's Street combining to cause problems with access to pedestrian walkways.
- 6.2 Mark Norton noted that, with regards to ScotRail's update, there was a commitment as part of the franchise that rural journey times would be optimised.

## 7. Press Communications

- 7.1 It was felt that communications should highlight the fruitful nature of the discussions and the ongoing plans for developments in the area.

## 8. Date of the next meeting

- 8.1 The next meeting is scheduled for 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015.
- 8.2 Trudy noted that in order to get the Caithness Bus Users Group meetings synced with the new schedule, a meeting would have to be held on 4<sup>th</sup> September, rather than in December as planned.
- 8.3 It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held at the Town Hall in Wick

## 8. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

**CTF(2015)M001/A005** – *Trudy Morris and Eann Sinclair to get information on difficulties local contractors have with Highland Council procurement system. Ongoing*

**CTF(2015)M001/A006** – *David Swanson to feed back to BEAR on issues with A9. Ongoing*

## 9. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2015)M002/A001** – *Gillian Coghill to investigate the possibility of further funding for the CTF from Highland Council.*

**CTF(2015)M002/A002** – *ScotRail to advise whether they will contribute to a Rail Users Group.*

**CTF(2015)M002/A003** – David Swanson to initiate approval of minutes promptly after each meeting and then issue to the press and upload to the chamber website.

**CTF(2015)M002/A004** – David Swanson to add a new item to the agenda before Any Other Business, 'Press Communications'.

**CTF(2015)M002/A005** – ScotRail to provide running time statistics at each meeting.

**CTF(2015)M002/A006** – ScotRail to provide further information regarding details of 'Club 50' which replaces 'Club 55'.

**CTF(2015)M002/A007** – ScotRail to provide feedback on trolley services on the Far North Line.

**CTF(2015)M002/A008** - ScotRail to provide information on Wick engine problems on 28<sup>th</sup> May.

**CTF(2015)M002/A009** – Dominic Mellan to feed back about possibility of match funding for Berriedale from Inverness City-Region deal

**CTF(2015)M002/A010** – Iain Moncrieff to feed back issues with placement of traffic calming measure in Wick

**CTF(2015)M002/A011** – Iain Moncrieff to provide information regarding the Engineer's audit report on Wick traffic calming measures near the Police Station/caravan park entrance.

**CTF(2015)M002/A012** – Names of haulage contractors hauling wood at speed through villages to be fed back to Iain Moncrieff

**CTF(2015)M002/A013** – Steve Walker to send details to the Chamber of the vacancy notice and job description for the vacant Engineering Manager's position.

**CTF(2015)M002/A014** - Steve Walker to forward fleet age profile to the Chamber for circulation

**CTF(2015)M002/A015** – James Linklater to feed back information, when available, on arrangements for 2016 dry docking.

# Appendix A – Scrabster Harbour Trust



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 29<sup>H</sup> May 2015

## SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

### 1. OVERALL

Although there was some falling back of port activity in the final quarter of the year, however, financial year 2014-15 was a particularly successful year with port revenues at a record level.

For 2014-15, there were 2,208 vessel arrivals at Scrabster, a 6% increase on the previous year. The overall tonnage of vessels through the port was 8.086 million tonnes, an increase of 3.5% on the previous year.

### 2. FERRY

The full Serco Northlink summer timetable (three sailings a day) begins on 12<sup>th</sup> June and runs to 25<sup>th</sup> August.

There will be a meeting of the Northern Isles Consultative Forum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015 in Aberdeen to discuss ferry issues.

### 3. FISHING

There was a 15.6% increase in box landings in 2014-15, with a total of 288,233 boxes landed at the port. Activity in April and May has been quieter with fish prices being depressed. Although

there has been a delay in the full implementation of the whitefish discards ban, the introduction is still a concern as the onshore implications have not been thought through.

#### **4. OIL AND GAS**

Oil and Gas vessel arrivals numbers are increasing reflecting that much of the project related activity is undertaken over the summer months. The semi-submersible rig, Deepsea Aberdeen, is now in position at the beginning of a seven year drilling programme for BP to develop Quad 204 West of Shetland. The replacement FPSO, the Glen Lyon, will also take up position on BP'S Schiehallion field in 2016. This together with recent announcements by Total and the Solan field going operational mean that activity West of Shetland has significantly increased which should mean greater traffic for Scrabster.

#### **5. RENEWABLES**

Thirteen shipments for SSE's Strathy North Wind Farm have been discharged through Scrabster. The port support of the project is expected to finish in early June.

#### **6. CRUISE**

The 2015 cruise programme will begin on 28<sup>th</sup> June with the visit of the Minerva. The Trust again exhibited at Seatrade Miami in March 2015. The booking position for 2016 is brighter with five confirmed and five provisional bookings at this stage.

#### **7. OTHER MATTERS**

The new Trust website was launched a fortnight ago. Any feedback is welcomed.

The Trust continues to make representations that the devolution of the Crown Estate in Scotland should include devolution to harbour authorities.

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

# Appendix B – Wick Harbour Authority

## WICK HARBOUR REPORT FOR CTE, MAY 2015

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

**Cargoes:** Imported cargoes of coal, lime, road salt, towheads, steel pipe, and fertiliser, are expected to continue as normal.

Export of timber from site clearances for local windfarms at Burn of Whilk and Stroupster has now been completed.

**Marina:** Again fully booked for the season by local vessels, with a few early visitors already been here.

**Onshore Windfarms:** Wind turbine imports for Burn o' Whilk are now complete.

**Offshore Windfarms:** Two major offshore windfarms are currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick, (BOWL and MORL). BOWL are due to make their 'Final Investment Decision' in January '16. Test drilling has begun this week in the Outer Harbour to establish seabed geology for the potential BOWL base, to assess the likely costs involved leading up to their FID. MORL's recent setback in terms of government funding is expected to delay confirmation of their development till Spring 2016.

Discussions are ongoing with both Developers on the required port infrastructure needed to provide an O&M base for at least the next twenty five years.

Several vessels are now involved in work on the subsea HVDC connector from Wick to the Moray coast, and the recently installed MORL Met Mast, all making regular visits to the Harbour.

**Oil Related:** Recent activity at Subsea7 is reflected in increased imports of steel pipe and towheads, and shipping movements. Confirmed contracts through 2015/16 should continue this activity.

**Infrastructure:** Our Engineers have awarded a Dredging Contract for the River Basin and approaches, but the start has again been postponed temporarily for weather reasons.

Hendersons have completed repairs and a new wave wall at Shaltigoe, funded by the last tranche of storm damage repair monies from the Scottish government.

**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.  
May 2015