



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

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**Date:** 14.12.12

**Time:** 10:30am

**Location:** Pentland Suite, The Weigh Inn, Thurso

## Present

Trudy Morris	CTF Chairperson, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Nicola Dreaves	Business Development Manager, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
David Swanson	Marketing & Communications, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
William Sutherland	Airport Station Manager, Wick John O'Groats Airport
Malcolm Bremner	Harbour Master, Wick Harbour
Ian Moncrieff	Principal Engineer, Highland Council TECS
Ken Nicol	Socio Economic Manager, DSRL
June Love	Secretary, Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Bob Earnshaw	Thurso Community Council
Mark Norton	DORLAG
Billy Maclean	Acting Operations Manager, Stagecoach
Robbie Mackintosh	Highland Council
Cllr. Robert Coghill	Highland Council

## 1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all present for attending.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from: Coreen Campbell, Eann Sinclair, John Yellowlees, John Green, Christine Dodd, Cllr Donald Mackay, Cllr Gail Ross, Frank Roach, Cllr James Stockan, Sandy Mackie, Cathel Mackaskill, Gordon Doull and Bert Macleod.

- 1.3 The Chairperson gave an update on the transfer of facilitation of the Forum from the Caithness Partnership to the Caithness Chamber of Commerce and thanked John Green and Koreen MacDougall for their hard work on the Forum previously and the Highland Council and DSRL for supporting and funding the Chamber's facilitation of the Forum.

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 18.07.12

- 2.1 The Chairperson noted that no minutes for the previous meeting had been received from Caithness Partnership.
- 2.2. The Chairperson noted that the last meeting included a presentation from Direct Rail Services on the new railhead at Georgemas Junction.

## 3. Matters Arising

- 3.1 See 2.1 above

## 4. Berriedale Braes

Trudy Morris delivered a brief update to the forum on activities relating to improvements to Berriedale Braes. Trudy read out a letter to John Green from Transport Scotland (**Appendix 1**). It was noted that there appeared to have been little progress since the last meeting. Trudy Morris mentioned that Anna MacConnell of the NDA had been trying to get a more recent update from Transport Scotland but was unable to do so in time for the meeting (see Section 5.4).

June Love mentioned that the Scottish Government, having recently received funds for capital investment in the latest Autumn Budget, was currently looking for shovel-ready projects into which these funds could be channelled, and that the Berriedale Braes improvements are near that stage. Trudy Morris confirmed that this was currently being looked at, and suggested that the Chamber write a letter to John Swinney MSP with regards to this.

June Love suggested that other organisations present could add supporting statements to the letter. There was some discussion, and it was agreed that the letter should also be sent to John Thurso MP, Keith Brown MSP and Rob Gibson MSP

**CTF(2012)M001/A001:** Trudy Morris to write a letter to John Swinney, John Thurso, Keith Brown and Rob Gibson with reference to the shovel-readiness of the Berriedale Braes upgrades. Other organisations to write supporting letters.

It was also noted that Scotland Transerv and BEAR will shortly be changing areas of responsibility (Section 5.2 / **Appendix 3**), and that the Forum should endeavour to keep in contact with both organisations throughout the changeover.

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 Roads – Iain Moncrieff, Highland Council TECS

In addition to Iain's verbal update, a written report was also submitted (**Appendix 2**).

Iain Moncrieff gave an update on the Highland Council's strategy for dealing with winter road conditions, both for the Highland region as a whole and for Caithness specifically.

Iain also noted that the Highland Council is trying to emphasise that drivers need to be aware of road conditions and drive appropriately, as conditions may be difficult even on roads which have been gritted. Trudy Morris asked Iain if he felt the Forum should act to publicise this message – Iain confirmed that any publicity in this area would be welcome. June Love and Ken Nicol confirmed that their respective organisations would be happy to help publicise.

**CTF(2012)M001/A002** – Forum members to assist Iain Moncrieff in distribution of Highland Council winter driving advice to members.

Iain went on to give an update on last summer's roads programme. Highland Council TECS undertook two main operations in a bid to preserve and extend the life of the road surfaces – surface dressing and overlay. It was explained that significant damage can be done to the roads when moisture gets in to the lower layers and that these are two methods of trying to prevent that.

It was noted that due to budgetary concerns and the rising price of tar, TECS has been focusing largely on surface dressing rather than overlay as it is much more cost effective.

Ken Nicol commented that significant areas of roads treated this year using the surface dressing technique are already breaking up. He asked if Highland Council has any plans to clean up the loose stone chips off these sections of road.

Iain stated that there were no plans at present to clean up loose stone chips, except in severe cases. However, he explained that the stone chips used this summer were sourced from three different quarries, including one on Skye, and that the worst-affected areas seem to have been the ones where chips from Skye were used. Trudy Morris asked if there were any plans to put up warning signs near such areas – Iain confirmed that they are currently identifying areas where stone chips from the Skye quarry were used and that they plan to put signage in place in these areas.

Iain then gave an update with regards to planned bridge upgrades at Halkirk and Westerdale. He noted that the Halkirk upgrade was likely to involve delays and diversions but that the Westerdale upgrade should not impact on traffic.

Finally, Iain updated the forum on the planned Highland Council charettes for Wick and Thurso urban planning. These will involve a period of consultation with the public and local stakeholders on how they feel land in the town centres would be best used. Iain noted that this was of interest to the Forum, as transport infrastructure is an important part of the local economy.

It was suggested that the Forum should produce a briefing note to be delivered prior to the charette, detailing the impact of potential transport infrastructure decisions on the marine renewable and

timber industries. Trudy Morris noted that the Chamber has previously produced a Transport Paper and that Dounreay and others have information and that it would be relatively easy to produce a briefing note from this.

**CTF(2012)M001/A003** – Trudy Morris to consult with members on production of briefing note for Wick / Thurso town plan charettes taking place in February 2013.

Billy Maclean raised again the issue of the proposed Halkirk bridge upgrades, enquiring as to likely diversion routes. Iain answered that the most likely routes would be back to the trunk road or out to Westerdale. Billy noted that this would have a serious impact on Halkirk, as buses would not be able to travel through the village for the duration of the upgrades.

Ken Nicol noted that there would be an impact on children travelling from Halkirk to local schools. Robert Coghill asked if there was any possibility of installing a footbridge to allow access for pedestrians. Iain stated that this would not be an option due to budgetary constraints but that the planned upgrades, while blocking the bridge to traffic, might still allow pedestrian access to the bridge.

There was a discussion as to the possibility of securing funding from the Halkirk District Benefit Fund for a permanent footbridge in Halkirk. June Love noted that this would very much be an issue for the Halkirk community.

Billy Maclean asked if it might be possible to schedule the work during the school holidays, so as to minimise disruption – Iain responded that this is currently the plan.

Iain noted that there is still a significant amount of inspection and planning to be carried out, and that they cannot say for certain at the moment what level of disruption might be involved in the upgrades. Ken Nicol asked if they would consider working at evenings and weekends to minimise disruption – Iain confirmed that this is a possibility, and that Highland Council also sometimes work at night for this reason.

Mark Norton suggested that the work be carried out during the school spring or summer break. Iain stated that there are a number of factors to be considered but that he would not expect the work to start earlier than June 2013.

Trudy Morris and June Love asked if Iain could deliver a more definite update on this matter at the next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A004** – Iain Moncrieff to deliver update on proposed Halkirk / Westerdale bridge works at next meeting.

## **5.2 Roads - Scotland Transerv**

Cathel Macaskill submitted a written update on behalf of Scotland Transerv (**Appendix 3**).

Trudy Morris noted that, further to the discussion in Section 4 and as mentioned in Cathel's update, BEAR Scotland will be taking over the area currently served by Scotland Transerv, and the Forum should endeavour to contact someone at BEAR and invite them to the meeting pre-changeover, but that contact should also be kept with Cathel until the changeover is complete.

**CTF(2012)M001/A005** – Chamber to find contact at BEAR Scotland and invite to next meeting.

Mention was also made in Cathel's update of the upcoming Kessock Bridge works, due to start in February 2013. Trudy Morris asked that attendees cascade the information to their members / contacts.

**CTF(2012)M001/A006** – Forum members to cascade information on Kessock Bridge works to members / contacts.

Finally, Cathel's update notified the Forum of an upcoming change in Scotland Transerv management for this area. Trudy Morris said that the Chamber would get in contact and invite her to the next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A007** – Chamber to contact new Scotland Transerv area manager and invite to next meeting.

Robert Coghill mentioned that the road surface on the Causewaymire is breaking up badly in several areas and noted that by comparison to similar roads further south. It was agreed that the Forum would feed this back to Cathel Macaskill.

**CTF(2012)M001/A008** – Chamber to feed back to Cathel Macaskill with regards to breaking up of Causewaymire.

There was some discussion initiated by Bob Earnshaw regarding the need for straightening of the A9 between the Berriedale Braes and Dunbeath. Trudy Morris noted that haulage operators have raised this as a concern.

### **5.3 Roads – Stagecoach**

Billy Maclean, currently Acting Operations Manager for Stagecoach, said he had no real update to give at this time. He mentioned that Brian Souter is stepping down as chief executive to be replaced by Martin Griffiths.

Ken Nicol asked about the use of alternative fuels on Stagecoach buses and whether there were any plans to use them in Caithness. Billy replied that Stagecoach is investing heavily in vehicles with alternative fuels but that he is not aware of any specific plans to use these in Caithness at this time.

### **5.4 Roads – Transport Scotland**

Trudy Morris delivered an update to the forum from Transport Scotland on behalf of Anna MacConnell (**Appendix 4**).

**CTF(2012)M001/A009** – Trudy Morris to follow up with Andy Anderson on Transport Scotland update.

### **6.1 Sea – Wick Harbour Authority**

Gordon Doull delivered a written report on behalf of Wick Harbour Authority (**Appendix 5**). Malcolm

Bremner, representing WHA, stated that he had been away for three months but was happy to answer any questions.

Robert Coghill mentioned that he had seen a presentation by Willie Watt and Gordon Doull of Wick Harbour on the potential for a heavy lift pad at the Harbour. He stated that it was an exciting opportunity for the Harbour and could lead to the creation of a number of jobs. Malcolm confirmed that the plans for this are currently being drawn up and that the project is on track, although it will be a reduced scheme due to funding issues.

Malcolm mentioned that the harbour is currently looking at a number of potential business opportunities in the renewables sector as a result of the heavy lift pad development. Robbie Mackintosh noted that Councillors Ross and Fernie are due to meet with the Director of Planning shortly and that this development is high on their agenda.

Mark Norton asked about the transport of pipes and whether they would be transported by rail. Malcolm explained that carrier pipes produced by Corus will continue to be transported by rail, but that internal pipes come from Europe and will continue to be transported by ship, as this is by far the cheaper option.

Trudy Morris said it was excellent that potential business from renewables was better than hoped, and that she hoped it continues to develop. Malcolm reiterated that as he has just returned from a long break, he cannot say for certain what has been agreed as yet. June Love noted that the Highland Council charrette as mentioned in Iain Moncrieff's update provided an opportunity for joined up working with regards to Wick Harbour's expansion. Iain confirmed that this is very much the aim of the project and that they are eager to work with businesses. It was suggested that Gordon Doull update the forum further at the next meeting. There was general agreement that the Forum welcomes the developments at Wick Harbour and looks forward to hearing more at the next meeting.

## 6.2 Sea – Any Other Business

Trudy Morris noted that Scrabster Harbour did not provide an update to the Forum for this meeting.

She noted that the strike action on Serco NorthLink ferries had started today and that this would obviously have an impact on Caithness. Nicola Dreaves confirmed that the Chamber has a contact at Serco and will be getting in touch to invite the appropriate person to the next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A010** – David Swanson to contact Marian Barbour at Serco NorthLink with regards to appropriate contact for CTF.

## 7.1 Air – Wick John O'Groats Airport

William Sutherland, Station Manager, delivered an update on behalf of Wick John O'Groats Airport / Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. He noted the recent name change from Wick Airport to Wick John O'Groats Airport, mentioning that it had been publicised all over the world and that hopefully there would be some tourism benefits to the airport from the change.

He reported that the airfield projects which had been ongoing – the Runway Resurfacing Project, Airfield Ground Lighting Replacement Project and the addition of a direction finder – have now been completed. Still outstanding is the addition of free wi-fi to the terminal building, although he is hopeful that this will be completed by the end of the year. William noted that this is a big issue for business travellers in particular.

William further reported that the recently added Europcar hire station has been doing well and has been a valuable addition to the airport. He went on to report that the passenger and aircraft movement stats for this year have been very good (**Appendix 6**).

William reported that the airport has recently secured a contract with Chevron to provide a temporary base for helicopters flying to their West of Shetland fields. They also have a new fixed asset solely chartered to Chevron – a Eurocopter 155. He noted that this has proven to be a fairly big operation, with Chevron landing two fixed-wing flights of 30 passengers each day and shuttling them on to the Captain field, about 40 miles out of Wick. William noted that HIAL management are currently in talks with Chevron in an attempt to secure this business for the future.

William went on to report that NHV Helicopters, the company providing the aircraft for Chevron, are showing a strong interest in Wick John O’Groats Airport, as they have a lot of interest in the renewables sector. It is hoped that this will lead to more business for the airport in the near future.

William reported that due to the sudden increase in business, infrastructure is becoming an issue, with e.g. car parking space and rubbish disposal facilities struggling to meet the strain. However, he noted that there is a “buzz” about the airport and that they’ve doubled aircraft movements in the last six weeks.

William mentioned the recent announcement by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority that the National Nuclear Archive will be sited at the Wick John O’Groats Airport Industrial Estate and that this will have a positive impact on both the airport and the whole county. He said his understanding is that the project is shovel-ready, which was confirmed by June Love. It was mentioned that the archive is hoped to be operational by 2016.

William noted that possible future opportunities might come from the Beatrice Offshore / Moray Offshore windfarms, should they get planning permission, as Wick is well placed to service these developments.

There was some discussion with regards to the dilapidated aircraft hangar at the airport, which had previously been brought to the Forum’s attention. William confirmed that this is part of the business development plan which is currently being drawn up.

William mentioned the ongoing issue of Air Traffic Control staff for weekends with reference to the current deal with Chevron and Bob Earnshaw asked for an update. William said that the recruitment is still in progress. They currently have one recruit in training, but that it takes a long time to train staff for this role

Trudy said she hopes the deal with Chevron leads to more business from other operators. William noted that Chevron is very happy with the airport.

June Love mentioned that there may be potential for a link with the NDA Archive with regards to the infrastructure issues raised earlier – there may be a possibility to use the hangar as temporary storage during the construction of the archive. June Love agreed to contact the NDA with regards to this.

**CTF(2012)M001/A011** – June Love to contact NDA with regards temporary storage for archives.

Trudy asked if there would be security issues and June noted that the airport is already a secure location.

## 8.1 Rail – First ScotRail

John Yellowlees of First ScotRail provided a written update (**Appendix 7**).

Mark Norton again thanked Caithness Partnership for their work with the Forum previously. He also mentioned that the projected average Journey Time Reduction of 17 minutes on the Inverness – Glasgow / Edinburgh services is very welcome.

There was some discussion of the planned strikes by ScotRail staff over the festive period.

Mark asked the forum if there were any updates on the new Direct Rail Services (DRS) railhead at Georgemas Junction. June Love said that the NDA has had talks with Transport Scotland about traffic calming measures near the site and that the new Business Development Manager at DRS is committed to the use of the railhead for commercial traffic. Trudy Morris suggested that the Forum ask DRS for an update on proposed traffic calming measures near the site.

**CTF(2012)M001/A012** – Chamber to contact DRS for an update including information regarding traffic calming measures.

It was generally agreed that the new railhead is a good opportunity for general rail services.

Trudy gave a brief update on recent improvements to the Edinburgh – Glasgow line, noting that the budget for work has been reduced and, as such, improvements to infrastructure further north are unlikely. She asked Mark to keep up to date on any further changes on this matter.

Ken Nicol asked if there had been any progress on plans to add automated barriers to all level crossings in Scotland. Iain Moncrieff said that this is currently out to consultation. Mark asked if the plans were to install full or half barriers.

**CTF(2012)M001/A013** – Chamber to get update from First ScotRail on level crossing barriers.

Trudy also delivered a brief update from HITRANS (**Appendix 8**)

## 9. Any Other Business

Ken Nicol asked if the Forum thought they should look again at the Terms of Reference for the Forum. Trudy Morris said she wasn't sure if they had been passed on to the Chamber.

**CTF(2012)M001/A014** – David Swanson to go through Transport Forum materials passed to Chamber from Caithness Partnership to find Terms of Reference. If none exist, discuss at next meeting with regards to this.

Trudy asked if anyone had suggestions for additional invitees for the next meeting. It was noted that there were no hauliers present – Trudy explained that they had been invited.

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March from 11.30 – 13.00. Venue TBC.

## **Actions arising from this meeting**

**CTF(2012)M001/A001** – Trudy Morris to write a letter to John Swinney, John Thurso, Keith Brown and Rob Gibson with reference to the shovel-readiness of the Berriedale Braes upgrades. Other organisations to write supporting letters.

**CTF(2012)M001/A002** – Forum members to assist Iain Moncrieff in distribution of Highland Council winter driving advice to members.

**CTF(2012)M001/A003** – Trudy Morris to consult with members on production of briefing note for Wick / Thurso town plan charettes taking place in February 2013.

**CTF(2012)M001/A004** – Iain Moncrieff to deliver update on proposed Halkirk / Westerdale bridge works at next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A005** – Chamber to find contact at BEAR Scotland and invite to next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A006** – Attendees to cascade information on Kessock Bridge works to members / contacts.

**CTF(2012)M001/A007** – Chamber to contact new Scotland Transerv area manager and invite to next meeting.

**CTF(2012)M001/A008** – Chamber to feed back to Cathel Macaskill with regards to breaking up of Causewaymire.

**CTF(2012)M001/A009** – Trudy Morris to follow up with Andy Anderson on Transport Scotland update.

**CTF(2012)M001/A010** – David Swanson to contact Marian Barbour at Serco NorthLink with regards to appropriate contact for CTF.

**CTF(2012)M001/A011** – June Love to contact NDA with regards temporary storage for archives.

**CTF(2012)M001/A012** – Chamber to contact DRS for an update including information regarding traffic calming measures.

**CTF(2012)M001/A013** – Chamber to get update from First ScotRail on level crossing barriers.

**CTF(2012)M001/A014** – David Swanson to go through Transport Forum materials passed to Chamber from Caithness Partnership to find Terms of Reference. If none exist, discuss at next meeting with regards to this.

## Appendix 1 – Transport Scotland Letter to John Green

Please see "Letter from Transport Scotland to John Green 16.11.12.pdf"

## Appendix 2 – Highland Council TECS

### Caithness Transport Forum

### TECS Report

13 Dec 2012

#### Winter

##### Maintenance Operations

Across Highland Council:  
£5m spent annually on winter maintenance  
120 gritters  
58 footway tractors  
50,000 t of salt used  
67,000 km of roads

In Caithness:  
£1.7m annual budget(CSER area, £900k Caithness)  
10 gritters  
6 footway tractors  
5 contractors  
769 km of roads in caithness  
Salt levels remained adequate to date.

Road network split into 4 priority classes:

Priority	Approx No of Routes	Description	Mon – Sat	Sun
P1	8	Main routes	6am – 9pm	7am – 9pm
P2	8	Other strategic routes + bus routes	6am –6pm	7am –6pm
P3	>20	Main urban & school bus routes	6am –6pm	Not Treated
P4		Remainder of network	6am –6pm or as resources permit	Not treated

#### Driving

Motorists **must** be prepared for winter driving. Speed is the main contributory factor in most accidents. Do not assume that when you see a gritter then the road will be ice free. Ice can still form through:

Salt wash off from rain showers and then sub zero temperatures

Salt clogging in the chute leaving an isolated untreated patch

Run-off from fields etc washing the salt off and then freezing

Extreme cold usually about -10 C reduces the salt's effectiveness and eventually stops it melting ice.

Unforeseen weather conditions – it's all based on a forecast!

Most drivers don't encounter problems during winter but taking some simple precautions may make a difference.

Check your car is serviced and ready for the winter.

Are your tyres legal and adequate?

Adjust your speed to match the conditions.

In bad conditions, is your journey really necessary?

Take the following with you:

Mobile phone

First Aid Kit

Torch

Extra warm clothing

Waterproofs

Shovel

Tow rope

Flask with hot drinks

Some food

I urge you all to pass this message to your colleagues and employees.

## **Results from 2012-13 Road Maintenance Programme**

Essentially there are two types of operations – surface dressing and overlay.

Surface dressing is spraying an oil and water emulsion on the road surface and then spreading stone chippings before using a road roller to press the chips into the emulsion. The emulsion breaks leaving the oil as a glue to hold the chips in place. Over time the stones are pressed into the tar below. Surface dressing helps to seal the road surface which prevents moisture getting in and weakening the bottom layers of the road and also helps give the road surface some texture or grip. Surface dressing costs approximately £3 per sq m.

Overlay is where tar is spread out across the road to form a new surface. Sometimes it's necessary to remove existing tar layers depending on the road condition. In recent years the rising oil prices have increased the cost of overlay to £18 per sq m without including any additional works.

Assuming all our roads across CSER North area are 3m wide, we can surface dress some 50km and overlay approximately 4km. There's just short of 1000km in CSER North Area.

Surface dressing is a volatile operation. It's dependent on the many variables & I've summarised a few here:

- Chips – cleanliness, type and source

- Temperatures of emulsion and road surface

- Spray rates

- Emulsion types

Although there has been some stripping, or loss of chips, the main test is still to come. From experience stripping is more likely to occur with freezing temperatures over the winter months. However the change to an improved emulsion has reduced the number of early failures.

## **2013-14 Roads Maintenance Programme**

The next three years road and bridge maintenance programmes are currently being prepared for approval by the Caithness & Sutherland Committee in February. While most of the road maintenance operations may result in delay and inconvenience to motorists there's unlikely to be any more disruption than usual.

Halkirk Bridge will have its expansion joint replaced either this year or next and this may cause some delay and diversions will be required. With the exception of unplanned emergency works there is unlikely to be any significant delays due to bridge maintenance.

## **Wick & Thurso Charrettes**

Planning & Building Control Service will be holding Charrettes for both Wick and Thurso in the February 2013. A charrette is a type of public consultation where the public can voice their opinion on future land use, amongst other issues. Suggestions are marked onto large scale plans and are

then reviewed to form the part of the next Local Plan. This will be used to determine planning applications.

I suggest a briefing note be prepared in advance for Planning. The briefing note should include all transport infrastructure for all sectors of commerce and industry from pedestrians and cyclists, road and rail public transport, car and HGV infrastructure to ports and harbours. It should address all sectors including tourism, arts, renewables, commercial, retail, agriculture, timber and fishing.

It's important that key transport infrastructure hopes and aspirations are included in the charrettes for both towns. I would recommend that the forum issues a briefing note as soon as possible to Planning Service outlining both concerns that hinder expansion and forecasts of future growth.

### **Appendix 3 – Scotland Transerv**

The main news from Scotland TranServ is that we are on the move, from the North West Unit to the South West Unit. Demobilisation will start in earnest in the early January, 2013. Of course we are disappointed to be leaving the North West but look forward to the new challenges the South West will present. Bear (Scotland) are the new incumbents in the North West and we wish them every success in the future. We will work hard to ensure that the transition is as seamless as possible for all our communities affected. The changeover takes effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

On the work front so far this financial year there has been significant investment in the trunk roads which serve Caithness with over 1.5 million pounds already spent on structural maintenance schemes throughout the county. The schemes programmed for the coming financial year have yet to be finalised but the selection process has started.

Winter service is now in full swing and the weather so far has brought its own challenges. The change of operating company will not affect the delivery of the winter service in any way. Can I also remind members of the forthcoming major refurbishment of the Kessock Bridge. The works are programmed to start on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2013, and last for four months. The Traffic Management will be in the form of the complete closure of one carriageway on the bridge and a contraflow on the other carriageway. There are between 30, 000 and 33,000 vehicle movements across the bridge daily and there is no doubt that unless the number of vehicles crossing the bridge at peak times is reduced significant delays will occur. It is important that all non-essential journeys to and from Inverness from the north are made outwith peak times. Peak times are 7.30am to 9.30am morning and 4.30pm to 6.30pm evening. The use of public transport is also encouraged with extra train/bus services and there will be a lane dedicated solely for the use of Heavy Goods Vehicles, Buses and Emergency Vehicles. A number of advance works are currently ongoing which include signalisation of the Longman Roundabout, Rose Street Roundabout, a right turn out of Henderson Road and a dedicated slip lane off Stadium Road, southbound.

Finally there has also been a recent change in the Transport Scotland post of Area Manager, North Area. Mr Gordon Sinclair has moved to the North East region and the new Area Manager for the North region is Mrs Joanne Seath. While Joanne is based at Transport Scotland, Buchanan House, Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, her home is in the Black Isle and she is no stranger to the north of Scotland. I know she is keen to attend any future meetings.

## Appendix 4 – Transport Scotland update to Anna MacConnell

Anna

Further to our discussion yesterday I write to confirm the current position with the above scheme to progress the design of an improvement scheme at Berriedale Braes. As I said we are in the process of transferring the project from Transport Scotland's Trunk Road and Bus Operations (TRBO) to Major Transport Infrastructure Projects (MTRIPs) team. I am therefore unable to advise of likely timescales to take this project forward at present. Once MTRIPs have appointed a project manager to the scheme they will be back in touch.

Regards

Andy

## Appendix 5 – Wick Harbour

**Cargoes:** Imported cargoes of usual commodities continue as normal, with timber export re-established after a break last year and continuing. This depends on which side of the County harvesting is taking place and that usually dictates whether Wick or Scrabster is used.

**Fishing:** Again activity continues as normal, with all landings consigned south. For information, local vessels land just short of £1m of whitefish and shellfish annually.

**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:** Changeable weather this summer has curtailed visiting yacht numbers by approximately 20%, and other members of Sail North Scotland (Inverness, Orkney, and Shetland Marinas), have experienced similar drops. All the sixty permanent berths for locals have now been taken up, and we have a small waiting list for 2013. We are looking at installing extra berthing fingers to ease the situation.

**Infrastructure:** No major new works or repairs have been done since our last report.

**Future infrastructure:** We are currently progressing design work and tenders for a new 'Heavy Lift' pad on Commercial Quay 1 on the south side of the River to augment our existing pad on the north side, and construction is planned for summer 2013. This is required for future heavy plant imports, and because the town bridges limit movement of long/heavy loads.

**Potential Business:** We are working closely with the developers of the Beatrice Offshore and Moray Offshore Windfarms, both currently awaiting Planning Consent in Spring 2013, with construction now programmed for 2015. No commitments have been made, but due to our proximity to both sites we hope to be considered as a service base, which would entail major quayside offices, stores, etc, along with berthing and welfare requirements for perhaps a dozen crew transfer vessels. A

significant number of jobs could be created for skippers, service technicians, and onshore admin staff. A major part of our sales pitch is our transport links, especially the Airport.

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

Gordon Doull

December 2012.

## **Appendix 6 – Wick John O’Groats Airport**

Please see "HIAL Monthly Statistics – November 2011-2012.pdf"

## **Appendix 7 – First ScotRail**

The new timetables for one year to 7 December 2012 are visible at <http://www.scotrail.co.uk/timetables-routes/1831>. Caithness benefits from reduced journey times on the Highland Main Line.

ScotRail fares will rise by 3.9% in January 2012. We have worked hard to keep the increase down to a level that continues to offer value for money. At the same time, our approach enables us to continue to invest in improvements including more and faster services and better facilities at stations and on trains. An announcement by Transport Scotland extending the ScotRail franchise to end-March 2015 has intimated that in January 2014 and 2015 peak fares will be capped at the Retail Price Index (RPI) – rather than RPI +1%. In addition, off peak fares will be frozen at the January 2013 level for the remainder of the franchise, subject to RPI being no greater than 3.5%.

Club 55 is likely to return in the New Year. Michael Portillo’s fourth series of Great British Railway Journeys takes him to Caithness, and is due to be broadcast in January.

## **Appendix 8 – HITRANS**

The Sleeper franchise will now be let earlier than the main ScotRail franchise which no moves back to March 2015. Conon Bridge will be opening in February.