



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 06.12.2013

Time: 11.30am

Location: Naver Business Centre, Thurso

Present

Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Marketing & Communications, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Sandra McCaughey	Business Development, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
William Sutherland	Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Bob Earnshaw	Thurso Community Council
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Steve Walker	Stagecoach
Chris Cartmel	Stagecoach
John Green	Caithness Partnership
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce

1. Welcome and apologies

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

Apologies were received from:

Coreen Campbell	Caithness Rural Transport
Ken Nicol	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Christine Dodd	Highland Council

Gail Ross	Highland Council
Iain Moncrieff	Highland Council
Mark Norton	North Line Action Group
Kris Bevan	NorthLink Ferries
James Linklater	NorthLink Ferries
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
John Yellowlees	ScotRail
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour

2. Approval of minutes of last CTF meeting 25.09.13

The minutes were unanimously approved

3. Review of actions from last meeting

CTF(2012)M001/A007 – Chamber to contact new Transport Scotland area manager and invite to next meeting – **Ongoing**. Malcolm has been contacted again but no response has been forthcoming.

CTF(2013)M001/A010 – Chamber to work with Mark Norton to input on First ScotRail franchising process – **Complete**. A response was submitted to the Caledonian Sleeper franchise consultation.

David noted that Transport Scotland are keen for all bidders to engage with local stakeholders, and it was agreed that he should contact the bidders with regards to this.

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts.

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

Trudy Morris, Eann Sinclair and Willie Watt (Subsea 7) met with Drew Hendry to discuss this issue. An options appraisal is expected to be completed by January 2014 (see Appendix A) and Eann hopes to meet with Iain Moncrieff to better understand this appraisal.

Peter Body noted that, as he recalled from the previous meeting, it was unclear what the usage of the B876 is. David noted that Iain's update contains more information on this.

Eann noted that there are examples from elsewhere in the Highland Council area of how a funding package can be put together to support road development and that this is a likely approach for the B876.

David Flear stated his concern that any solution has to take economic development into account as the main priority. Trudy noted that the Forum needs to find out what options are available before they can be discussed with business.

Bob Earnshaw noted that studies have previously been conducted on the route and that the findings must still be available.

There was some discussion of the fact that the current situation with the road was always intended to be temporary. Bob noted that it is important to make a socio-economic case for developing the route.

John Green raised the lack of progress on improvements to the road between Keiss and Keiss Mains. It was agreed that Eann would raise this during his meeting with Iain.

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road.

CTF(2013)M003/A002 – David Swanson to follow up with Iain Moncrieff regarding B876. **Complete** – Iain has submitted an update on this (Appendix A).

CTF(2013)M003/A003 – Steve Walker to ensure drivers liaise with ground handlers at Gills Bay ferry terminal. **Complete** – Steve confirmed this has been actioned.

CTF(2013)M003/A004 – David Swanson to follow up with Neil Young on issues with timetables. **Ongoing** – Neil has confirmed that he is actively working on this and that progress has already been made.

Trudy noted that the Chamber had been contacted by the local press regarding a lack of timetables in bus stops. Steve confirmed that new timetables had been produced and the information sent to Highland Council 8 weeks ago.

It was agreed that David Swanson would feed back to Neil Young on this.

CTF(2013)M003/A005 – David Swanson to circulate Flybe ADS link / WJACC press release to Forum. **Complete** – this was circulated to the Forum.

CTF(2013)M003/A006 – David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services. **Ongoing** – David fed back to ScotRail but has had no response and will follow this up.

4. Berriedale Braes

Trudy Morris noted that there were no specific developments relating to the Berriedale Braes at this time and that the Forum would continue to lobby on this.

There was some discussion of which proposed route was the preferred option, and it was confirmed that 5b is preferred. John Green enquired whether this route would lead to improved overtaking – this was confirmed.

John further raised issues with overtaking once past Berriedale. Bob Earnshaw noted the importance of dealing with the Berriedale Braes first before pushing for further improvements.

5. Roads

5.1 Highland Council TECS

Iain Moncrieff submitted a written update on behalf of Highland Council TECS (Appendix A)

David Flear raised the issue of flooding at Riverside in Thurso, noting that the slipway is causing problems and flood defences were not put out in time. It was suggested that what is needed is a floodgate at the top of the slipway and that the Forum should take this issue up with Highland Council.

It was agreed that the Chamber would write a letter to Neil Gillies (Director of Highland Council TEC Services) and Iain Moncrieff.

CTF(2013)M004/A003 – *Chamber to write to Neil Gillies, Iain Moncrieff regarding flood defences in Thurso*

5.2 BEAR Scotland

No one from BEAR Scotland was present and no written report was submitted.

David Swanson noted that he had received details for a new contact (Iain McDonald) at BEAR Scotland from Cathel Macaskill.

Bob Earnshaw raised that Thurso Community Council has for some time been attempting to get Scotland Transerv / BEAR Scotland to deal with the road between the end of the bridge and the traffic lights at Sir George's Street, which is in a poor state.

It was agreed that when the Chamber get in touch with the new BEAR contact, they will ask for an update on this.

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*

5.3 Stagecoach

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

- There has been a minor change to the town services in Wick and Thurso
- Johnson Controls are ceasing management of the Dounreay bus contract, which is expected to pass to DSRL. Steve will be meeting with DSRL in 2 weeks' time to discuss this.

CTF(2014)M004/A005 – *David Flear to feed back to the Dounreay Stakeholder Group regarding the Dounreay bus contract*

Trudy queried the nature of the changes to the town services. Steve confirmed that they have reduced one service – to the housing estate near Tesco in Thurso – to hourly, rather than half-hourly.

Eann Sinclair noted that the lack of an afternoon service to High Ormlie had been raised with him. Steve noted that this is a longstanding complaint – they have tried running town services in the afternoon but they are not used.

Trudy noted the Chamber had also been contacted regarding an issue with bus passes – a passenger on a Stagecoach bus was informed that she could not use her pass twice within a 10 minute period. Steve confirmed that this is the case and that it is intended to prevent fraud. Chris Cartmel noted that this information is recorded on the card itself and the machine will not accept it if it has been used within the time limit.

5.4 Fuel Discount Scheme

David Swanson noted that Ken Nicol had raised a concern relating to the scheme and its applicability to towns in Caithness. He delivered a brief update on the scheme. Of note:

- There are three criteria for eligibility – distance from a refinery, avg. price of fuel vs. that in areas where the scheme is currently active, population density.
- Based on the available data, it does not appear that any town in Caithness meets the eligibility criteria – Bettyhill may do

There was some general discussion of the scheme, with the consensus that it is unclear exactly how it applies e.g. to individual towns or surrounding areas. It was agreed that a letter should be written to John Thurso MP to ask for clarification on this matter.

CTF(2013)M004/A006 – *Chamber to write to John Thurso to request clarification on the Fuel Discount Scheme*

6. Sea

6.1 Scrabster Harbour

Sandy Mackie submitted a written update on behalf of Scrabster Harbour (Appendix B).

Trudy noted that Stephen Sutherland met recently with Keith Brown regarding the Serco NorthLink Ferry contract. Little can be done regarding the current contract, but the Scottish Government will ensure that the next contract includes contingency measures.

Eann raised concerns with the dry-docking arrangements, noting that Scrabster has to undertake modifications to accommodate the Helliar. Peter Body asked what the arrangement was last time and John Green confirmed it was the same.

CTF(2013)M004/A007 – Chamber to seek clarification from Sandy Mackie on the effect on Scrabster of Serco's dry-docking arrangements.

Eann also raised the issue of planning for the business / industrial park, which requires a new access route off the A9 and that Transport Scotland have not been helpful in this matter. It was noted that consultation events were held recently.

David Flear suggested the Forum write to Transport Scotland to ask for an update on the link between Scrabster's development and the A9. It was agreed that it would be best to get an update on the situation first.

CTF(2013)M004/A008 – Eann Sinclair to discuss A9 access route with Sandy Mackie

Trudy noted that no response has been had from Mark Harper regarding concerns with new border control policies – this was also flagged up with Scottish Chambers, who raised it on a national level but have failed to get a response.

CTF(2013)M004/A009 – Chamber to follow up with John Thurso regarding lack of response from Mark Harper

6.2 Wick Harbour Authority

Gordon Doull submitted a written update on behalf of Wick Harbour Authority (Appendix C).

Eann noted it was good to see that the contract for the heavy lift pad has gone out to tender.

6.3 Serco NorthLink Ferries

Kris Bevan submitted a written update on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries (Appendix D).

John Green noted that Orkney councillors would be meeting with Serco in the next few days.

7. Air

7.1 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

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

- This has been the airport's busiest ever year – passenger numbers were up 12,500 from April-December
- The extra flight on Friday afternoons has been very popular
- The Chevron contract is now finished, but infrastructure has been left in place
- Enercon are interested in storing turbines at the airport
- Mazda have been bringing chartered flights in recently

William emphasised the need to keep positive. He noted that the Chevron COO came to Wick JOG Airport to let them know how delighted they were with the service at the airport and in the town.

William noted that BP are now operating fixed-wing flights into Shetland and transporting workers by helicopter from there – there is hope that Wick will see the same happen. June Love noted that she met with Chevron recently and their main concern is the cost of fixed-wing flights.

With regards to the Enercon turbines, it was noted that issues with transportation may be mitigated by using the Staxigoe road. Eann noted that this is a good idea and should be passed on to Wick Harbour as well.

CTF(2013)M004/A010 – *William Sutherland to talk to Wick Harbour regarding turbine transportation*

Trudy noted that she wished to record her thanks to William and the team at the airport for all their hard work over the past year. This was met with general agreement.

Peter Body mentioned accommodation issues – it was noted that this had been raised previously but that there is no real issue.

June Love noted that the airport has now shown it can handle that sort of business is a great selling point when approaching other companies.

8. Rail

8.1 First ScotRail

John Yellowlees submitted a written update on behalf of First ScotRail (Appendix E).

David Swanson noted that he had been contacted by FirstGroup, who are consulting stakeholders on their bid for the Daytime Franchise. He is currently reading and summarising the Draft Invitation to Tender for the franchise, and agreed to circulate this summary along with FirstGroup's consultation to the Forum.

CTF(2013)M004/A011 – *David Swanson to circulate FirstGroup consultation and draft ITT summary*

9. Any Other Business

William noted that, particularly following the recent bad weather, the access road to the airport needs work and that its current condition was giving a poor first impression of the area.

CTF(2013)M004/A012 – *Chamber to write to David Sutherland, Gail Ross regarding airport access road*

David Flear noted that given the amount the NDA are expecting to invest in building the National Nuclear Archive, it would reflect poorly for the access road to it to be in bad condition.

William noted that there is a lot of potential for the area with the upcoming Homecoming 2014.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 6th March 2014 in Wick at 11.30am, venue TBC

Actions on-going from previous meetings

CTF(2012)M001/A007 – Chamber to contact new Transport Scotland area manager and invite to next meeting – **Ongoing**. Malcolm has been contacted again but no response has been forthcoming.

CTF(2013)M003/A004 – David Swanson to follow up with Neil Young on issues with timetables. **Ongoing** – Neil has confirmed that he is actively working on this and that progress has already been made. Further issues were raised at the December meeting which are to be fed back to Neil.

CTF(2013)M003/A006 – David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services. **Ongoing** – David fed back to ScotRail but has had no response and will follow this up.

Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts.

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road.

CTF(2013)M004/A003 – Chamber to write to Neil Gillies, Iain Moncrieff regarding flood defences in Thurso

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

CTF(2014)M004/A005 – David Flear to feed back to the Dounreay Stakeholder Group regarding the Dounreay bus contract

CTF(2013)M004/A006 – Chamber to write to John Thurso to request clarification on the Fuel Discount Scheme

CTF(2013)M004/A007 – Chamber to seek clarification from Sandy Mackie on the effect on Scrabster of Serco's dry-docking arrangements.

CTF(2013)M004/A008 – Eann Sinclair to discuss A9 access route with Sandy Mackie

CTF(2013)M004/A009 – Chamber to follow up with John Thurso regarding lack of response from Mark Harper

CTF(2013)M004/A010 – William Sutherland to talk to Wick Harbour regarding turbine transportation

CTF(2013)M004/A011 – David Swanson to circulate FirstGroup consultation and draft ITT summary

CTF(2013)M004/A012 – Chamber to write to David Sutherland, Gail Ross regarding airport access road

DRAFT

Appendix A – TECS Report

Caithness Transport Forum

TECS Report

04 Dec 13

Winter Maintenance

All gritters, ploughs and salt stocks have been inspected and are ready for use.

B876 Killimster Moss Remedial Works

The option appraisal is nearing completion. It is expected that the options appraisal will be completed by Jan 2014. The options appraisal will examine a range of temporary and permanent works with design lives ranging from a few years to several decades. Each option will be assessed in terms of cost, value and disruption to local traffic.

A traffic survey confirmed that the daily two flow traffic flow is 1400 vehicles with 91 HGV's. HGV traffic is approximately 6% of the total flow which was expected.

The preferred solution will be determined on factors such as engineering, value, disruption etc. However funding will be a significant determining issue. The outcome of the option appraisal will be the preferred solution.

Depending on the preferred solution the works may be undertaken as one discrete package or phased over different financial years with temporary surfacing

Similarly disruption to local traffic is dependent on the preferred solution. It may be possible to keep the road open with appropriate traffic management or a temporary road closure may be required.

Appendix B – Scrabster Harbour Report



Caithness Transport Forum 6th December 2013

Scrabster Harbour Trust Update

- 1. Developments** – The redeveloped Old Fish market Pier continues to be well used and attract commercial enquiries. The Phase 1 redevelopment project won Best Oil and Gas Service Provider at the recent Energy North Awards.

Initial feasibility work on Phase II (development of the deep water basin) continues with a focus on option evaluation and high level cost estimation.

Two public display events were held in November as part of the pre-application period for development of the enterprise area. It is anticipated that a formal planning application covering the enterprise area and access will be submitted early 2014.

Other development projects are currently being evaluated by the Trust Board.

- 2. Harbour Trade** – The previous decline in fish landings has been arrested. The improvement can be attributed to the refrigerated facilities in the fish market plus competition in the supply of fuel.

Quota allocations and days at sea remain critical to the overall health of the sector. There remains a tension between the view of the scientists and that held by the fishermen, particularly over cods stocks.

Of other revenue sectors, both Oil and Gas activity and general cargo trade continue to perform well.

- 3. Cruise** – The final figures for the 2013 cruise season was eight vessel arrivals bringing 2,573 passengers to the area. There are eight confirmed vessel bookings for 2014 with a projected 2,562 passenger arrivals.

In September the Trust exhibited at the Seatrade Europe exhibition held in Hamburg, Germany. Future marketing activities are under consideration. The Trust continues to be an active member of Cruise Scotland. The campaign regarding the “face to document” border control regime continues but there are no indications of relaxation in the short term.

4. **Ferry** – The Hamnavoe will be in dry dock between 6th and 24th January 2014. During this time the freight vessel Helliar will operate on the Scrabster to Stromness route as no relief vessel is available externally. This is a repeat of the arrangement put in place when the Hamnavoe suffered a crankshaft failure earlier this year.

The Trust has expressed concern to Serco Northlink and Scottish Government regarding the dry docking arrangement. The crankshaft failure in April was an exceptional event; however, dry docking is a planned outage of service the dates of which were known at the time of the tender exercise.

Fender modifications are needed at Scrabster to accommodate the Helliar.

The Northern Isles ferry contract provides that the Scrabster to Stromness is a ro-pax service but for the second time in a year a reduced service is being permitted.

The Hamnavoe will dry dock again in 2016 and 2017.

5TH December 2013

Appendix C – Wick Harbour Report

WICK HARBOUR REPORT FOR CTF, DECEMBER 2013

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

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

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

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 During October, Varis Engineering installed three extra 12 metre berthing fingers to accommodate larger visiting yachts. The three 10 metre fingers removed have been slotted in within the existing marina footprint thus creating six extra resident berths, all already booked. Included in this project are four Information Boards to be sited near the Marina, covering Herring Fishing, White Fishing, Wildlife, and Walks. These will be installed within the next few weeks. This has been done with the help of EU Axis 4 funding.

Infrastructure: Tender have been issued for a new £0.5m 'Heavy Lift' pad on Commercial Quay 1 in the River Basin to augment our existing pad on the North River Pier. Assuming prices are acceptable, construction of the 375 tonne facility is planned for January to March 2014. This is required for future heavy plant imports, and because the town bridges limit movement of long/heavy loads. WHA are grateful to HIE for £200k funding assistance, which along with a WHA £200k loan and £100k from private sources, means this vital development can proceed. £250k has also been awarded from the NDA for dredging to the River Basin and approaches.

Potential Business: The two major offshore windfarms currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick are currently awaiting construction consent from Marine Scotland, hopefully by the end of the year. Discussions continue with both developers, and, organised again by HIE, a second

delegation from WHA and local businesses visited the SSE Lowestoft O&M base recently on an information gathering exercise, which proved to be invaluable for all concerned. The job potential from hosting an O&M base in Wick with a twenty five year lease is exciting, with perhaps 200 high quality posts being created from just one of the developments, with spin-offs to many local businesses and training providers.

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

Stakeholders Workshop A full day workshop involving invited stakeholders was held recently in Wick to help us plan the way forward for the Harbour. Representatives attended from our Business Consultants Affric, HIE, THC, CNSRP, NDA, RNLI, Caithness C of C, Babcock, Arch Henderson, Harper Macleod, and Harbour Users. The results of a questionnaire issued to over 200 customers were thoroughly analysed and discussed and these confirmed our own plans for future development were on the right track. A public meeting the same evening drew nearly 40 people, all supportive of the plans outlined from the earlier discussions. We very much appreciate everyone's interest.

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman, WHA.

December 2013

Appendix D – Serco NorthLink Report

Caithness Transport Forum 6th December 2013

Serco NorthLink Ferries Update

Operational Update

There has been no weather or technical related cancellations of MV Hamnavoe since the last meeting of the forum. However, there have been some small delays to service due to weather & tidal conditions en route.

Our advanced booking figures are positive and our analysis continues to show a less than 5% abstraction in passenger, vehicle and freight volumes during the operation of the off-peak timetable.

2014

We have opened bookings for 2014 with the publication of timetables and fares for the year.

Passenger fares will increase by 2.7 per cent from 1 January, in line with the Consumer Price Index, and as agreed with the Scottish Government. Freight rates on the Stromness – Scrabster route will increase by 1.7 per cent.

The regular maintenance schedule means that MV Hamnavoe will be out of service from 6 to 23 January 2014.

While MV Hamnavoe is out of service, the Scrabster to Stromness route will be served by the freight vessel MV Helliard, which can carry up to 12 passengers. In addition, Pentland Ferries has confirmed that it has capacity for all potential NorthLink passengers. A courtesy bus will operate between the NorthLink and Pentland Ferries terminals at each location.

In addition, following customer feedback, we have made revisions to the Scrabster-Stromness route for the summer period of 2014 to meet perceived demand in late August. The changes mean that during August three daily return trips will now be possible through most of the month.

Full details of our 2014 timetables and fares can be found at www.northlinkferries.co.uk

Appendix E – First ScotRail Report

A minor timetable recast from 28 October has improved Far North timekeeping. From 8 December Culrain will become a request stop.

Issuing its Invitations to Tender on 19 November to the five bidders shortlisted for the new ScotRail franchise, Transport Scotland said that faster trains, better connections for passengers and an improved service for cyclists and disabled travellers who wish to travel more spontaneously than current arrangements allow will all feature when the new franchise begins. More comfortable and faster trains will connect Scotland's seven cities and services will be tailored to attract tourists to Scotland's scenic railways. Peak time ticket prices will be pegged to inflation for commuters, there will be continual innovation to improve Wi-Fi access for business and leisure travelers, and additional services will be laid on for major events. The successful bidder for the franchise will be required to work with Transport Scotland, regional transport partnerships and other public transport providers to drive towards seamless inter-modal travel for passengers throughout Scotland. The next franchisee will be required to drive up use of SMART across all ticket-types and play a full part in developing a smart ticketing scheme which could be used across all Scottish public transport. The new franchise will ensure that all those directly employed by ScotRail earned at least the Living Wage, every train will have at least two members of staff and the franchisee will be required to put in place apprenticeship schemes for more than 100 new recruits in customer service and engineering.

Transport Scotland have shortlisted five bidders for the new franchise, which is due to commence on 1 April 2015.