



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

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**Date:** 09/09/2014

**Time:** 11:30am

**Location:** Mackays Hotel, Wick

## Present

Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Bob Earnshaw	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership (CNSRP)
Christine Dodd	Highland Council
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Stan Towers	Stagecoach
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority

## 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:

James Wilkin	Association of Community Rail Partnerships
Coreen Campbell	Caithness Rural Transport
Ken Nicol	Dounreay
Iain Wilson	First ScotRail
Ivor Souter	Highland Council

Mark Norton	North Line Action Group
Jean Lipa	Thurso Community Council
Marion Milligan	Transport for Tongue

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 14.12.12

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were unanimously approved

## 3. Review of actions from last meeting

**CTF(2014)M002/A001** – *DRS to feed back to Chamber with list of companies talked to, discussions had and issues raised. Complete*

David Flear noted that he and Derrick Milnes had met with the Chair of DRS – it was felt that it was a positive meeting and the chair will be feeding back to the Forum in December.

Trudy Morris noted that the issue is that Georgemas is supposed to be a legacy for the area – for two years DRS have failed to explore opportunities to use the railhead.

David Flear felt there was a need to take this up again.

**CTF(2014)M003/A001** – *Chamber to get update from DRS on Georgemas railhead*

**CTF(2013)M002/A002** – *David Swanson to put Gordon Doull in touch with ScotRail. Complete*

**CTF(2014)M002/A003** – *Chamber to find out more about flood defences in the Highlands. Complete*

David Flear noted that Highland Council have produced a flood prevention plan, and queried the timetable for implementation and whether it would include Wick.

Gordon Doull noted that when the north river pier at Wick Harbour was reconstructed for coastal defence purposes, there was a similar plan to deal with the south pier – this appears to have fallen off the radar.

It was agreed that Eann Sinclair would take this matter up with Stuart Black.

**CTF(2014)M003/A002** – *Eann Sinclair to talk to Stuart Black regarding flood defence plans for Highlands*

Gordon noted that the harbour had recently extended the wave wall from the fire station up to the commercial quay, which should hopefully reduce flooding.

**CTF(2014)M002/A004** – *David Swanson to circulate letters from CTF to Keith Brown. Ongoing*

There was a brief discussion of the Berriedale Braes. Trudy Morris noted that URS were due to publish a report on this and Eann Sinclair noted there was a commitment to publish the draft road orders.

It was agreed that the matter would be taken up again following this.

**CTF(2014)M002/A005** – Chamber to contact BEAR Scotland regarding repairs following accident on Berriedale Braes. **Complete.**

This was done and the repairs have been progressed.

**CTF(2014)M002/A006** – David Swanson to feed back to Serco regarding continued non-attendance at meetings. **Complete**

This was done and Kris Bevan from Serco is in attendance

**CTF(2014)M002/A007** – Gail Ross to feed back to Highland Council regarding airport access road. **Complete**

This was done and the access road has been tidied up

**CTF(2014)M002/A008** – David Swanson to feed back to Eann Sinclair regarding progress on the Highland Council hangar at Wick JOG Airport. **Complete.**

Trudy Morris noted she received an update on this at the earlier meeting of the Wick John O'Groats Airport Consultative Committee – Highland Council are currently in discussions regarding both hangars at the airport.

## 4. Berriedale Braes

Matters regarding the Berriedale Braes were covered earlier in the meeting – see **3. Review of Actions**

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 Roads – Highland Council TECS

No representative from Highland Council TECS was present and no written update was provided.

Eann Sinclair noted that there has been some progress regarding the B876 – Highland Council Development & Infrastructure are currently trying to move the necessary upgrades into the capital programme, which would potentially line them up for ERDF funding. This would make a longer-term solution more likely. Eann noted that this issue is a priority for CNSRP.

It was felt that Highland Council TECS have poor engagement with the Forum – Bob Earnshaw noted that the Community Councils have a similar issue – and it was agreed that Eann would follow this up. Eann noted that CNSRP has good links with the Highland Council teams in Inverness and Dingwall.

**CTF(2014)M003/A003** – Eann Sinclair to contact Highland Council TECS regarding non-engagement

Gordon Doull queried whether it was possible to find details of the capital works programme. David Flear noted that this can be found in the relevant committee papers.

## 5.2 Roads – BEAR Scotland

No representative from BEAR Scotland was in attendance and no update was provided.

Bob Earnshaw noted that the A9 at Sir George's Street would be part of next year's programme. Billy Manson raised an issue with potholes on the roads – Trudy said that BEAR felt it was quicker to use the Freephone number to report minor issues.

It was agreed that the Chamber would feed back to BEAR with regards to engagement and to get an update on their winter works programme.

**CTF(2014)M003/A004** – *Chamber to feed back to BEAR regarding engagement with CTF and to get update on winter works programme*

## 5.3 Buses – Stagecoach

Stan Towers delivered a brief update on behalf of Stagecoach. They are currently looking to update the fleet in Caithness with new vehicles. Refurbishment works on the Thurso depot have been completed. He noted that when roadworks on St George's Street / Odrig Street take place, there is likely to be disruption to timetables.

Trudy asked whether they were talking to BEAR about this – Stan confirmed that Steve Walker was discussing this with BEAR.

Bob Earnshaw raised the issue of public access to the depot, noting that members of the public have to pass in front of the workshop doors in order to access the depot. Stan noted that they are waiting on the contractors to display a clear path for the public – i.e. using painted lines – but assured that there are processes in place to ensure public safety.

David Flear asked whether Stagecoach still own land at Janetstown.

**CTF(2014)M003/A005** – *David Swanson to clarify ownership of land at Janetstown with David Flear*

Stan noted that they have put in for some capital expenditure to refurbish the Wick yard next year.

Trudy Morris raised issues with out-of-date timetables in the Thurso area and the progress on a replacement bus shelter at Upper Burnside. Christine Dodd agreed to follow this up with Neil at the Highland Council.

Christine noted that timetables are available in the Wick Council offices, but that any suggestions for other locations would be welcome. Stan noted that they already put them in Post Offices and libraries, and that they have been updated on the website.

Stan noted that Stagecoach North East will go live on Twitter on 12<sup>th</sup> August, and will use this for updates on delays, etc.

Bob Earnshaw asked whether there was any progress on a replacement bus shelter at Upper Burnside. Christine agreed to follow this up with Neil as well.

**CTF(2014)M003/A006** – *Christine Dodd to contact Neil Young with regards to issues with bus timetables and replacement bus shelter on Dounreay road*

## 5.4 Sea – Scrabster Harbour

Sandy Mackie provided an update from Scrabster Harbour Trust. Of note:

- The peak season for ferries has passed – there has been some growth in traffic over the summer
- Scrabster will be attending the first meeting of the Northern Isles Ferry Forum in Aberdeen on 23<sup>rd</sup> September
- Fishing remains good – revenues are 40% up for the first four months of the year with comparable numbers for shellfish
- The cruise season ended in August. Scrabster had visits from eight cruise ships this year, with a total of over 2000 passengers
- They are in the early stages of a collaboration with Venture North and North Highland Initiative to promote the area to cruise traffic
- The new immigration controls raised at earlier meetings show no sign of being relaxed but the experience across Scottish ports has shown no operational problems as a result
- There has been a major growth in Oil & Gas traffic – up 76% on last year.
- They have shipped around 24,000 tons of timber through the port
- Eimskip are now providing a weekly service – which previously called at Aberdeen – from the Faroe Islands to Scrabster

Sandy noted that looking forward, they expect 2015 to be a busy year, particularly with the announcement that Scrabster will be facilitating delivery of raw materials for the initial stage of the MeyGen project. They will also take a shipment of turbines for the Strathy North wind farm and expect another increase in Oil & Gas traffic.

Peter Body enquired as to the current state of play regarding ASCO and NorSea Group's work at Scrabster. Sandy noted that NorSea are winning work and that BP are currently out to tender for quayside logistics, which can hopefully be provided by ASCO.

## 5.5 Sea – Wick Harbour

Gordon Doull delivered an update from Wick Harbour Authority – see Appendix A.

Gordon noted that they are hoping looking to support the installation of the casing for a meteorological mast for MORL.

David Flear enquired about the future plans for the slipway at the harbour. Gordon noted that the old slipway has been taken out of use due to its condition. They would like to bring it back into use but the business case is not there at present. They may look at it again once discussions regarding operations and maintenance for MORL and BOWL are further along.

Stan noted that the towheads for Subsea 7 come in through the harbour and are then transported by road, which can cause disruption – he asked if he could be kept in the loop to help plan for this.

**CTF(2014)M003/A007** – *David Swanson to forward contact details for Willie Watt to Stan Towers*

## 5.6 Sea – Serco NorthLink Ferries

Kris Bevan delivered an update from Serco NorthLink. Of note;

- Their peak timetable is from June – August and they are trying to target additional sailings
- Passenger numbers for June-August are up on last year – around 2000 more passengers and 1000 more commercial vehicles
- They have held the vessel a few times at Scrabster due to incidents on the A9 in an attempt to accommodate passengers
- They expect the timetable for 2015 to be similar to this year's
- Freight shipments were up 8.5% in August, partly due to another vessel being out of service
- They have extended complimentary use of the new facilities such as the Magnus Lounge to regular travellers
- The Hamnavoe B&B offer has been extended to 7 days per week
- The website has been updated to allow amendments to bookings and bookings for onboard services
- They are now offering discounts to school and sporting groups from both the islands and the mainland
- They recently hosted a City Connections networking event for Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce

Kris noted his concerns with the lack of integrated transport between Scrabster Harbour and Thurso rail station. David Flear enquired as to the possibility of a taxi rank at Scrabster – it was felt that taxis may be busy at certain times of day, due to school runs. Kris noted that they are looking at this issue internally.

David asked whether a free phone is available, to allow passengers to request taxis – Kris noted that passengers could use the terminal phone.

Stan said that he could look at combining times with trains and ferries.

**CTF(2014)M003/A008** – *Stan Towers to look at aligning bus times with those of trains and ferries*

Trudy said she would put Kris in touch with Venture North to discuss tourism transport needs in Caithness.

**CTF(2014)M003/A009** – *Trudy Morris to put Kris Bevan in touch with Venture North*

Trudy asked what plans were in place for the scheduled drydock of the Hamnavoe in 2016. Kris gave his assurances that a vessel would be available, the type depending on availability. Trudy noted that the vessel provided last time was not suitable – Kris noted that this had been taken on board.

David Flear noted that this might give confidence with regards to commercial traffic – Kris said that the Helliar is suitable for current needs

## 5.7 Air – Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd

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

- There has been growth on both Eastern Airways and Loganair routes
- They have had some issues with car parking space and are looking at this – they feel this gives a good demonstration of demand
- The current Chevron contract will run until December but there is confidence they will get more business
- NHV have built a new hangar at the airport, capable of holding two Super Pumas
- They are aware that there is an opening for the airport to support Scrabster with regards to crew changes
- They have plans to upgrade the apron in 2015 / 16 – this will be dependent on what contracts they have in this time
- As part of the Joint Warrior exercises, there will be some activity at Wick JOG Airport
- Air-conditioning is being installed in the departure lounge
- They expect to have new fire appliances at the end of September

Eann enquired as to any progress with GNSS – William noted that the design and build phase is done, but progress is now dependent on CAA approval. Trudy noted that a commitment from the airlines is further away. William said the key thing is that investment is being made in the airport.

David Flear noted that Eastern Airways are flying older planes and that there is some difficulty finding suitably-sized replacements – he wondered if there was any progress on this. William noted that there hasn’t been any progress at the moment – he noted that there is some regulatory change, with the introduction of European safe skies legislation.

Gordon noted that BOWL & MORL choosing to use Wick Harbour was partly influenced by the availability of Wick JOG Airport and its facilities.

David Flear asked whether Chevron are bringing their own fuel in – William said this was not the case.

## 5.8 Rail – First ScotRail

No representative from ScotRail was present – a written update was provided (see Appendix B)

Bob Earnshaw noted that the train from Wick has been cancelled a few times, and Christine Dodd raised that the 4pm service was often late. It was agreed that David Swanson would feed back to ScotRail on this matter.

**CTF(2014)M003/A010** – *David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding cancellations / delays on Far North Line*

There was some brief discussion regarding wi-fi provision on Stagecoach buses – Stan noted that they are looking into this and hope to trial it soon.

## 6. Any Other Business

David Flear asked if Roger Saxon could give an update on the Highland Council's capital programme for roads – Roger said he could get that information.

**CTF(2014)M003/A011** – *Roger Saxon to provide David Swanson with update on Highland Council capital programme*

Trudy Morris thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

## 7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 5<sup>th</sup> December at Naver Business Centre, Thurso.

## 8. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

**CTF(2014)M002/A004** – *David Swanson to circulate letters from CTF to Keith Brown.*

## 9. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2014)M003/A001** – *Chamber to get update from DRS on Georgemas railhead*

**CTF(2014)M003/A002** – *Eann Sinclair to talk to Stuart Black regarding flood defence plans for Highlands*

**CTF(2014)M003/A003** – *Eann Sinclair to contact Highland Council TECS regarding non-engagement*

**CTF(2014)M003/A004** – *Chamber to feed back to BEAR regarding engagement with CTF and to get update on winter works programme*

**CTF(2014)M003/A005** – *David Swanson to clarify ownership of land at Janetstown with David Flear*

**CTF(2014)M003/A006** – *Christine Dodd to contact Neil Young with regards to issues with bus timetables and replacement bus shelter on Dounreay road*

**CTF(2014)M003/A007** – *David Swanson to forward contact details for Willie Watt to Stan Towers*

**CTF(2014)M003/A008** – *Stan Towers to look at aligning bus times with those of trains and ferries*

**CTF(2014)M003/A009** – *Trudy Morris to put Kris Bevan in touch with Venture North*

**CTF(2014)M003/A010** – *David Swanson to feed back to ScotRail regarding cancellations / delays on Far North Line*

## Appendix A – WHA Report for CTF 2014-09-09

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**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 large tonnages of timber from site clearances for local windfarms at Burn of Whilk and Stroupster is continuing on a weekly basis, and is likely to last for several months. The cargoes are destined for Ghent in Belgium or Wismar in Germany, dependent on the quality of the timber.

**Onshore Windfarms:** Eight shipments of turbines from Germany and Portugal for Stroupster, have been handled since June and are now complete. Substantial storage was required on WHA quays and at the old Skitten Airfield. Shipments for Burn of Whilk Windfarm are expected later this year.

**Offshore Windfarms:** The two major offshore windfarms currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick (BOWL and MORL) have been awarded construction consent from Marine Scotland. WHA have recently signed MOU's with both Developers, with Beatrice declaring Wick to be their chosen port for O&M. We still await Moray Offshore's final choice of port, and that is expected soon. Both are due to make their 'Final Investment Decisions' in December '15/January '16. Discussions are ongoing with both Developers on the required port infrastructure. Several survey vessels are now involved in work on the subsea HVDC connector from Wick to the Moray coast, making sporadic 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 2014/15 should continue this activity.

**Marina** Again, fully booked by local vessels, with a waiting list for permanent berths. The visitor number to end of August was 297, in line with previous years, but vessels are now staying for several nights, increasing revenue for WHA and local businesses.

**Infrastructure** Gunns, Lybster, Ltd successfully completed the new Heavy Lift Areas on Commercial Quay 1 at the end of June, and they are now fully operational. £250k has been awarded from the NDA for dredging to the River Basin and approaches, and our Engineers have now awarded a Dredging Contract for an imminent start.

**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.  
September 2014

## Appendix B – ScotRail Report for CTF 2014-09-09

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Club 55 runs from 1 October to 30 November.

Class 158 trains on Caithness services are now enabled for free mobile wifi

Accessing free wifi at Wick station is scheduled by the end of November as the latest as part of our phase two project on wifi enablement at stations. In terms of Thurso, this will be a decision for the next franchise.

New ticket gates at Inverness improve customer security while reducing ticketless travel.

DRAFT