



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

**Date:** 04/09/2015

**Time:** 11:00am

**Location:** Wick Town Hall

## **Present**

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Derrick Milnes	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Christine Dodd	Highland Council
Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Gillian Coghill	Highland Council
Gail Ross	Highland Council
Neil Macdonald	Highland Council
Roger Saxon	Highland Council
Mark Stuart	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Mark Norton	North Rail Line Action Group
Lindley Kirkpatrick	ScotRail Alliance
Iain Wilson	ScotRail Alliance
Howard Little	Stagecoach North Scotland
Steve Walker	Stagecoach North Scotland
Bob Earnshaw	Thurso Community Council

Carl Rosie	UK Parliament
Paul Monaghan MP	UK Parliament
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:

Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Ken Nicol	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group (Derrick Milnes deputising)
Iain Moncrieff	Highland Council
Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
William Sutherland	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Frank Roach	HITRANS
Neil MacRae	HITRANS
Ranald Robertson	HITRANS
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Rob Gibson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Alastair Somerville	Transport Scotland

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 29.05.2015

2.1 Iain Wilson requested that two minor amendments be made to sections 5.1.10 and 5.1.15, as follows:

5.1.10 Change “knock-on effect on train performance” to “should benefit performance”

5.1.15 Change “reducing line speed” to “increasing line speed”

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

### 3. Review of actions from last meeting

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

Trudy confirmed that the Chamber had arranged a meeting with Ashley Gould, Head of Procurement at Highland Council and that a number of actions are being taken forward from this.

She noted that if anyone was interested in further information on the meeting, they could contact the Chamber.

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

Trudy noted that she had written to BEAR and Transport Scotland regarding lack of engagement and confirmed that the Chamber has had feedback from BEAR with regards to the A9 – an update was provided for the current meeting (Appendix B) and assurances given that they will try to attend future meetings.

Trudy noted that discussions have been held with the Council regarding the availability of videoconferencing facilities and it has been confirmed that these will be available for future meetings.

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

Gail Ross noted that this had been discussed and it was felt that budget constraints prevented Highland Council from providing any additional funding.

Trudy noted that the Highland Council had provided facilities and catering for the current meeting.

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

ScotRail confirmed that they would not contribute to Rail Users Group, but that they would be working to engage with rail users in other ways.

Iain Wilson delivered an update on this, noting that the ScotRail Alliance has an obligation to hold Alliance Roadshows – the proposal is that these would be once-yearly regional rail forums to which all stakeholders are invited. It was felt that hosting a group solely in Caithness would not be sustainable given the proposal for regional rail forums.

Trudy enquired as to where the forums would be hosted – Iain noted that this was a matter for the Regional Transport Partnerships to decide. Trudy noted her feeling that this was unlikely to be Caithness – Iain noted that this could be raised at the first meeting.

Iain noted that the ScotRail Alliance is engaging with the area through the Caithness Transport Forum – Trudy noted the importance of engaging with the public also.

Mark Norton queried the geographical scope of the forums – Iain confirmed that this would be the HITRANS area.

Mike Lunan queried the nature of the contribution requested from ScotRail, noting that one of the strengths of Rail User Groups is their financial independence from the operator. Trudy confirmed that a financial contribution was requested, and noted that the plan was to run the group on the same model as the Caithness Bus Users Group, which receives a financial contribution from Stagecoach. The aim was to facilitate a meeting to allow transport users to put their concerns direct to the transport provider.

Mike felt that he would not accept money from the railway for Friends of the Far North Line and that independence is vital in allowing them to criticise the operator – Trudy noted that this is a valid point, but that a lot of criticism is put forward at the Bus Users Group.

Trudy asked Iain to feed back once he knows where the first Alliance Roadshow in the region will be held.

- 3.5 **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. Complete*

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

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

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

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

Covered as part of ScotRail's update.

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

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

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

Trudy noted that feedback was provided but that the question being asked related more to provision of trolley services on the earliest train out of Wick rather than consistency of trolley services.

Iain noted that it is rare for ScotRail not to provide catering and that, in the event of a staff absence at Wick they would send staff from Inverness to provide cover. As of end July, stock is now held at Wick. He explained that this meant ScotRail are now covering all trains to and from Wick, as far as is possible, and that they are looking to employ additional catering staff to facilitate this – one has been hired but they are still looking to hire another.

Trudy noted the importance of the trolley service, given the length of the journey – Iain again noted the staffing issues.

Eann Sinclair asked where the vacancy was advertised – Iain confirmed that it was with a recruitment agency. A number of those present noted they were not aware of the vacancy. It was agreed that Iain would provide details of the vacancy to David Swanson for circulation.

**CTF(2015)M003/A001 – Iain Wilson to provide details of Wick vacancy to David Swanson for circulation.**

Christine Dodd asked that if staff were not available for the southbound journey, whether a trolley could be transferred from the northbound service.

Mark Norton inquired as the possible provision of automated vending machines.

It was agreed that Iain would look at contingency measures if no trolley service is available.

**CTF(2015)M003/A002 – Iain Wilson to look at contingency measures if no trolley service available on Wick-Inverness route**

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

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned.

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

Trudy noted that Dominic no longer works with Scottish Chambers, but that this action is being taken forward through discussions with Highland Council and CNSRP.

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

Covered in the Highland Council Community Services update (Appendix A)

- 3.13 **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. Complete*

Covered in the Highland Council Community Services update (Appendix A)

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

Gillian Coghill noted that similar issues occur in Reay and that the local mother and toddler group had been in touch with Highland Council to ask if a footbridge can be provided for a section of road which is felt to be a particular danger. Trudy asked if Gillian was taking this up with Highland Council – Gillian noted that she has taken it up with Iain Moncrieff.

Paul Monaghan noted that he had come across this issue before and that the Forestry Commission has extensive procedures for tracing and dealing with speeding haulage vehicles. Trudy queried with Gillian whether the issue is timber haulage – Gillian noted that it is all heavy traffic.

Roger Saxon noted that Reay currently has a 40mph limit and suggested that Highland Council could look at implementing a 30mph limit. He further noted that Scottish Government and Highland Council policy is to eventually have 20mph zones in place throughout residential areas.

Bob Earnshaw confirmed that there has been a significant increase in heavy traffic through Reay over the last couple of years and that there is local concern about this.

Mike Lunan suggested that Police Scotland be invited to monitor the area and deal with those travelling too fast – Gillian felt that this would be ineffective unless the Police were in unmarked cars.

It was noted that Halkirk has similar problems to Reay with heavy traffic.

Gillian raised an issue with Fastracs travelling through villages at speed and felt the issue of age limits for driving Fastracs, as opposed to other agricultural vehicles, needed to be raised on a nationwide level.

Mark Norton suggested that the Highland Council look at implementing traffic calming measures in Reay.

It was agreed that the Chamber and the Councillors present should feed back to Iain Moncrieff on these issues.

**CTF(2015)M003/A003** – Chamber and Councillors to take up issues with large vehicles speeding through Reay with Iain Moncrieff

- 3.15 **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. **Complete**

Trudy confirmed that this had been actioned and the position advertised – Steve noted that the position had now been filled by a local candidate.

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

Trudy confirmed that this information was provided and circulated to the Forum.

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

Trudy noted that there had still been no feedback regarding this and that it is getting near to the next scheduled dry docking. She noted that the Chamber would continue to seek an answer on this.

## 4. Matters arising

- 4.1 There were no matters arising

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 The ScotRail Alliance

- 5.1.1 Iain Wilson delivered an update on behalf of the ScotRail Alliance.
- 5.1.2 The ScotRail Alliance has begun a £14 million refurbishment of the Class 158s. The first of the refurbished units would be ready in time for the opening of the Borders Railway, and the remainder would be completed at a rate of one per month, with all being completed by April 2018. The first 10 units for the Far North Line are expected to be operating on the route by next summer.

5.1.3 The new Club 50 scheme starts on September 14th and free registration has been extended until then – there have been more than 70,000 sign ups to date. Iain noted that while the Club 55 offer of £19 anywhere in Scotland would not be retained there would be other promotions within Club 50 including a launch offer of £10 return.

5.1.4 Running time statistics were as follows:

- PPM
  - Inverness-Wick – 82.9%
  - Inverness-Kyle – 88%
  - Combined average – 84.5%
  - During first 70 days of new timetable – 79%
- Cancellations in the last 40 days
  - Inverness-Wick – 1.5%
  - Inverness-Kyle – 0.3%
  - Combined average – 1.1%
  - During first 70 days of new timetable – 5%

Iain noted that this improvement came despite a bad summer and issues with drivers. He also noted that ScotRail Alliance is increasing train crew at all rural depots – as an interim measure at Wick they have seconded an additional crew member. Mike Lunan queried if the seconded crew member was a driver – Iain noted he would have to check this.

5.1.5 Progress continues with work on the Radio Electronic Token Block signalling system and is due for completion by end 2015. Work is also ongoing on the track improvements identified at the last meeting:

- Speed improvement at Nigg has now been delivered.
- Work is currently taking place on further improvements at Georgemas, Foulis, Lairg, Balmacara, Brora and Rogart

Iain stressed that these improvements are more about improving the robustness of the timetable, rather than delivering journey time improvements.

5.1.6 Mark Norton queried whether there would be any commitment to journey time reduction during the length of the franchise, and noted that he has been in contact with Transport Scotland who have stated that work is in progress to identify journey time improvements on rural rail lines.

- 5.1.7 Iain noted that he could not answer that at this stage but that Scottish Government is keen on both journey time reduction and robustness. Mark noted that journey time reduction has been identified as a key priority for the Far North Line by local rail users.
- 5.1.8 Paul Monaghan asked if there were targets in the franchise agreement relating to journey time reduction – Iain noted that he could not answer that at this moment. It was agreed that Iain would look into this and report back.

**CTF(2015)M003/A004** – *Iain Wilson to find out about possible performance targets for journey time reduction in ScotRail franchise agreement*

- 5.1.9 Lindley Kirkpatrick delivered a brief update with regards to Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs).
- 5.1.10 Lindley noted that there is a commitment within the ScotRail Franchise Agreement to form Community Rail Partnerships, which offer another form of engagement with communities across Scotland. At this time there are seven across the network and there has been some interest in a CRP on the Far North Line. Lindley noted that a CRP on the line would bring additional engagement opportunities and promotion of the line.
- 5.1.11 Mark Norton noted that he had previously been in contact with James Wilkin of ACoRP regarding this. He further noted that, with regards to the regional rail forums, HITRANS covers one of the largest geographic areas of any regional transport partnership, and that this includes a variety of users and groups with divergent priorities. He noted his concern that credence needs to be given to the priorities of rail users in Caithness.
- 5.1.12 Iain Wilson noted that the arrangement of the rail forums will be based around the geographical areas of the regional transport partnerships. He explained that ScotRail meet with the RTPs four times a year, and that one of these four meetings with each RTP will act as a rail forum, and that ScotRail see this as increasing engagement with other stakeholders.
- 5.1.13 Trudy queried the role of a CRP and asked who would run it.
- 5.1.14 Lindley explained that the role of a CRP is defined by the needs of the communities it serves. He noted that it could be the case that the length of the Far North Line is too big to be served by a single CRP, as CRPs need to be run by communities with shared interests. Lindley further explained that CRPs promote the use of the line, interaction and engagement between the railway and the community. He emphasised that the specifics of this are defined by the needs of the community.

- 5.1.15 Trudy enquired as to how CRPs are funded.
- 5.1.16 Lindley explained that ScotRail provide initial funding of up to £20,000 per year for the first two years, followed by £10,000 a year for the duration of the franchise. He noted that they would expect other funding sources to be identified in order to achieve all the expected impacts of a CRP.
- 5.1.17 With regards to Mark's earlier point on James Wilkin, Lindley noted that James had previously worked for the Association of Community Partnerships (ACoRP) and is not currently working for ScotRail.
- 5.1.18 Eann Sinclair asked if there were other examples of CRPs currently operating in the Highlands – Lindley noted that the West Highland Line and Highland Main Line are both served by CRPs.
- 5.1.19 Eann noted his concerns with splitting the line up into multiple CRPs – Lindley noted that the challenge is to identify the best solution for the line and the community and that this may not be a CRP, but that this is a tool that is available to the community.
- 5.1.20 Mike Lunan supported Eann's concerns, noting that a CRP not including the whole of the Far North Line could cause issues and create division – for example with one CRP in Thurso and one in Dingwall working at odds with each other. He felt that the solution is to put together a Far North Line CRP involving all parties.
- 5.1.21 Mark Norton said he understood the need to avoid conflict but reiterated his concern that the length of the line and the divergent needs of communities along it is an issue.
- 5.1.22 It was agreed that Mike Lunan & Mark Norton would work together to look at the feasibility of a Far North Line CRP.

**CTF(2015)M003/A005** – *Mike Lunan and Mark Norton to discuss possibility of a Far North Line CRP and report back findings*

- 5.1.23 Mike Lunan distributed some papers on recent work carried out by Friends of the Far North Line (CTF(2015)M003-DOC001 – CTF(2015)M003-DOC005) on station visits and the possibility of reinstating the Lentrane Loop – he gave his apologies to Iain Wilson for failing to send him advance copies. He noted his disappointment that the paper on the Lentrane Loop (CTF(2015)M003-DOC005) was not raised at a recent Highland Council meeting.

- 5.1.24 Trudy asked whether Mike was looking for feedback on the Lentrán Loop proposal – Mike noted that he would like the Forum to be aware of it and to get behind the suggestion. With regards to the papers on station visits, these are addressed more to the rail industry and were distributed for the information of the Forum.

## 5.2 Direct Rail Services

- 5.2.1 There was no update from Direct Rail Services – the Chamber agreed to liaise with DRS to get an update

**CTF(2015)M003/A006** – *Chamber to get update from DRS on progress of developments at Georgemas*

## 5.3 Berriedale Braes

- 5.3.1 Trudy raised recent press coverage of Berriedale relating to funding and objections, and noted that Rhoda Grant had raised the issue in the Scottish Parliament. She noted that she had spoken to Fergus Ewing recently and that he was supportive of the project. The aim was to get the funding in place in time for the next Spending Review.
- 5.3.2 Trudy noted that while recent reports have mentioned several objections to the project, Transport Scotland have confirmed that only one objection is outstanding. The current situation is that the case is now with the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) to arrange a Public Local Inquiry (PLI). Transport Scotland anticipate that the PLI process will take 12-18 months.
- 5.3.3 Derrick Milnes suggested that the Freedom of Information Act could be used to discover the nature of the objection and who raised it, in order to try and resolve the issue.
- 5.3.4 Roger Saxon enquired whether there was any way to avoid a PLI, noting that the Inverness West Link project had a large number of objections and yet went forward without a PLI.
- 5.3.5 Willie Mackay noted that, as far as he is aware, Transport Scotland are in the process of attempting to deal with the objection.
- 5.3.6 Trudy asked how the Forum felt this issue should be taken forward and there was some discussion on the matter. It was felt that it was important to focus on identifying the nature of the issued and attempting to resolve it in a way that avoids antagonism. Trudy suggested that the Forum take the approach of offering to facilitate and mediate meetings between affected parties. Gail Ross agreed to take this forward, and Paul Monaghan noted that he would be happy to assist.

**CTF(2015)M003/A007** – *Gail Ross to investigate issues with objection at Berriedale and look at how to resolve*

## 5.4 Highland Council

- 5.4.1 A written update was provided by Iain Moncrieff (Appendix A).
- 5.4.2 Gillian Coghill cautioned that care needs to be taken over the design of works at the Castlegreen Road junction. She raised the previous issues with the traffic island in Wick, noting that the end result was a cost to the Council both to install and remove the work. She further noted her feeling that Safer Routes to Schools needs to be delivered locally.
- 5.4.3 Donnie Mackay noted that there was a meeting in Thurso regarding Safer Routes to Schools and that this would have been a good time to raise concerns. There was some discussion of this matter amongst the Councillors present. Gillian highlighted the importance of local input and considering the needs of all road users.
- 5.4.4 Bob Earnshaw noted that a local meeting was held in Thurso with a number of affected groups and that this was a positive. He further noted that with regards to the recent sale by Tesco of the mart site in Thurso, Thurso Community Council has been in touch with interested parties about the possibility of expanding the parking at Thurso Rail Station. He felt that the Safer Routes to Schools team do listen to local groups. Gillian felt that this was not the case.
- 5.4.5 Willie Mackay noted his disappointment that works at Keiss appear to have been delayed again – it was agreed that Willie would take this matter up with Iain Moncrieff.

**CTF(2015)M003/A008** – *Willie Mackay to take up lack of progress on Keiss development with Iain Moncrieff*

- 5.4.7 Trudy raised recent reports in the local press regarding an issue with signage for John O’Groats – Gillian noted that this had been raised with the Council.

## 5.5 BEAR Scotland

- 5.5.1 A written update was provided by BEAR Scotland and Transport Scotland (Appendix B).
- 5.5.2 Trudy Morris noted that BEAR have committed to engaging with the Forum and noted earlier discussions on videoconferencing.
- 5.5.3 It was noted that BEAR have also been engaging with Highland Council and the general feeling was positive for future engagement.

## 5.6 Stagecoach

- 5.6.1 Steve Walker delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland.
- 5.6.2 Following a recent retendering of Highland Council's contracts in Sutherland, Stagecoach have lost some school routes and, as a result, have had to look at the impact on the rest of the bus network in the area.

On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September, they will begin the process of consultation with the Council on deregistering the following services:

- 76, Wick Town Service
- X99, Thurso to Inverness
  - 13:30 southbound
  - 17:40 northbound

With regards to the 17:40, Steve noted that this will operate out of Inverness and will run as far as Brora.

- 5.6.3 Gail Ross asked what this leaves as the latest southbound service – it was confirmed that the last southbound service will be 11:30.
- 5.6.4 Mike Lunan asked for clarification that these changes were the result of losing two school contracts. Steve confirmed that this is the case, noting that Highland Council and DSRL contracts allow them to cover the cost of running marginal routes, and that if these contracts are lost, the commercial routes suffer. He noted that the same issue was seen on Skye, where Stagecoach lost a number of school contracts and were therefore unable to provide the same number of buses to the local network.
- 5.6.7 Mark Norton enquired as to the impact on rural services. Steve noted that the only changes planned at this moment in time are those discussed and that the next round of tendering for Highland Council contracts is in 2017
- 5.6.8 Christine Dodd noted that consultation on the next round of tendering will begin with members next month, with the bidding taking place in 2016. She noted that the services discussed by Steve above are commercial routes.
- 5.6.9 Christine asked whether, if the 76 service is lost, there will be no remaining service to Staxigoe – Steve confirmed that this is the case. Christine noted that this left the only services from Wick either to Thurso or southbound to Dunbeath.
- 5.6.10 Steve explained that where there is a social need for a service but usage does not cover the cost of running it, Highland Council can opt to subsidise that service. He noted that a loss is made on most commercial services in Caithness – the only services which stand up commercially are the majority of X99 services.
- 5.6.11 Trudy asked what would happen if, in 2017, Stagecoach lost more Highland Council contracts – Steve noted that they probably wouldn't operate in the area.

- 5.6.12 There was some discussion as to which routes would be affected and whether this was only during the winter.
- 5.6.13 Steve noted that the consultation process has been started and the changes will come in as of 23<sup>rd</sup> November. With regards to winter vs. summer timetables, he noted that in summer, Stagecoach would likely move the 11:40 to 13:30 to connect with the ferry and restore the later journey.
- 5.6.14 Trudy asked if Steve could provide statistics for the 76 service and affected X99 services – Steve confirmed that he could provide these.
- 5.6.15 Roger Saxon enquired as to whether Stagecoach could give details on where passengers embarked and disembarked – Steve noted that this information is commercially sensitive but, as these services are being deregistered, he could share this information.

**CTF(2015)M003/A009** – *Steve Walker to provide passenger stats for 76 and 13:30 / 16:40 / 17:40 X99 services*

- 5.6.16 Paul Monaghan asked for clarification on the meaning of deregistration and whether Stagecoach were contracted to deliver these services – Steve confirmed that the services will be cancelled and that these are commercial services.
- 5.6.17 Bob Earnshaw noted that it would need to be taken up with the Council if these services are to be retained. Gail Ross noted that Highland Council is saving money in Sutherland but losing services in Caithness and queried how this could be the case. Steve reiterated that Stagecoach use income from passenger revenue, Dounreay contracts and Council subsidies to provide the best network they can, and that if an element of that is lost then they have to cut costs.
- 5.6.18 Christine Dodd asked if Stagecoach are only planning changes in Caithness – Steve noted that they are looking at changes in Inverness, but for a different reason.
- 5.6.19 Trudy asked why the 76 service is being deregistered – Steve noted that this is one of the poorer performing marginal service. Mike Lunan enquired if there would be any town service if this is lost – Steve confirmed that there would not.
- 5.6.20 Mike Lunan and Mark Norton both noted that they feel this is unacceptable.
- 5.6.21 Donnie Mackay noted his surprise that Caithness services are being affected by changes in Sutherland.
- 5.6.22 Donnie Mackay raised an issue with maintenance of buses, and related a recent instance where a bus from Inverness to Wick broke down several times. He noted that he had raised the issue of the age of buses at the previous meeting and felt that Stagecoach needed to take action on this.

- 5.6.23 Steve noted that the key issue for Stagecoach was securing an engineering manager – this has now been done and he hopes to see an improvement in quality soon.
- 5.6.24 Donnie reiterated his point about the age of buses and there was some discussion of the age profile of buses in Caithness. Steve noted that the average age of the fleet has dropped by about 3.5 years, that the buses used on frontline services are all less than 10 years old, and that those used for the X99 and 82 services were bought brand new for Caithness around three years ago.
- 5.6.25 Christine Dodd noted that although the buses were bought for these routes, the newer buses are not always used. Steve explained that, for some journeys on the X99, the buses are used on other routes further south before returning. He also noted that vehicles need to go in for periodic maintenance and must be temporarily replaced on the route by other vehicles.
- 5.6.26 Gillian Coghill noted that the proposed changes to the X99 will disadvantage a number of people, for example those who rely on buses to get to appointments at Raigmore. She felt that Stagecoach were not considering the needs of people living in Caithness and were making a money-led decision.
- 5.6.27 Roger Saxon asked whether Stagecoach would consider running the last bus later. Steve noted that they had looked at delaying the 16:40 but that the numbers for people using the 16:40 to travel to Wick and Thurso are much higher than for the 17:40. He noted that he would have no issue delaying the 16:40 to 17:40, but felt that it would inconvenience more people from the area.
- 5.6.28 Eann Sinclair asked whether the Caithness Bus Users Group could assist in seeking the views of local bus users and Paul Monaghan noted that NHS Highland should be brought into these discussions. It was agreed that the Chamber would take both of these matters forward.

**CTF(2015)M003/A010** – Chamber to put together survey seeking passenger preferences on 16:40 vs. 17:40 X99 service

**CTF(2015)M003/A011** – Chamber to discuss with NHS possible issues with withdrawal of 13:30 / 17:40 X99 service

- 5.6.29 With regards to the 76 service, Christine Dodd asked whether it would be possible to retain some limited service. Steve agreed to look into this.

**CTF(2015)M003/A012** – Steve Walker to liaise with Highland Council on possible running of limited 76 service

Trudy asked if, when providing statistics, Steve could show at what times people use the service. Steve agreed to do this.

- 5.6.30 Billy Manson asked whether the 76 service is subsidised – Steve noted that this is not the case. Billy felt that Highland Council should look at this.
- 5.6.31 Willie Mackay noted that the X99s are good buses. He felt that NHS Highland do try to fit appointments in before 2pm for people travelling from Caithness. There was general disagreement that this was the case. Willie further noted that Stagecoach have made significant investment into Thurso.
- 5.6.32 Christine Dodd noted that there would be discussions shortly with Highland Council members on retendering and that this would be followed by a public consultation – she felt that this would be a good opportunity to ask what services people in Caithness want and need.
- 5.6.33 Gail Ross noted that, when retendering, the Council need to ask Stagecoach whether other commercial routes will be at risk if they don't win Council contracts. Steve noted that they do try to provide this information.

## 5.7 Wick Harbour Authority

- 5.7.1 Gordon Doull delivered an update on behalf of Wick Harbour Authority (Appendix C). In addition to the written update, Gordon noted the following:
- Numbers at the marina were also impacted by the closure of the Caledonian Canal
  - They are seeking funding for a storm protection gate which will ensure 24/7 acceptable conditions
  - With regards to issues with dredging and Marine Protected Areas, the Western Isles are fighting proposed MPAs on the West Coast but Gordon noted that it can be difficult to stop these things progressing.
- 5.7.2 With regards to an expected pick up in Subsea 7 activity, Mark Norton enquired whether this will result in a resumption of rail freight to Georgemas Junction. Gordon noted that he can't speak for Subsea 7 but that he imagined this would be the case.
- 5.7.3 Paul Monaghan inquired as to the tonnage of dredged material and how often dredging needs to be carried out. Gordon noted that there would be around 20-30,000 tonnes, and that the last time dredging was carried out was around 15 years ago.
- 5.7.4 With regards to the devolution of Crown Estate assets, Roger Saxon noted his hope that this will initially be devolved to councils and then further from there. Gordon noted that the concern is fragmentation, with different councils taking different approaches.

## 5.8 Scrabster Harbour Trust

- 5.8.1 A written update was provided by Scrabster Harbour Trust (Appendix D)

## 5.9 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.9.1 No attendee was present from Serco NorthLink Ferries. A written update was provided following the meeting (Appendix E).

## 5.10 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.10.1 Mark Stuart delivered an update on behalf of Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd and Wick John O’Groats Airport.
- 5.10.2 Passenger numbers for the airport are down 4.4% year-to-date – this is in part down to less oil and gas chartered flights. Ongoing issues in the oil and gas industry have also impacted on scheduled flights. Passenger numbers are, however, still up compared to 3-4 years ago.
- 5.10.3 Work is currently taking place on the apron, and HIAL are working with contractors to minimise disruption as a result of this. The work should be completed by the end of September 2015. The hangar has also been reclad and HIAL are seeking sponsors for the end of the hangar.
- 5.10.4 With regards to previous discussions on navigational aids, procedures for GNSS are currently going through CAA approval, and will hopefully be live in February or March 2016. This should help reduce the decision height for aircraft which have the correct equipment to use these procedures, which should help with issues with low cloud
- 5.10.5 Work is also being done to upgrade the runway shoulders and there is a new voice controller command system going into the Air Traffic Control tower.

## 6. Press Communications

- 6.1 It was felt that communications should highlight the positive news stories from the meeting – progress on works at Wick John O’Groats Airport, that discussions regarding a Community Rail Partnership have been started, that rail performance has improved and that there is investment ongoing in the Far North Line.
- 6.2 With regards to Berriedale, the Forum should express its hopes that the outstanding objection will be resolved positively. With regards to Stagecoach service changes, the Forum is exploring options and hopes for a positive resolution.

## 7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Paul Monaghan noted that he receives a significant amount of mail regarding the importance of transport integration to the local community. Trudy noted that this is a focus for the Forum, and Steve Walker noted that Stagecoach had undertaken an exercise a few years ago to look at integration with other forms of transport.
- 7.2 Mark Norton noted that he had recently attended a Direct Rail Services open day and was very impressed. He also wished to commend Mike Lunan on his update.

## 8. Date of the next meeting

- 8.1 To be confirmed

## 9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

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

## 10. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2015)M003/A001** – Iain Wilson to provide details of Wick vacancy to David Swanson for circulation

**CTF(2015)M003/A002** – Iain Wilson to look at contingency measures if no trolley service available on Wick-Inverness route

**CTF(2015)M003/A003** – Chamber and Councillors to take up issues with large vehicles speeding through Reay with Iain Moncrieff

**CTF(2015)M003/A004** – Iain Wilson to find out about possible performance targets for journey time reduction in ScotRail franchise agreement

**CTF(2015)M003/A005** – Mike Lunan and Mark Norton to discuss possibility of a Far North Line CRP and report back findings

**CTF(2015)M003/A006** – Chamber to get update from DRS on progress of developments at Georgemas

**CTF(2015)M003/A007** – Gail Ross to investigate issues with objection at Berriedale and look at how to resolve

**CTF(2015)M003/A008** – *Willie Mackay to take up lack of progress on Keiss development with Iain Moncrieff*

**CTF(2015)M003/A009** – *Steve Walker to provide passenger stats for 76 and 13:30 / 16:40 / 17:40 X99 services*

**CTF(2015)M003/A010** – *Chamber to put together survey seeking passenger preferences on 16:40 vs. 17:40 X99 service*

**CTF(2015)M003/A011** – *Chamber to discuss with NHS possible issues with withdrawal of 13:30 / 17:40 X99 service*

**CTF(2015)M003/A012** – *Steve Walker to liaise with Highland Council on possible running of limited 76 service*

# Appendix A – Highland Council Community Services

## My area – South & East Caithness:

- Westerdale Rd Remedial Works - delayed to labour resources. May try to combine Wick and Thurso to form a third squad.
- Noss Primary School 20mph Order. - now started and will shortly be issued for consultation.
- Noss Primary School Works - nearing completion with the site accesses and some signage remaining.
- Wick Campus - one way order at Seathforth Terrace - not started yet.
- Wick Campus - traffic island at Station Rd. Now designing this myself with consultation with both Caravan Site and Community Council. Traffic calming feature will be spray painted onto road to allow for more widespread comment. Traffic calming likely to consist of a low flat speed table allowing 2 way flow which reduces speed, allows pedestrians to cross on the desire line but allows camper vans access to and from the lane without reducing the available road width.
- A99 Keiss Widening - likely to restart in Sep/Oct
- B876 Killimster Moss - no further movement from my colleagues in Design and Infrastructure.
- Haster Bridge – Insurance company refusing to pay full amount. Negotiations ongoing.
- Lyth Bridge – unable to recover damage costs & waiting for DLO to resource repairs

## Stuart's Area- North Coast

Miller Academy - Castelgreen Rd junction. Pedestrian build outs. SRTS design team about to consult on proposal – complicated and not easily solved.

Thurso Disabled Parking Order Update overdue, no progress due to lack of resources

Shore St One Way Order No progress due to lack of resources

Janet St Parking Restrictions SRTS design team to incorporate in proposed scheme, hoping to take to committee in November if design can begin earlier.

Murkle Bridge Works issued, delayed due to lack of resources.

Fors Bridge Don't know what the issue is here

Old Reay Bridge Community Council to try and progress footbridge. Additional road signage installed June 2015

Both Areas:

Surface dressing appears to be holding well but need to wait till after the winter.

# Appendix B – BEAR Scotland / Transport Scotland

## **Planned works in Caithness to end of 2015**

- A9 Latheron to Wick (Various locations) – road stud replacement, November 2015. Traffic management - Stop/Go boards.
- A9 Achavanich to Tacher – ditching, November 2015. Traffic management - Traffic Signals.

## **Road Safety Team Investigations and Works in Caithness 2014/15**

- A99 Latheron to Wick – signing review.
- A9 Latheron to Thurso – investigation, design and construction.

## **Road Safety Team Investigations and Works on the A9 north of Inverness 2015/16**

- A9 Tain north – road marking works following road safety study.
- A9 junction B9161 Munloch – investigation, design and construction.
- A9 Dalmore junction – investigation, design and construction.

## **Other issues raised by THC Councillor's with BEAR which are currently under review:**

1. Review signage at Thurso War Memorial.
2. Traffic speeds between Thurso and Scrabster.
3. A9/A882 junction road markings.
4. Parking on footways in Brora.
5. Traffic speeds through Brora.

## **Berriedale Braes Project**

Draft Road Orders for A9 Berriedale Braes were published on 21 November 2014 and the objection period ended on 16 January 2015. Transport Scotland received a number of objections to the scheme proposals. Whilst every effort is being made to resolve outstanding objections, it is currently anticipated that a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) will be necessary where an independent Reporter will hear evidence from all parties and make findings and recommendations to the Scottish Ministers in relation to the scheme. On this basis, Transport Scotland have approached the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) to arrange a PLI. It is anticipated at this stage that the PLI will take place this winter. Whilst it is difficult to confirm exact timescales at this juncture, it is our experience that the process associated with a PLI could take in the region of 12-18 months.

# Appendix C – Wick Harbour Authority

**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 should resume later this year.

Cargo of large cable drums on-quay for Wick-Spittal SSE connection, second cargo expected soon.

Three large transformers from Sweden expected soon for Spittal and Thurso sub stations.

**Marina:** Again fully booked for the season by local vessels, Visitor numbers are slightly down due to poor summer weather.

**Onshore Windfarms:** No anticipated shipments due this year.

**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, but detailed discussions are underway meantime on potential new port facilities to provide an O&M Base for the next twenty five years, creating at least 150 jobs.

MORL's recent setback in terms of government funding is expected to delay confirmation of their development till Spring 2016, but discussions are ongoing as with BOWL.

**Oil Related:** Subsea7 activity has slowed down meantime but is expected to pick up again towards the end of the year.

**Infrastructure:** The dredging contract due to have been awarded recently has been abandoned due to severe restrictions by Marine Scotland and SNH on inshore dumping ground access. An alternative scheme is now being investigated to take the sand ashore for recycling.

Further concreting works have been carried out on the Commercial Quay to complete the deck areas around the new Heavy Lift Pads.

**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.

**Crown Estate:** Representations have been made to all Highland MSP's stating our concern at the proposed devolvement of the Crown Estate's Scottish assets to Local Authorities, as suggested in the recent Smith Commission Report.

- The concern is that marine issues may become politicised if the Crown Estate's assets are under the control of individual local authorities.
- Revenues raised from the Crown Estate's assets may be diverted away from truly relevant

coastal and marine projects.

- Desire for short term political gains may hinder longer term industry plans for economic growth, in particular Scotland's Marine Tourism Strategy.
- Fragmentation and confusion in relation to Scottish coastal matters may result through the potential removal of the current single point of contact of the Crown Estates.

Feedback so far suggests this a common concern throughout the Scottish marine industry, and it will be interesting to see what other options arise for the Scottish Parliament to discuss at a later date.

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman, WHA.  
August 2015

# Appendix D – Scrabster Harbour Trust



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 4<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2015

## SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

### 1. OVERALL

Building upon last year's record revenues, the port has been busy throughout the first five months of 2015-16. In the period April to August 2015, there were 977 vessel arrivals in line with the number of vessel arrivals last year. However total vessel tonnage was up 4% at 4.078 million tonnes.

### 2. FERRY

The Serco Northlink summer timetable (three sailings a day) has now ended.

Scrabster attended the meeting of the Northern Isles Consultative Forum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015 in Aberdeen to discuss ferry issues. Transport Scotland are currently focussed on the process for the Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Service. There is no advance detail available regarding the current thinking on the next contract for the Northern Isles.

The Trust met with the new Transport and Islands minister Derek Mackay on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

### 3. FISHING

After encouraging growth in fishing activity in the previous two years, 18% and 16% respectively, activity has fallen back in 2015-16. A total of 100,432 boxes were landed up to August, compared with 106,323 boxes in the previous year.

The new landing obligations for discards remains a concern. New infrastructure may be required to separately store the discarded fish. Discarded fish cannot be sold for human con-

sumption and will be classified as an animal by product and subject to additional environmental health monitoring. Marine Scotland admit that there is no reliable data upon which projected volumes of discards can be based. This makes it difficult for ports to make any decisions regarding new stores.

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

There has been strong increase in oil and gas activity since April. In the period April to August 2015 we have had 57 O&G vessel arrivals with a total tonnage of 340,983. Vessel numbers and tonnage are up 46% and 98% respectively.

July was the busiest month on record for Oil and Gas activity at Scrabster. A press release highlighting the record has been well picked up particularly in Aberdeen.

The factors behind the increase in activity include:

- Increase in installations and activity West of Shetland
- Competitive port charges offered by Scrabster
- Modern and improved infrastructure and services at Scrabster
  
- The increased focus on cost by operators is recognising the costs and time savings to be realised by using Scrabster
- The local supply chain has a good reputation for partnership working and a can-do attitude to getting the job done.

The Trust will be attending Offshore Europe exhibition next week in Aberdeen.

#### **5. RENEWABLES**

The shipments and storage for SSE's Strathy North Wind Farm ended in June. There has been limited marine renewable activity supporting MeyGen and Emec activity.

#### **6. CRUISE**

The 2015 cruise programme will finish with the visit of the Amadea next Tuesday. The port accommodated an unscheduled call when the Ocean Majesty called on 6<sup>TH</sup> August.

The Harbour Master will be attending Seatrade Europe cruise show exhibition next week in Hamburg.

**3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015**

# Appendix E – Serco NorthLink Ferries



## CTF Update 04.09.2015

Since the last meeting of the Caithness Transport Forum MV Hamnavoe has operated at 100% reliability, although there have been several minor delays to services which have affected punctuality; these have all been weather related.

Our off peak timetable resumed on the 26<sup>th</sup> August; however there are several 3 return trip sailing days scheduled in the coming months to cover events such as the Orkney Blues Festival and the October school holidays.

MV Hamnavoe is due to go to dry dock in Q1 2016.

Passenger volumes are up almost 6% YOY.

### **Marketing & Sponsorship**

Northern Lights issue 3 (our on board magazine) includes an article on Rockrose Gin as well as a focus on what to do in Caithness for Children.

We recently made a donation to Wick lifeboat of £2030

We have updated our website with a guide to Caithness;

<http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/your-holiday/guide-to-caithness/>

Our online business directory has space dedicated to Caithness;

<http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk/your-holiday/caithness-business-directory/>