



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 23/03/2017

Time: 11:30am

Location: Wick John O'Groats Airport, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Roger Saxon	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Julie McGee	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Derek Glasgow	The ScotRail Alliance
William Mainus	Stagecoach North Scotland
Alisdair Goodall	Stagecoach North Scotland
Howard Little	Stagecoach North Scotland
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland
William Sutherland	Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

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:

Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Coreen Campbell	Caithness Rural Transport
Rachael Storey	Direct Rail Services
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Cllr Neil MacDonald	Highland Council
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
James Linklater	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Graeme Leslie	Stagecoach North Scotland
Karl Rosie	UK Parliament (Dr Paul Monaghan MP's Office)
Dr Paul Monaghan MP	UK Parliament

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 27.10.2016

2.1 There being no changes or amendments, the minutes were adopted as a true record of the meeting

3. Review of actions from last meeting

3.1 **CTF(2016)M001/A012** – *Iain Moncrieff & Gillian Coghill to review winter maintenance route priorities once new bus routes confirmed.* **ONGOING**

Trudy noted that this was awaiting the confirmation of new bus routes on 24 April 2017. Cllr Saxon noted that certain route priorities have already been set locally.

3.2 **CTF(2016)M002/A004** – *Chamber to follow up with Transport Scotland on custom livery to promote Far North Line.* **ONGOING**

Trudy noted that this was being covered by the Far North Line Review Team, and that she would update on this under the appropriate agenda item.

3.3 **CTF(2016)M002/A010** – *Gail Ross MSP to seek clarification on length of PLI process for Berriedale.* **COMPLETE**

Trudy noted that this has been done – the PLI has finished with a positive outcome, funds have been provided in the latest Scottish Budget for these works, and road and compulsory purchase orders have been published.

- 3.3 **CTF(2016)M002/A014** – Chamber to take up issue with Hoy Crossing with Network Rail and Highland Council. **COMPLETE**

Derek Glasgow updated on this – Network Rail are ready to proceed with works over the Easter weekend, but are awaiting confirmation from Highland Council with regards to the road-related section of the work.

It was agreed that Alex Macmanus would take this up.

CTF(2017)M001/A001 – Alex Macmanus to take up progression of Hoy Crossing works with Highland Council

- 3.4 **CTF(2016)M003/A001** – Derek Glasgow to get date for ScotRail / HITRANS rail forum. **COMPLETE**

This was the “Points North” seminar held by HITRANS in December 2016.

- 3.5 **CTF(2016)M003/A002** – Graham Mackenzie to provide an update on completion of parking enforcement works. **ONGOING**

Alex Macmanus noted that it is up to Inverness to get this up and running – he thought it would start around April. Trudy noted that some yellow lines in Thurso have not yet been repainted – there was some discussion as to in which areas enforcement would be active, and it was agreed that Roger Saxon would take this up.

CTF(2017)M001/A002 – Roger Saxon to take up active areas for parking enforcement with Shane Manning at Highland Council

Howard Little asked for clarification on some points regarding enforcement – it was noted that this would start in April, and would be periodic visits from wardens based elsewhere

- 3.6 **CTF(2016)M003/A003** – Graham Mackenzie to provide an update on grace period for parking enforcement. **COMPLETE**

From previous discussions, it was understood that the initial visits of wardens would involve warning notices.

- 3.7 **CTF(2016)M003/A004** – Highland Council to put notice in press warning of start of parking enforcement. **COMPLETE**

It was noted that there have been stories about this in the local press.

- 3.8 **CTF(2016)M003/A005** – David Swanson to circulate link to BEAR Scotland weekly updates. **COMPLETE**

This was circulated.

- 3.7 **CTF(2016)M003/A006** – *Chamber to write to Robin Pope at Highland Council regarding future of bus services in the area.* **COMPLETE**

Trudy noted that the Chamber had held an emergency meeting of the Caithness Bus Users Group to address this, and has been liaising with David Summers at Highland Council and with Stagecoach.

A number of changes have been made to services on the basis of feedback from bus users – both at meetings and sent direct to the Chamber

Further service changes are to come on 24 April 2017, and the Dounreay contract remains to be awarded – it is hoped that following this, there should be a period of stability with regards to bus services.

It was agreed that this matter would be discussed further under Stagecoach's update.

- 3.8 **CTF(2016)M003/A007** – *David Swanson to redraft response to NIFS fares consultation and circulate for approval.* **COMPLETE**

This was circulated and the final, approved version of the consultation response was submitted

- 3.9 **CTF(2016)M003/A008** – *David Swanson to circulate Loganair presentation to Forum members.* **COMPLETE**

This was circulated

- 3.10 **CTF(2016)M003/A009** – *David Swanson to work with Forum members on press release highlighting positive developments.* **COMPLETE**

It was noted that David had drafted a press release and that this would be put to various members for approval or update as necessary. Following this, a draft would be circulated to the Forum and the final version sent to the press.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Trudy Morris noted that she was unaware of any matters arising – no matters were raised.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 The ScotRail Alliance

5.1.1 Trudy Morris and Mike Lunan delivered an update on their work with the Far North Line Review Team. Of note:

- It was agreed that certain recent papers produced by the Team would be circulated to the Forum, including a full list of workstreams and actions
- The Team had seen a presentation on Borders Rail and how lessons could be learned from this to apply to the Far North Line
- There had been some discussion of journey times and how these have changed since 2000 – Mike noted that in 2000 one train did do the journey in 30 minutes less, but missed out a number of stations along the way in order to achieve this
- Some modelling work had been done to investigate the impact of raising the speed limit along the line – this could reduce journey times by 7-10 minutes
- The Team is looking both at immediate actions – e.g. with regards to level crossings – and at medium to long-term improvements such as additional infrastructure
- Some work is being done with regards to request stops and ways to alert the driver whether or not someone is waiting to board
- Both Trudy and Mike felt that there was a focus on the Inverness commuter market, citing e.g. plans to remove some Wick and Thurso trains and to bus passengers to Helmsdale. They both feel their role is to make the point that the North Highlands should not be disadvantaged.

CTF(2017)M001/A003 – *Chamber to circulate certain papers from Far North Line Review Team*

There was some discussion between Cllr Mackay and Mike Lunan with regards to infrastructural changes and the impacts these might have on journey time – Mike noted that the immediate priority is dealing with level crossings, speed limits, etc. and that changes such as re-canting the line may not be worth the expense for the minimal speed increase they would allow.

5.1.2 Derek Glasgow gave an update on behalf of the ScotRail Alliance. Of note:

- In conjunction with the work of the Far North Line Review Team, he is involved in a lower-level team with HTRANS, ScotRail, Network Rail, etc. to address issues
- The Tain-Inverness section has five times as much traffic as the northern section – Derek noted that the Forum will need to push hard to overcome this
- Only one cancellation recently has been down to a ScotRail issue – the rest have been due to Network Rail, disruptive passengers, etc.
- With regards to tourism, it is important to get the product right first and then push tourism

Mike Lunan noted his pleasure that there has been a substantial improvement in performance and reliability. Derek noted that changes such as digital RETB have helped with this.

Derek provided a brief update with an ongoing issue around fencing at Thurso High School – Network Rail are dealing with this as a high priority and work should be carried out imminently.

Roger Saxon enquired as to the background on custom livery. David Swanson noted that he had discussed this with Transport Scotland and ScotRail, and that ScotRail had indicated they would be happy to look at it if funding can be provided – this would cost around £70,000.

David noted that the key priority is to get the product right with regards to performance and reliability, before taking action to promote the line to tourists.

5.2 Direct Rail Services

5.2.1 A written update was provided – see Appendix A.

5.3 Berriedale Braes

5.3.1 Trudy noted that this had been covered in the review of actions.

5.4 Highland Council

5.4.1 Alex Macmanus and Cllr Mackay noted that work is due to commence on the B876 Killimster Moss – this will initially be exploratory work, and it is hoped that once a solution is identified work can start on this by the end of the year.

5.4.2 Trudy noted the importance of finding a long-term solution to this issue

5.5 BEAR Scotland

5.5.1 Marco Bardelli provided a brief update on BEAR Scotland’s programme for the forthcoming year.

5.5.2 It was agreed that Marco would provide a full table of planned works once this is ready for distribution

CTF(2017)M001/A004 – *Marco Bardelli to provide table of BEAR Scotland planned works*

5.5.3 There was some discussion around planned works on the Cromarty Bridge – it was noted that this would last for about 6 months, and would entail at maximum a 10 minute delay at peak times, and that this would be traffic lights only with no convoy system in place.

5.5.4 Marco noted that BEAR have carried out various resurfacing works on the A99 in March 2017

5.5.5 Alex Macmanus enquired as to progress on the landslide on the A9 at Scrabster

- 5.5.6 Marco noted that temporary traffic lights are in place, as are concrete barriers to prevent further slippage. BEAR are working on a design to repair this, but there are some legal issues as the land is private – he emphasised that BEAR and Transport Scotland are aware of the significance of the road.
- 5.5.7 Alex Macmanus asked whether Orkney Islands Council were involved in discussions, given the importance of the road to Orkney – Marco noted that once a plan and timetable are in place, they will advise Orkney Islands Council.
- 5.5.8 Marco reiterated that they are aware of the significance of the road, and that they are working closely with Scrabster Harbour and local businesses. They are aware of planned large cargo transfers via the harbour and have plans in place to deal with this. He noted that at present, the level of disruption is more or less a 1 minute increase in journey time.
- 5.5.9 Cllr Mackay raised an issue with the lack of a barrier at the new traffic lights in South Road, Wick – Marco agreed to take this up with BEAR

CTF(2017)M001/A005 – *Marco Bardelli to take up issue with South Road traffic lights with BEAR Scotland*

- 5.5.10 Trudy asked Marco to update the Forum once a design had been approved to deal with the Scrabster landslide

CTF(2017)M001/A006 – *Marco Bardelli to update Forum once design approved for Scrabster*

5.6 Stagecoach North Scotland

- 5.6.1 William Mainus provided an update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland. Of note:
- Following conclusion of the Highland Council tender process, a number of changes to timetables will come in as of 24 April
 - It is hoped that there will be a period of stability following this
 - The Dounreay contract has yet to be announced – any changes as a result of this will come in on 31 Aug
- 5.6.2 Alisdair Goodall delivered an update on specific changes from 24 April
- The late evening 82 service from Wick-Thurso will not run – everything else on this route will remain the same
 - 2 trips per day have been removed from the John O’Groats-Wick service
 - They have not been awarded the Bettyhill-Thurso contract – this will drop to 2 days per week with another operator
 - They have not been awarded the Bower-Wick and Killimster-Noss services
 - There will be some very minor changes to the 81 Thurso-Castletown-Wick service

- The 78 Thurso town service will be reinstated for Ormlie in John Kennedy Drive and Henderson Street, and will also cover Mount Vernon, Scrabster and Holborn
- The 78 has been removed from Pennyland Drive due to issues with parking causing damage to vehicles and Highland Council infrastructure
- There have been some changes to the X99 and X82 services, including the addition of an evening bus – this will leave Thurso at 17:10 southbound and Inverness at 21:30 northbound

- 5.6.3 Alisdair noted that if there are complaints about particular services e.g. regarding toilets it is important to provide dates and times, or even ticket information if available
- 5.6.4 Alisdair noted that the timetables proposed for 24 April are drafts and that if there are comments on these they may be able to change some services
- 5.6.5 With regards to the 82, Trudy asked how many passengers used the late night service – Alisdair noted that it was lightly used, but he was not sure of the exact criteria used by Highland Council to determine whether the service should continue
- 5.6.6 Trudy asked if Stagecoach could put some press communication out to update the public on these changes – it was agreed that this would be done.

CTF(2017)M001/A007 – *Stagecoach to put out press communication on timetable changes from 24 April*

- 5.6.7 Trudy asked if Cllr Saxon could take up the issues surrounding Pennyland Drive. There was some discussion on the issues affecting bus services in Pennyland Drive and Heathfield Road – it was noted that if it could be arranged for parking to be aligned on one side of the road, it would be possible to run services in this area. Alisdair noted that Stagecoach are keen to run these services, but are not able to due to the current issues. It was agreed that Alisdair would take these issues up with Highland Council.

CTF(2017)M001/A008 – *Alisdair Goodall to take up issues with parking in Pennyland Drive with Highland Council*

- 5.6.8 There was some discussion around what information could be gained from ticket details – Alisdair noted that if a complaint was raised and ticket information included, data such as time and location of service, the driver of the bus, etc. could be found.
- 5.6.9 Cllr Saxon raised an issue with booking on the X82. Alisdair noted that this is due to technical limitations with Citylink’s booking system, and that they are looking for a long-term solution. As a temporary solution, bookings taken through the depot or Arcade Travel are being treated as X99 tickets, securing X82 passengers a reserved seat on the X99.
- 5.6.10 Cllr Saxon raised issues around accessibility of buses – Alisdair Goodall noted that he would be able to provide a further low floor bus, but that this may prove unpopular as the seating is in a 3 x 2 layout. Alisdair noted that there are problems with the way accessibility legislation applies to different groups of passengers.

5.6.11 There was some discussion around the possibility of a bus service to the new Nucleus facility – it was noted that it may be possible to run a regular service for workers at facility.

5.7 Scrabster Harbour

5.7.1 A written update was provided – see **CTF(2017)M001-DOC001**

5.8 Wick Harbour Authority

5.8.1 No attendee was present and no written update was provided.

5.9 Serco NorthLink Ferries

6.8.1 No attendee was present. Kris Bevan provided a written update subsequent to the meeting – see **CTF(2017)M001-DOC002**.

5.10 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

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

- There will be changes to Loganair bookings from September 2017, when they will no longer be a Flybe franchise partner
- Loganair will be increasing the number of flights they operate from Wick
- The oil and gas market has likely bottomed out, and some improvement may be seen soon
- The airport is working closely with SSE on the Beatrice Offshore Wind Farm project
- There have been improvements to the Wi-Fi in the terminal
- New LED lighting has been put in at the airport
- The temporary car park has been extended and a bus parking place added – this has been done in partnership with Nucleus

6.11.2 With regards to the Loganair / Flybe changeover, David Swanson noted that flights from 1 September 2017 can be booked on the new Loganair site, flights before this date should be booked via Flybe

6.11.3 Trudy enquired as to the cost of resurfacing the new car park – William noted this would be around £30-40K

6.11.4 Cllr Saxon enquired as to progress with GNSS – David Swanson noted that Loganair will have some aircraft capable of flying GNSS approaches by summer 2018, and that their full fleet of Saab 340s should be capable by summer 2020.

- 6.11.5 Mike Lunan enquired as to the possibility of overseas flights – William noted that he could not comment on this matter

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Derek Glasgow enquired as to whether ScotRail provided any funding for the Forum – it was noted that they did not. Derek agreed to enquire about this.

CTF(2017)M001/A009 – *Derek Glasgow to ask ScotRail about providing funding for the Forum*

- 7.2 Alisdair Goodall noted that Stagecoach have been working with ScotRail to provide joint tours of Skye
- 7.3 Billy Manson enquired as to bus services on Henderson Street from 24 April – Alisdair noted that the 78 service would cover this Monday-Friday, and the 82 Wick-Thurso would continue to cover this as well.
- 7.4 William Sutherland noted that Loganair would be increasing their number of flights from Wick-Edinburgh
- 7.5 Marco Bardelli noted that he had been involved in some discussions around North Coast 500 and that this was good news – they are seeing 10-15% additional traffic in the area.

8. Date of the next meeting

- 8.1 It was agreed that David Swanson would circulate the date of the next meeting as soon as possible.

9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

CTF(2016)M001/A012 – *Iain Moncrieff & Gillian Coghill to review winter maintenance route priorities once new bus routes confirmed*

CTF(2016)M002/A004 – *Chamber to follow up with Transport Scotland on custom livery to promote Far North Line*

CTF(2016)M003/A002 – *Graham Mackenzie to provide an update on completion of parking enforcement works*

10. Actions arising from this meeting

- CTF(2017)M001/A001** – *Alex Macmanus to take up progression of Hoy Crossing works with Highland Council*
- CTF(2017)M001/A002** – *Roger Saxon to take up active areas for parking enforcement with Shane Manning at Highland Council*
- CTF(2017)M001/A003** – *Chamber to circulate certain papers from Far North Line Review Team*
- CTF(2017)M001/A004** – *Marco Bardelli to provide table of BEAR Scotland planned works*
- CTF(2017)M001/A005** – *Marco Bardelli to take up issue with South Road traffic lights with BEAR Scotland*
- CTF(2017)M001/A006** – *Marco Bardelli to update Forum once design approved for Scrabster*
- CTF(2017)M001/A007** – *Stagecoach to put out press communication on timetable changes from 24 April*
- CTF(2017)M001/A008** – *Alisdair Goodall to take up issues with parking in Pennyland Drive with Highland Council*
- CTF(2017)M001/A009** – *Derek Glasgow to ask ScotRail about providing funding for the Forum*

Appendix A – Direct Rail Services

DRS Georgemas Railhead update

March 2017

DRS continue to support the NDA with their mission to deliver 'safe and sustainable solutions to the challenge of nuclear clean-up and waste management of the UK's nuclear legacy'.

Operations in relation to the Dounreay Programme continue and DRS are also supporting the MoD with operations in relation to fuel movements from Vulcan to Sellafield.

Discussions are ongoing between Restore, Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd and DRS in relation to the transport of archive materials from various nuclear facilities to Wick.

DRS has also been working with Network Rail and stakeholders creating a paper for the Scottish Government outlining the investment choices for the funders and the Far North line is featured in this.

As an open access terminal, DRS would welcome approaches from any operator with commercial opportunities which do not conflict with the terminal's prime purpose. Since our last update we have not been approached by any other operator however we have once again highlighted the availability of the terminal at the latest Rail Freight Group meeting in Scotland.

Kind Regards,

Rachael Storey

Communications & Marketing Manager