



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

**Date:** 08/03/2018

**Time:** 11:00 am

**Location:** Wick Town Hall, Wick

## **Present**

David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
Fiona Levack	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Victoria Ross	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Thomas Meikle	Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
John Gunn	Highland Council
Julie McGee	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Frank Roach	HITRANS
Ross Thomson	ScotRail Alliance
Steve Mackintosh	ScotRail Alliance
Daniel Laird	Stagecoach
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:

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Eann Sinclair	CNSRP
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Nicola Sinclair	Highland Council
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Graham Mackenzie	Highland Council
Lindsay Saddler	Network Rail
Peter Agnew	Network Rail
Jenni Wilson	Pentland Ferries
James Linklater	Serco Northlink Ferries
Kris Bevan	Serco Northlink Ferries
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Mark Whitelocks	Stagecoach North Scotland
Paul Linhart-Macaskill	Transport Scotland

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 14.09.2017

2.1 The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

## 3. Review of actions from last meeting

**CTF(2017)M002/A004** – *Alisdair Goodall to write to head teacher of Pennyland Primary School regarding parking issues.* **COMPLETE**

Daniel Laird updated that the situation has improved significantly and there is no need for further action at this time

**CTF(2017)M002/A005** – *Alisdair Goodall to write to Police Scotland regarding dangerous parking in Pennyland Drive.* **COMPLETE**

As A004 above

**CTF(2017)M002/A015** – *Cllr Nicola Sinclair to take up issues with Network Rail.* **COMPLETE**

Nicola provided presentations from Network Rail on rail infrastructure plans and winter maintenance – these were circulated to the Forum

**CTF(2017)M003/A001** – *Chamber to write to HIAL Board to request meeting in November.* **COMPLETE**

This was done and a meeting held to discuss HIAL's plans for centralised Air Traffic Management. The Forum and other bodies such as Dounreay Stakeholder Group continue to lobby on this.

**CTF(2017)M003/A002** – *Chamber to feed back discussions at WJACC to CTF members.* **COMPLETE**

Per A001 above

**CTF(2017)M003/A003** – *Nicola Sinclair to contact Ross Thomson with regards to infrastructure issues on Far North Line.* **COMPLETE**

Per A015 above

**CTF(2017)M003/A004** – *Ross Thomson to get update from ScotRail on staffing issues on Far North Line.* **COMPLETE**

This was with regards to catering – Transport Scotland confirms that ScotRail have recruited additional staff and catering provision should be back to normal

**CTF(2017)M003/A005** – *Chamber to discuss possibility of Network Rail attendance with Derek Glasgow.* **ONGOING**

No representative available to attend this time, but contact has been made with Lindsay Saddler (Head of Maintenance) at Network Rail. Details of the next meeting will be provided to Lindsay, and the Chamber will pass on any Network Rail-specific issues as required.

**CTF(2017)M003/A006** – *Chamber to pass on DRS update to June Love.* **COMPLETE**

This was done.

**CTF(2017)M003/A007** – *Chamber to clarify operational capacity of Georgemas crane with DRS.* **COMPLETE**

An update was received from Rachael Storey at DRS as follows:

“Yes an intermodal container is well within its capability. Also the concrete and terminal is designed for use with a reach stacker if required”

**CTF(2017)M003/A008** – *Alisdair Goodall to feed back information on Stagecoach maintenance schedule.* **COMPLETE**

Daniel Laird provided a brief update on this, noting that vehicles are taken off for a full service every 28 days.

**CTF(2017)M003/A009** – *Alisdair Goodall to arrange meeting with Caithness Councillors and Mark Whitelocks.* **ONGOING**

Daniel Laird is in the process of trying to arrange this.

**CTF(2017)M003/A010** – *Alisdair Goodall and Cllr Nicola Sinclair to discuss service to East Caithness Community Facility.* **ONGOING**

Daniel Laird will be progressing this.

**CTF(2017)M003/A011** – *Trudy Morris to raise due diligence around Andrew’s Coaches with Highland Council.* **COMPLETE**

The Highland Council updated Trudy that all due diligence was followed. All Caithness services now have permanent replacements as of 5 February, one route in Sutherland remains to be re-tendered

**CTF(2017)M003/A012** – *Roger Saxon to ask why Dounreay require use of coaches on contracted services.* **COMPLETE**

Update from June Love as follows:

“On Roger's behalf I went to Dounreay Commercial for clarification on bus contract. The old contract had made mention of 'coaches' however the new contract which Stagecoach are now working to uses the term 'bus' and makes no reference to coaches.”

Daniel Laird was asked whether it is now possible for Stagecoach to provide other vehicles for use on these services – Daniel to clarify this and come back.

**CTF(2018)M001/A001** – *Daniel Laird to clarify whether vehicles other than coaches can be used for Dounreay contracts*

**CTF(2017)M003/A013** – Chamber to ask Wick Harbour to provide update for next meeting. **ONGOING**

No attendee present or update provided – Chamber to contact Chairman of Wick Harbour to discuss whether they wish to continue to be represented at the Forum.

**CTF(2017)M003/A014** – Forum to send letter to Transport Scotland regarding Hamnavoe dry-dock. **COMPLETE**

Letter and response included in pack

**CTF(2017)M003/A015** – Chamber to circulate letter to Humza Yousaf MSP and response. **COMPLETE**

This was circulated

**CTF(2017)M003/A016** – David Swanson to send information on RET impact to Alisdair Goodall. **COMPLETE**

This was done

## 4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 David Swanson noted that DSRL had confirmed their ongoing contribution of £10,000 to the Forum for the next 3 years but after that period they would be looking to reduce this figure. David further noted that he would be presenting to the local Highland Councillors shortly in order to seek approval for a renewal of Highland Council's contribution of £2,000. David Swanson noted that he has also written to Mark Whitelocks regarding Stagecoach's contribution of £2,000 towards the running of the Caithness Bus Users Group. All attendees were asked to think about how they could help fund the Forum in the future.
- 4.2 David Swanson asked all attendees to confirm their attendance in advance of future meetings.

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 HITRANS

- 5.1.1 Frank Roach delivered an update on behalf of HITRANS, looking at current and proposed rail projects. He noted that at a high level, Government funding of £4.8bn for Network Rail's Scotland Route for Control Period 6 (2019-2024) had been proposed. This is currently going through the Periodic Review 2018 process and should be complete by the end of the year. The next stage in the process will be the Rail Enhancements & Capital Investment Strategy, to be followed by the Office of Rail & Road's Draft Determination for CP6.
- 5.1.2 Frank noted that enhancements to the Far North Line are likely to be among the projects selected by funders for the 2019-2024 period.
- 5.1.3 Caledonian Sleeper are currently looking at additional markets including Oban and the Far North Line
- 5.1.4 The Far North Line Review Team have ongoing work streams regarding shortening the journey time on the far north line. This includes improvements at loops, crossing and line speeds at platforms which should all reduce the journey time and have a cumulative impact on the robustness of the timetable.
- 5.1.5 It was reported that performance has been very good over the last period, excluding the recent period of extreme weather conditions.
- 5.1.6 Frank noted that HITRANS have secured some ERDF funding to progress another initiative – 'Press & Ride' – which will allow people at request stops to notify on-train staff that they are waiting to board the train. At present the train has to pass through every request stop, slowing along the way to allow the driver to spot anyone waiting to board – this new system should allow some stops to be bypassed, increasing reliability and journey time.
- 5.1.7 Frank noted that although the project is at an early stage, there are also plans to have the Press & Ride infrastructure serve as wi-fi hotspots, provide temperature sensing abilities to assist Network Rail maintenance crews, and potentially deliver real-time customer information to some stations.
- 5.1.8 Marco Bardelli and David Swanson queried how this would impact on future timetables, given the difficulty of knowing whether a station will need to be served on a particular journey. Frank noted that the main impact would be to give some additional robustness to any future timetables.
- 5.1.9 Roger Saxon questioned whether there were any plans to include customer information services at other stations? Frank Roach noted that a review of projects is to take place, and that they currently have a number of solar-powered customer information units in place. This review will also look at 4G availability at stations.
- 5.1.10 Frank updated the Forum on changes to signalling on the Far North Line, noting that from September this year there will be two desks instead of one. One desk will deal with traffic between Inverness and Invergordon, and one will deal with traffic north of Invergordon. He explained that this should have a performance benefit by reducing queueing, and should also allow Network Rail maintenance crews to more efficiently and safely access areas of track to carry out works.

- 5.1.11 With regards to maintenance, Frank noted that Network Rail have recently recruited for nine additional maintenance crew positions, with six to be based at Helmsdale. Some fencing work is currently being carried out to help prevent animal incursion.
- 5.1.12 The Far North Review Team has been given a presentation from David Whiteford at North Highland Initiative on extending the benefits of the North Coast 500 initiative to rail, and that this is currently under consideration.
- 5.1.13 On the “Midnight Train to Georgemas” project, Frank noted that a report is due from the consultants before the end of March or the beginning of next financial year. It is currently expected that the service would require a subsidy of around £2.9m per year. Economic work is to be done to look at wider benefits. Frank noted that Serco, who operate the Caledonian Sleeper, have been very interested and very helpful in putting the report together.

It is hoped that in addition to passengers, the service will also be able to carry high value parcels and potentially other items such as medical supplies and equipment.

Mike Lunan noted that £2.9m per year is a very reasonable sum in the context of rail subsidies. David Swanson asked Frank to report back to the Forum once further information on the wider economic benefits of the service is available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A002** - *Frank Roach to provide further information on economic benefit of Midnight Train to Georgemas project once available.*

- 5.1.14 A freight train trial between Inverness and Georgemas operated by DRS will take place within the next one or two months, and there has been some success in attracting customers. This will be a one-off trial run, with HITRANS underwriting the costs.

**CTF(2018)M001/A003** - *Frank Roach to provide details of freight trial once available.*

- 5.1.15 Plans are in progress to make additional space available, one return trip a day, on the Far North Line for bikes and other sporting equipment, and the hope is that this will dovetail with the scenic trains initiative, which should be live from May 2019.
- 5.1.16 European money for a business case has been provided to look into new types of trains including electric and hydrogen. The aim is to mirror current plans for removal of diesel vehicles from the roads by 2040.
- 5.1.17 Roger Saxon queried whether any additional fleet would be available for use on the Far North Line once the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Programme is completed. Frank noted that there is currently a fleet shortage throughout Scotland. Steve Mackintosh provided some additional information on this, noting that ScotRail have already handed back two Class 158s and four Turbostars to the rolling stock leasing companies, and that a further twelve Turbostars have to be handed back by the end of the year.

- 5.1.18 David Swanson queried what impact this might have on the Far North Line, and what contingency plans ScotRail have in place if they are unable to source additional rolling stock to replace these? Steve Macintosh agreed to feed back on this for the next meeting in June.

**CTF(2018)M001/A004** - *Steve Mackintosh to provide details on contingency plans ref. loss of Turbostars from fleet.*

## 5.2 The ScotRail Alliance

- 5.2.1 Ross Thomson delivered an update on behalf of the ScotRail Alliance. Of note:

- Of the top ten incidents affecting services on the line since January, one of these has been due to train maintenance, three due to RETB issues, and the remainder due to track infrastructure
- On-time departure statistics are improving, although PPM remains below target
- Passenger numbers on the route are up 7% on the previous year
- The Inverness maintenance depot will see an increase in High-Speed Trains from May of this year

- 5.2.2 David Swanson queried where on the line the 7% increase has been seen, noting that e.g. Wick and Thurso stations have seen continued decline, while stations nearer Inverness have seen increases. Frank Roach noted that he is carrying out a station by station analysis and that he would be able to provide more detail on this for the next meeting.

**CTF(2018)M001/A005** - *Frank Roach to provide details of station analysis once carried out.*

- 5.2.3 Roger Saxon noted an incident where a passenger was left at Thurso station for a significant amount of time while waiting for a replacement bus service, and queried whether some waiting facility might be made available. Ross Thomson agreed to look into this issue and report back.

**CTF(2018)M001/A006** - *Ross Thomson to take back issue with passenger stuck at Thurso on 12 Feb, look at possibility of waiting facility at station.*

- 5.2.4 There was some discussion of the cause of the above issue, and it was noted that there are repeated issues with points and signalling at Georgemas Junction. Some further discussion was had on the impact of the recent extreme weather conditions, but it was noted that these issues occur at all times of year. It was agreed that the Chamber would raise this with Network Rail.

**CTF(2018)M001/A007** - *Chamber to take up issue with points / signalling at Georgemas with Network Rail.*



### 5.3 Direct Rail Services

- 5.3.1 David Swanson noted that a written update had been provided (**CTF(2018)M001/DOC001**) and that Frank Roach had covered other areas of interest with regards to DRS in his update.

### 5.4 Berriedale Braes

- 5.4.1 Marco Bardelli gave a brief update on Berriedale Braes, noting that plans are progressing as expected. Four companies have bid for the work to upgrade the north hairpin and are currently in dialogue with Transport Scotland. Work is expected to start in summer 2018 and take 12-14 months to complete. Marco noted that some supplementary ground investigation works are to be carried out shortly, but that this is not expected to impact the timetable.
- 5.4.2 Marco Bardelli noted that during works a traffic management system will be put in place and there will be two complete road closures which are due to take place at night. Details have to be worked out but will be reported on in the near future.
- 5.4.3 David Swanson queried what provision is being made to ensure that emergency vehicles, patient transport, etc. will be able to get through during these periods. Marco noted that provision is always made for emergency traffic, and that as the road closures would take place at night there should be limited impact – he agreed to feed back on the full traffic management plans once these are available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A008** - *Marco Bardelli to provide details of traffic management plans for Berriedale.*

### 5.5 Highland Council

- 5.5.1 John Gunn provided a brief update on behalf of Highland Council. He noted that the resurfacing programme for 2017/18 is still to be completed and the Highland Council programme of works for next financial year is still to be finalised. With the severe weather staff have been manning the snow ploughs and therefore not working on the pot holes.

**CTF(2018)M001/A009** - *John Gunn to provide details of Highland Council programme of works for next financial year.*

- 5.5.2 David Swanson noted recent reports on Highland Council's overspend on its winter maintenance programme, and asked what impact this was likely to have on plans for the next financial year. John Gunn agreed to feed back on this once he had information available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A010** - *John Gunn to feed back on what impact winter overspend will have on rest of Highland Council road programme.*

- 5.5.3 There was some discussion of parking charges and it was noted that this remains an issue which needs to be addressed in the area. David Swanson queried whether any issues remained with e.g. double yellow lines not being clearly marked – the general feeling was that this issue had been addressed. Marco Bardelli noted that Highland Council would take on responsibility for parking enforcement on certain portions of trunk road, e.g. where the A9 passes through Thurso town centre.

## 5.6 BEAR Scotland

- 5.6.1 Marco Bardelli stated that the impact of the weather had a major impact on the BEAR Scotland programme of works for the next financial year. At present they are looking at areas which most urgently need addressed and ensuring these are made safe. He agreed to provide details of the programme of works for 2018/19 once these are available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A011** - *Marco Bardelli to provide details of BEAR Scotland programme of works for next financial year.*

- 5.6.2 Marco Bardelli noted that a study is to take place of stopping places on the Inverness - Wick and Thurso route, to ensure that sufficient places are available both for commercial traffic and to account for the increase in traffic as a result of North Coast 500

**CTF(2018)M001/A012** - *Marco Bardelli to provide details of study on stopping places on A9.*

- 5.6.3 June Love asked about the plans for the Scrabster road since the latest landslide. Marco Bardelli noted that BEAR staff were busy at present doing winter duties and emergency repairs, however they will be out shortly to clear the soil from the latest incident. Investigations into the slope are to take place and will be reported back to the Forum. He stated that they understood the importance of this road.

**CTF(2018)M001/A013** - *Marco Bardelli to feed back on geotechnical study / long term plans for A9 at Scrabster.*

- 5.6.4 David Swanson noted recent reports in the local press on traffic incidents on a section of the A99 during the recent severe weather. Marco noted that he was not aware of this but would look into it if further information could be provided.

**CTF(2018)M001/A014** – *David Swanson to provide Marco Bardelli with additional information on A99 incidents during severe weather*

- 5.6.5 David Swanson noted that with the work on the Berriedale Braes now progressing, this was an opportune time to look at what further investments could be made on the A9 north of Inverness.

Marco Bardelli stated that he was not aware of any plans at this time, although a review of various projects is due to take place.

- 5.6.6 David Swanson noted that any investments should be informed and driven by local knowledge and needs, and asked the Forum members to provide suggestions on areas where they felt investment was most needed.

**CTF(2018)M001/A015** - *Forum members to provide suggestions for A9 improvements once Berriedale works complete.*

## 5.7 Stagecoach North Scotland

- 5.7.1 Daniel Laird noted that changes have recently been made to services across the Highlands and that there will be a consultation taking place shortly on the changes to Caithness services. David Swanson asked Daniel to ensure that the Forum was made aware of details of this as soon as possible.

**CTF(2018)M001/A016** - *Daniel Laird to provide details of upcoming Stagecoach consultation on changes to Caithness services.*

- 5.7.2 It was noted that all contracts within Caithness that were previously with Andrew's Coaches now have stable contracts in place.

- 5.7.3 Daniel Laird stated that lessons are to be learned from the latest round of winter weather. David Swanson added that praise should be given to the social media team for their extremely useful information.

- 5.7.4 Daniel Laird noted that there will be a review of fleet changes including changes to the Dounreay contract, but this will not be a quick process.

**CTF(2018)M001/A017** - *Daniel Laird to feed back on proposed Stagecoach fleet changes.*

- 5.7.5 Daniel Laird noted that there has been slippage in the new fleet programme and a full backfill exercise is to be done when new vehicles are available.

- 5.7.6 Daniel Laird stated that they are in the process of updating payment machines and passengers will in future be able to make contactless payments on the bus.

**CTF(2018)M001/A018** - *Daniel Laird to provide timescale for contactless payment rollout in area.*

- 5.7.7 Daniel Laird noted that there is a series of marketing campaigns moving forward on the tourism potential of bus services in the area and that Stagecoach will be working with local stakeholders on this.

- 5.7.8 Mike Lunan queried whether recent developments in Stagecoach's rail business were likely to have any impact on their bus services – Daniel noted that he was not aware that this would be the case.

## 5.8 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.8.1 No attendee was present, but a written update was provided for the Forum members (CTF(2018)M001/DOC002)

## 5.9 Wick Harbour Authority

- 5.9.1 No attendee was present, and no written update was provided.

## 5.10 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.10.1 No attendee was present, but a written update was provided from Transport Scotland's Ferries Unit (CTF(2018)M001/DOC003).
- 5.10.2 David Swanson noted that the Chamber has been invited to meet with Humza Yousaf MSP towards the end of March on the current ferries procurement review, and that they would feed back the views of Caithness stakeholders on this.

## 5.11 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.11.1 William Sutherland noted that the weather had brought its problems but that staff on the ground have done an excellent job.
- 5.11.2 William Sutherland noted that a presentation on the new Air Traffic Management System will take place on the 25/26<sup>th</sup> May in Inverness, invitations are to be sent out.
- 5.11.3 William Sutherland stated that a Sunday flight has been introduced between Wick and Aberdeen. The logic of introducing this service was queried – David Swanson noted that the Chamber could take this up with Eastern at the next Wick John O'Groats Airport Consultative Committee meeting.

**CTF(2018)M001/A019** - Chamber to query with Eastern on business case / impact for Sunday service.

5.11.4 William Sutherland stated that discussions have taken place with Siemens, the O&M contractor on the BOWL project. Three helicopter operators have visited the airport.

5.11.5 David Swanson stated that the Chamber had commissioned Aviation Economics to carry out a study on the air services from Wick John O’Groats Airport. He noted that the final report had been received and was currently being examined by the Chamber, and that the Forum would be updated in due course on the key findings and recommendations from the report.

## 6. Any Other Business

6.1 No other business was raised.

## 7. Press Communications

8.1 It was agreed that press communications should focus on the positive performance of ScotRail services, the introduction of Sunday flights between Wick and Aberdeen, and on expressing gratitude to staff across all modes of transport for their performance during the recent severe weather

## 8. Date of Next Meeting

9.1 It was proposed that the next meeting would be held in June. David Swanson noted that he was keen to avoid a clash with Highland Council meeting dates and that he would confirm the date of the next meeting as soon as possible.

## 9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

**CTF(2017)M003/A009** – *Alisdair Goodall to arrange meeting with Caithness Councillors and Mark Whitelocks.*

**CTF(2017)M003/A010** – *Alisdair Goodall and Cllr Nicola Sinclair to discuss service to East Caithness Community Facility.*

**CTF(2017)M003/A013** – *Chamber to ask Wick Harbour to provide update for next meeting.*

## 10. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2018)M001/A001** – Daniel Laird to clarify whether vehicles other than coaches can be used for Dounreay contracts

**CTF(2018)M001/A002** - Frank Roach to provide further information on economic benefit of Midnight Train to Georgemas project once available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A003** - Frank Roach to provide details of freight trial once available.

**CTF(2018)M001/A004** - Steve Mackintosh to provide details on contingency plans ref. loss of Turbostars from fleet.

**CTF(2018)M001/A005** - Frank Roach to provide details of station analysis once carried out.

**CTF(2018)M001/A006** - Ross Thomson to take back issue with passenger stuck at Thurso on 12 Feb, look at possibility of waiting facility at station.

**CTF(2018)M001/A007** - Chamber to take up issue with points / signalling at Georgemas with Network Rail.

**CTF(2018)M001/A008** - Marco Bardelli to provide details of traffic management plans for Berriedale.

**CTF(2018)M001/A009** - John Gunn to provide details of Highland Council programme of works for next financial year.

**CTF(2018)M001/A010** - John Gunn to feed back on what impact winter overspend will have on rest of Highland Council road programme.

**CTF(2018)M001/A011** - Marco Bardelli to provide details of BEAR Scotland programme of works for next financial year.

**CTF(2018)M001/A012** - Marco Bardelli to provide details of study on stopping places on A9.

**CTF(2018)M001/A013** - Marco Bardelli to feed back on geotechnical study / long term plans for A9 at Scrabster.

**CTF(2018)M001/A014** – David Swanson to provide Marco Bardelli with additional information on A99 incidents during severe weather

**CTF(2018)M001/A015** - Forum members to provide suggestions for A9 improvements once Berriedale works complete.

**CTF(2018)M001/A016** - *Daniel Laird to provide details of upcoming Stagecoach consultation on changes to Caithness services.*

**CTF(2018)M001/A017** - *Daniel Laird to feed back on proposed Stagecoach fleet changes.*

**CTF(2018)M001/A018** - *Daniel Laird to provide timescale for contactless payment rollout in area.*

**CTF(2018)M001/A019** - *Chamber to query with Eastern on business case / impact for Sunday service.*