



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 06/03/2019

Time: 11:00

Location: Wick Town Hall, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Thomas Meikle	Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Bill Mowat	Gills Harbour
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Nicola Sinclair	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Julie McGee	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Kenny Hurst	Network Rail
Neil Thain	Pentland Ferries
Ross Thomson	ScotRail Alliance
Brendan Reynolds	Serco Northern Isles Ferry Services Bid Team
Davie Alexander	Thurso & Wick Trades Union Council
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland

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:

Coreen Campbell	Caithness Voluntary Group
June Love	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Jonathan Gunn	Highland Council
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail Alliance
Gail Ross MSP	Scottish Parliament
Paul Linhart-McAskill	Transport Scotland

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 05.09.2018

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

3. Review of actions from last meeting

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

This was provided and circulated to members

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

No information was received from Frank on this.

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

This was provided and circulated to Forum members

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

This was provided and circulated to Forum members

CTF(2018)M002/A001 – David Swanson to follow up with Frank Roach at HITRANS on progress of timber transport by rail **ONGOING**

Latest update contained in meeting papers (see **Appendix A**) – a meeting is to be held in London on 25 March 2019 to discuss this with a number of Freight Operating Companies. David to follow up with Frank following this meeting once more information available.

CTF(2018)M002/A006 – David Swanson to speak with Highland Council to make a contact to discuss the issue of signage and access to historic monuments **CLOSED**

It was agreed that David would follow this up with Bill Mowat, who originally raised the issue.

CTF(2018)M001/A001 – Marco Bardelli to follow up with BEAR Scotland on A99 south of Hempriggs House **COMPLETE**

Marco confirmed that works on this were currently underway and due to finish within the week.

CTF(2018)M003/A002 – *David Swanson to raise lack of Gills Bay on 77 timetable with Stagecoach*
COMPLETE

David noted that he had raised this with HITRANS and subsequently checked the Wick St Fergus Road bus stop, which appeared to have no display cases and a non-functional Real Time Information display.

It was agreed that the Forum would write to HITRANS for a more general update on ongoing issues with bus service information provision in the area.

CTF(2019)M001/A001 – *Chamber to write to HITRANS on behalf of Forum to ask for an update on bus service information provision*

Subsequent to the meeting, an update was received from Stagecoach on this (see **Appendix B**), noting that they are reviewing how this information is presented and that this will be picked up in the next timetable revision. HITRANS have advised that this is why Gills Bay is not presented on the published information for service 77.

CTF(2018)M003/A003 – *Marco Bardelli to provide BEAR Scotland contact details to Sandy Mackie*
COMPLETE

Marco confirmed that this was done.

CTF(2018)M003/A004 – *Marco Bardelli to ensure David Swanson added to mailing list for consultation on road improvement schemes* **COMPLETE**

David and Marco confirmed that this was done.

CTF(2018)M003/A005 – *David Swanson and Kris Bevan to liaise on bus-ferry connectivity* **COMPLETE**

Kris noted that there had been some positive changes to connectivity but that room for improvement remained.

CTF(2018)M003/A006 – *Brian Gordon to feed back to Forum on RET rollout when more information available* **ONGOING**

An update on this was provided by Transport Scotland Ferries Unit (see **Appendix C**) – this is awaiting the outcome of the State Aid complaint process.

CTF(2018)M003/A007 – *Paul Linhart-MacAskill to provide Northern Isles Ferry Services contract consultation materials for circulation to Forum* **COMPLETE**

A meeting was arranged with the Transport Scotland Ferries Procurement unit and details of this circulated to Forum members. The Northern Isles Ferry Service Invitation to Tender has been issued and the procurement process is currently underway (see **Appendix C**).

CTF(2018)M001/A008 – *David Swanson to liaise with Forum members on press release* **COMPLETE**

This was done and a press release issued.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 There were no matters arising.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 Scrabster Harbour

5.1.1 A written update was provided on behalf of Scrabster Harbour (see **Appendix D**).

5.2 Wick Harbour

5.2.1 No attendee was present and no written update was provided. Trudy Morris noted that the Chamber would continue efforts to secure an attendee or update from Wick Harbour.

5.3 Gills Harbour

5.3.1 A written update was provided (see **Appendix E**) and Bill Mowat talked through some of the key points of this. Of note:

- The Gills Bay Economic Development Zone was endorsed by Scottish Government in October 2018
- This will aid promotion of the Inner Basin as a base / hub for work-boats
- Gills Harbour Ltd has been endorsed by SIMEC Atlantis Energy in its forward strategy
- SIMEC Atlantis works continue, with all four turbines on the MeyGen project operating normally. They are awaiting the outcome of a Contracts for Difference bid for MeyGen Phase 1C
- GMR Henderson have been awarded a contract for restoration of storm damage near the seaward end of Gills Pier

5.3.2 Bill noted his concerns with the Stagecoach bus service, noting that the bus does not go down to the harbour to meet the midday sailing. He noted a specific issue the previous week and his concerns regarding tourism

5.3.3 It was agreed that this would be raised for discussion with Stagecoach

CTF(2019)M001/A002 – *David Swanson to liaise with Bill Mowat and Stagecoach on bus services to Gills Harbour*

5.3.4 It was noted that this was the second meeting in a row at which Stagecoach had not been in attendance. It was agreed that this would be raised with Stagecoach.

CTF(2019)M001/A003 – *Chamber to raise non-attendance at Forum meetings with Stagecoach*

5.4 Pentland Ferries

5.4.1 Neil Thain introduced himself as the new Operations Manager for Pentland Ferries and delivered a brief update. Of note:

- Neil noted that he was unable to discuss the current legal challenge over the Northern Isles Ferry Services procurement, but read a brief statement on behalf of the Banks family:

- “We are proud to have built an efficient, innovative and affordable ferry service for the people of Orkney and for those who visit our islands. The level of market distortion imposed by Scottish Ministers is now at a critical point where it threatens the future of this provision. All we have ever asked for is a level playing field on which to operate, and at this point we have no resort but to take measures to safeguard the vital transport link that we have worked so hard to create.”
 - The *MV Alfred*, named after Alfred Banks, the late founder of the modern “short sea route” between Caithness and Orkney and father of Andrew Banks, founder of Pentland Ferries, was successfully launched in Vietnam
 - The *Alfred* has capacity for 450 passengers, 12 lorries and 58 cars (or 98 cars and no lorries), a significant increase on the capacity offered by the *MV Pentalina*. It can accommodate 50,000 litres of fuel plus an additional 50,000 in a long-range fuel tank
 - It offers four seating lounges and a play area, as well as an internal and external sun deck
 - It is hoped the *Alfred* will be operating a service on the route by June of this year
 - Pentland Ferries have been working to improve the infrastructure at St Margaret’s Hope
 - There is a complete new phone system in place to aid with customer service, this allows for incoming calls to be transferred between Gills and Orkney as needed.
- 5.4.2 Trudy Morris enquired as to what would happen to the *Pentalina* once the *Alfred* is in place – Neil noted that he is not aware of plans at present.
- 5.4.3 Mike Lunan enquired whether any indication could be given as to when the legal challenge might be resolved – Neil noted that it could not.
- 5.4.4 Trudy noted that the Forum was aware of a number of issues around State Aid and legal challenges to Scottish Government transport initiatives and would seek an update on this from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity.
- 5.4.5 Kris Bevan noted that Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands has the ferries brief.
- CTF(2019)M001/A004** – *Forum to seek update on State Aid issues from relevant Cabinet Secretary and Minister*
- 5.4.6 Cllr Willie Mackay queried the impact of adverse weather on the Gills Bay route and whether Pentland Ferries operated a year-round service. Bill Mowat noted that adverse weather can have an impact but that recently several good winters have allowed no stops in service.

5.5 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.5.1 Kris Bevan delivered an update on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries. Of note:
- Passenger numbers have increased 4.7% from 2017 to 2018
 - Car numbers have increased 5.7%
 - Freight is up 7.8%
 - Over contract years 1-6 Serco NorthLink has seen very high satisfaction levels and has made efforts to increase local employment and use of local produce on board
 - The *MV Hamnavoe* entered dry dock between 13-19 January of this year and was covered by the *MV Helliard*, with the bed and breakfast offer continued over this period
 - Serco NorthLink continue to promote the North Coast 500 initiative and Caithness as a destination

- They have achieved a Gold Investors in People Award, Silver Investors in Young People Award, and a Health and Wellbeing Award
 - A new customer service manager has been appointed, replacing James Linklater who left last year
- 5.5.2 Bill Mowat felt that while the increased numbers were encouraging in a local context, they do not compare favourably to elsewhere in Northern Europe. Trudy noted that these are still positive figures and show the demand for both ferry routes.
- 5.5.3 Trudy noted that CalMac Ferries Ltd, one of the other bidders for the Northern Isles Ferry Services contract, was holding a local engagement event and queried whether Serco NorthLink would be doing the same. Kris noted his feeling that Serco NorthLink's record of local engagement speaks for itself, that they have a range of connections with local companies, and that he was not sure there was a need to do a specific engagement event.
- 5.5.4 Roger Saxon queried what differences there would be on freight services in the new contract – Kris noted that this was best directed to Transport Scotland. David Swanson agreed to liaise with Roger on this.

CTF(2019)M001/A005 – *David Swanson to liaise with Roger Saxon and Transport Scotland on freight services in new Northern Isles Ferry Services contract*

- 5.5.5 Bill Mowat noted his understanding that there is no freight subsidy on the services – Kris stated that this is incorrect.
- 5.5.6 There was some discussion of the legal challenge and how this would affect the procurement process. It was agreed that the Forum would write to Paul Wheelhouse MSP in his Ministerial capacity to seek clarity on this.

CTF(2019)M001/A006 – *Forum to write to Paul Wheelhouse MSP for clarity on impact of legal challenge on procurement process for Northern Isles Ferry Services*

- 5.5.7 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that he is impressed with the NorthLink Ferries offer.

5.6 ScotRail Alliance

- 5.6.1 Ross Thomson delivered an update on behalf of ScotRail. Of note:
- PPM is at 90.4% for the last four weeks, 88.8% for the last 12 weeks
 - There has been a reduction in full cancellations of services over the last six weeks
 - Overall services are running well. Defects which have been sustained tend to be radio incidents and some technical investigations have been carried out to see what is causing these issues
 - Extensive upgrades within the Inverness depot to enable additional maintenance works to take place there. They have just taken ownership of a wheel lathe – this will enable defects to wheels to be dealt with at Inverness rather than having to be sent to the Central Belt
- 5.6.2 Kenny Hurst delivered an update on behalf of Network Rail. Of note:
- Performance this autumn has been slightly worse than last year – this is partly down to a large volume of subsea pipe traffic
 - Next year is likely to see heavier volumes of pipe traffic and there is a possibility of getting a dedicated road-rail vehicle for the line to help alleviate this

- Work on token-driven points has started, the end product remains around 2 years away
 - The three-month RETB split trial is due to finish next week, initial results have been promising and Kenny is hopeful this will be introduced permanently
- 5.6.3 Bill Mowat queried the nature of the RETB split. Kenny explained that presently the Inverness signalling centre controls both the Far North and Kyle lines – the trial saw this split to two centres, one for Inverness-Invergordon and Kyle, one for Invergordon north.
- 5.6.4 Bill Mowat noted his understanding that Subsea 7 have positive indications of work for the next three years.
- 5.6.5 Mike Lunan gave a brief overview of the final meeting of the Far North Line Review Team, noting that the final announcements are still being worked on by Transport Scotland. Mike noted that some indication of works coming out of the group for CP6 are likely to be announced by end March 2019.

5.6.6 David Swanson briefly updated the Forum on the plans to introduce automated request systems at request stops to allow drivers to maintain linespeed through these stations where no request has been made. He noted that there are plans for a demonstration of this system and that he would update the Forum on these once details are available.

CTF(2019)M001/A007 – *David Swanson to update Forum on Press'n'Ride demonstration event*

5.6.6 Roger Saxon noted issues with encroaching vegetation north of Helmsdale and with discarded sleepers at Altnabreac. Kenny noted that he thought these were awaiting uplift, but that he would follow up and report back.

CTF(2019)M001/A008 – *Kenny Hurst to follow up on discarded sleepers at Altnabreac*

5.6.7 Roger enquired as to progress on installing sidings at Kinbrace for potential timber traffic. Kenny noted that he was not aware of progress on this. David Swanson agreed to follow this up with HITRANS.

CTF(2019)M001/A009 – *David Swanson to follow up with HITRANS on sidings at Kinbrace for timber traffic*

5.6.8 Kris Bevan noted that NorthLink Ferries are keen to see greater rail / bus / ferry integration and to explore options for this. David Swanson agreed to coordinate on this.

CTF(2019)M001/A010 – *David Swanson to coordinate with relevant partners on future rail / bus / ferry connectivity*

5.7 Direct Rail Services

5.7.1 A written update was provided (see **Appendix F**)

5.7.2 There was some discussion as to when the live trial can be expected, and it was agreed that Trudy Morris and Roger Saxon would discuss this with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority at the next Dounreay Stakeholder Group meeting.

CTF(2019)M001/A011 – *Trudy Morris & Roger Saxon to discuss Georgemas freight trial with NDA*

5.8 Highland Council

- 5.8.1 No attendee was present and no update received. Alex Macmanus noted that he would secure an update from the relevant department.

CTF(2019)M001/A012 – *Alex Macmanus to secure update from Highland Council roads department*

- 5.8.2 Billy Manson noted that roads had been discussed in detail at the recent Association of Caithness Community Councils meeting, with particular reference to the roads around Halkirk.
- 5.8.3 Cllr Nicola Sinclair noted that the recent Highland Council budget includes an additional £1.5m for road maintenance, the Caithness portion of which comes to roughly £165,000. She noted that the Councillors will be meeting to discuss how this is best used. Trudy asked Nicola to feed back to the Forum once these discussions have taken place.

CTF(2019)M001/A013 – *Cllr Nicola Sinclair to feed back to the Forum on discussions around additional roads maintenance budget*

- 5.8.4 Cllr Raymond Bremner noted that there is no reason Highland Council roads department could not submit a report in advance. He updated the Forum that he had met with William Gilfillan and Tracey Urey at Highland Council to discuss capital expenditure and revenue issues relating to the roads budget.
- 5.8.5 David Swanson asked Alex Macmanus if he was able to update on the progress of Traffic Regulation Orders to introduce decriminalised parking in Thurso and Wick. Alex noted that consultation is still ongoing and that he would feed back once he had more information.

CTF(2019)M001/A014 – *Alex Macmanus to feed back on Traffic Regulation Orders once consultation is complete*

- 5.8.6 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that there is a concern that repairs are not lasting. Cllr Bremner noted that members had received a briefing on the different types of repair and that hot tar, while preferable, is much more expensive and takes a longer time to use. Given the scale of repairs required, cold tar patching is sometimes necessary. He noted that members have asked for a report on the various methods for fixing roads and the priorities for this.
- 5.8.7 Cllr Sinclair noted that cold tar patching is only intended to be a temporary repair to make potholes safe and that members would be seeking a schedule for when the Jetpatcher would be in Caithness again.

5.9 BEAR Scotland

- 5.9.1 Marco Bardelli provided an update on behalf of Transport Scotland Roads Unit and BEAR Scotland.
- 5.9.2 With regards to work on the Berriedale Braes, Marco noted that he had recently met with RJ McLeod, the primary contractor for the works. Trial blasting has been carried out and a draft timescale for works is being put together. The preliminary information he has indicates a start date of April, with the contractor expecting to be off site by January 2020.
- 5.9.3 Regarding the impact on the travelling public of the works, Marco noted that there are strict terms in the contract relating to road closures, how often these can occur and how long for. He

noted that any impacts will be publicised well in advance. Marco further noted that short closures would be necessary while blasting works are carried out, but that the aim is to have these happen at the same time every day to allow drivers to plan for them. Blasting is not due to start until September for environmental reasons.

5.9.4 Trudy noted that, with regards to road closures some hauliers travel south in the evenings and overnight.

5.9.5 Cllr Bremner complimented Marco and BEAR Scotland on their communications with stakeholders. He noted further concerns with the A99 near Hempriggs and the A9 at Dunbeath – it was agreed that Cllr Bremner would provide Marco with further information on these.

CTF(2019)M001/A015 – *Cllr Raymond Bremner to provide Marco Bardelli with details of areas of concern on A99*

5.9.6 Cllr Willie Mackay noted the quality of the Wick-Thurso road – there was some discussion of Transport Scotland / BEAR Scotland surfacing works, the timescales for these, and the general causes of road surface defects.

5.9.7 Marco provided a further update on other works being carried out by BEAR, noting that the programme for the next year would start to be populated from 1 April, and that he would shortly be doing a route tour with BEAR to finalise this. Of note:

- Work on the A99 at Hempriggs due to finish shortly
- Work to take place at Georgemas within the next two weeks
- Resurfacing to take place on the South Brae at Berriedale
- Resurfacing works to take place at Tain and Thrumster
- Review of road markings on the A99 to take place

5.9.8 Trudy enquired whether there had been any progress with the A9 at Scrabster. Marco noted that the geotechnical investigation was complete and a report due to be produced shortly. He further noted that there may be limits to possible interventions due to the land in question being privately owned.

5.9.9 Cllr Mackay complimented BEAR Scotland on the speed of their response to repair potholes. Marco noted that the Service Level Agreement requires an immediate response by 6am the next day to make safe, with a full patch repair to be programmed in.

5.9.10 Davie Alexander noted his concern that the timescale discussed for Berriedale works was not feasible. He queried whether there would be any penalty clauses in the contract. Marco noted that he was not in a position to answer this but noted that the contractors are experienced and he has no reason to disbelieve their estimates. It was agreed that this query would be put to the relevant Transport Scotland MTRIPS contact.

CTF(2019)M001/A016 – *Forum to query Transport Scotland on feasibility of Berriedale contract timescales and any penalty clauses*

5.9.11 Billy Manson queried the scale of the blasting works required for Berriedale. Marco noted that the whole length of road covered in the works is around 1km but noted that other work can be carried out before the blasting takes place.

5.9.12 Cllr Bremner noted that whenever he has had a question about BEAR Scotland works, this has been answered quickly and the timescales given have been accurate.

- 5.9.13 It was queried whether the A99 road marking works would extend to John O’Groats – Marco noted that these would extend to Wick.
- 5.9.14 Marco noted that Transport Scotland hope to shortly install tourist signage for the North Coast 500.

5.10 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.10.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided. Trudy Morris noted that the usual statistics would be gathered from HIAL at the Wick John O’Groats Airport Consultative Committee and circulated to Forum members.

CTF(2019)M001/A017 – *Statistics for Wick John O’Groats Airport to be circulated to Forum once available*

- 5.10.2 Trudy noted that Air Traffic Controllers across HIAL airports are due to take part in industrial action, and that the Chamber intends to write to Prospect to urge that a resolution to the issues be found. She noted that the Chamber would circulate relevant information on this industrial action to the Forum.

CTF(2019)M001/A018 – *Chamber to circulate press release and Q&A on HIAL industrial action to Forum*

- 5.10.3 Trudy further noted that HIAL intend to cut airport hours back from April due to schedule changes. She noted concerns about the impact this would have on staffing and that this issue should be taken forward through both the Committee and the Forum. She emphasised the need to safeguard the airport.

- 5.10.4 Cllr Bremner suggested that Inglis Lyon, HIAL’s Managing Director, be invited to meet with the Forum. It was agreed that an invite would be extended.

CTF(2019)M001/A019 – *Chamber to invite Inglis Lyon to meet with the Forum*

- 5.10.5 Trudy noted that these issues and others relating to the airport were due for discussion at the Wick John O’Groats Airport Consultative Committee and that relevant information from the Committee would be fed back to the Forum.

CTF(2019)M001/A020 – *Chamber to feed back on discussions at Wick John O’Groats Airport Consultative Committee to Forum*

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 No other business was raised.

7. Press Communications

- 7.1 It was discussed that there is positive news regarding road, rail, ferries and harbours to report.
- 7.2 There was some discussion of the Air Discount Scheme, which has recently been extended to cover a wider geographical area and to include students.

8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 It was confirmed that the next meeting would take place on 12 June 2019 and that David Swanson would confirm a venue and time in due course.

9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

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

ONGOING

CTF(2018)M002/A001 – David Swanson to follow up with Frank Roach at HITRANS on progress of timber transport by rail **ONGOING**

CTF(2018)M002/A006 – David Swanson to speak with Highland Council to make a contact to discuss the issue of signage and access to historic monuments **ONGOING**

CTF(2018)M003/A006 – Brian Gordon to feed back to Forum on RET rollout when more information available **ONGOING**

10. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2019)M001/A001 – Chamber to write to HITRANS on behalf of Forum to ask for an update on bus service information provision

CTF(2019)M001/A002 – David Swanson to liaise with Bill Mowat and Stagecoach on bus services to Gills Harbour

CTF(2019)M001/A003 – Chamber to raise non-attendance at Forum meetings with Stagecoach

CTF(2019)M001/A004 – Forum to seek update on State Aid issues from relevant Cabinet Secretary and Minister

CTF(2019)M001/A005 – David Swanson to liaise with Roger Saxon and Transport Scotland on freight services in new Northern Isles Ferry Services contract

CTF(2019)M001/A006 – Forum to write to Paul Wheelhouse MSP for clarity on impact of legal challenge on procurement process for Northern Isles Ferry Services

CTF(2019)M001/A007 – David Swanson to update Forum on Press'n'Ride demonstration event

CTF(2019)M001/A008 – Kenny Hurst to follow up on discarded sleepers at Altnabreac

CTF(2019)M001/A009 – David Swanson to follow up with HITRANS on sidings at Kinbrace for timber traffic

CTF(2019)M001/A010 – David Swanson to coordinate with relevant partners on future rail / bus / ferry connectivity

CTF(2019)M001/A011 – *Trudy Morris & Roger Saxon to discuss Georgemas freight trial with NDA*

CTF(2019)M001/A012 – *Alex Macmanus to secure update from Highland Council roads department*

CTF(2019)M001/A013 – *Cllr Nicola Sinclair to feed back to the Forum on discussions around additional roads maintenance budget*

CTF(2019)M001/A014 – *Alex Macmanus to feed back on Traffic Regulation Orders once consultation is complete*

CTF(2019)M001/A015 – *Cllr Raymond Bremner to provide Marco Bardelli with details of areas of concern on A99*

CTF(2019)M001/A016 – *Forum to query Transport Scotland on feasibility of Berriedale contract timescales and any penalty clauses*

CTF(2019)M001/A017 – *Statistics for Wick John O’Groats Airport to be circulated to Forum once available*

CTF(2019)M001/A018 – *Chamber to circulate press release and Q&A on HIAL industrial action to Forum*

CTF(2019)M001/A019 – *Chamber to invite Inglis Lyon to meet with the Forum*

CTF(2019)M001/A020 – *Chamber to feed back on discussions at Wick John O’Groats Airport Consultative Committee to Forum*

Appendix A – HITRANS

Report to Partnership Meeting 8 February 2019

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Branchliner - Wood You Use Rail

Purpose of Report

To update Members on the progress of the Branchliner / Wood You Use Rail workstream.

London Calling

Following a meeting between HITRANS and Fergus Ewing it has been agreed to hold a round table meeting at Scotland House, London on Mon 25th March 2019 to discuss opportunities for transporting Scottish Timber by rail.

All MDs of Freight Operating Companies (FOCs) are to be invited. The aim is to highlight to the key decision makers in the UK's main railfreight operating companies:

- i. the importance that the Scottish Government places in forestry and timber processing and the environmental credentials to be gained from modal shift from lorry to rail
- ii. the scale of the forest resource in Scotland , the rate of expansion, the current growth in timber production and the level of investment by the processing sector
- iii. the freight growth plan, and specific opportunities that exist now and the grant support available to enable modal shift within Scotland.

HITRANS' role is to sell the business opportunity to the FOCs, focussing on Crianlarich, Rannoch, Altnabreac, Kinbrace, Georgemas, Aberdeenshire, Keith etc.

Meanwhile, discussions continue on getting a flow to start this spring, with enthusiasm from a number of processors.

Appendix B – Stagecoach

Update from Daniel Laird to David Swanson

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

Whilst this is noted as complete, I just wanted to confirm that we are pleased that we can operate the newer small buses on the Thurso and Wick town services. The initial plan to use 2x Mercedes Sprinter minibuses was adjusted to 1x Mercedes and 1x Optare Solo following feedback from Dounreay staff members regarding the use of the Mercedes bus. This is unfortunate but we hope the use of the 2 more modern low-floor buses is appreciated by customers.

CTF(2018)M003/A002 – David Swanson to raise lack of Gills Bay on 77 timetable with Stagecoach

We are reviewing how we present this information, as the service technically connects with service 80 at John o Groats for onward travel to Gills Bay. We will pick this up in the next timetable revision, which is to be confirmed as we progress with further network workshops.

CTF(2018)M003/A005 – David Swanson and Kris Bevan to liaise on bus-ferry connectivity

I haven't had any recent contact from Kris or yourself on this so not sure of the context? Having said that, we are aware of NorthLink's concerns and have discussed with them the difficulty in meeting all the various possible connections. We should have made progress locally at Scrabster with NorthLink representatives being instructed to advise the X99 driver if the vessel is expected to arrive late. I would like to see this progress to a two-way communication of bus passengers who intend to catch the Northbound ferry and Southbound ferry passengers who intend to catch the bus, so that all parties can be informed about connections.

More generally, we are looking to conduct another network workshop to decide on refinements to the local network. We are working on improvements to staff facilities at both Thurso and Wick depots.

Appendix C – Transport Scotland Ferries Unit

Caithness Transport Forum - 6 March 2019 Transport Scotland Ferries Unit - Update

Northern Isles Ferry Service Tender

- ✓ We are committed to a fair, open and transparent tender which aims to get the best possible deal for the communities and employees that depend on these ferry services.
- ✓ The Invitation to Tender for the next contract to operate the Northern Isles Ferry Services was issued to three bidders on 17 January 2019. Submission of final tender bids is scheduled for the end of April 2019, followed by the tender evaluation period, with the new contract due to start on 31 October 2019.

- ✓ The Minister informed Parliament and issued a news release on 21 February 2019 noting that the Invitation to Tender, which includes the specification for the next contract, has been published on Transport Scotland's website. We also published the names of the three tender participants:

CalMac Ferries Ltd, *Förde Reederei Seetouristik GmbH* and Serco NorthLink Ferries.

- ✓ In that announcement the Minister also indicated that there is a legal challenge and a related complaint to the European Commission.
- ✓ Tender participants attended an Industry Day with Transport Scotland on 30 January 2019 to gain further information about the tender process. There follows a period of time for participants to engage with key stakeholders and prepare their bids.

NIFS Freight ferry services

- ✓ A key benefit of this new contract is the in-built flexibility, allowing the ferry services to be amended to reflect future changes in demand across the important sectors of the islands' economies, tourism, fishing, aquaculture, food and drink and farming (subject to demand and availability of funds).
- ✓ The tender documents make clear that we have listened and are aware that additional tonnage and sailings may be required during the term of the contract to ensure that the ferry services are best placed to meet the future requirements of all Shetland and Orkney stakeholders, including the seafood and freight sectors.
- ✓ Ministers previously took the decision to deploy the MV Arrow on two separate occasions to provide enhanced freight provision on the Northern Isles ferry service. The vessel provided added capacity and supported increased growth in the important seafood sector, as well as the busy livestock season.
- ✓ It is expected that those who deliver public contracts adopt fair employment practices for all workers engaged on delivering contracts. This not only includes workers they directly employ, but also workers they will engage with through, for example, employment agencies and / or "umbrella" companies.

Judicial Review

- ✓ Pentland Ferries has lodged a Petition for Judicial Review of a decision of the Scottish Ministers, published in the OJEU on 27th September 2018, to subsidise the provision of public services in relation to Northern Isles Ferry Services to or from harbours located at Aberdeen, Kirkwall, Lerwick, Scrabster and Stromness.
- ✓ In addition, Pentland Ferries has lodged a related complaint with the European Commission.

- ✓ Scottish Ministers will defend their position in relation to the continued provision of subsidy in support of these lifeline ferry services. The Northern Isles procurement process will continue as

planned, pending the outcome of the Judicial Review and complaint to the European Commission.

RET on the Northern Isles

- ✓ An official State aid complaint was made on 8 June 2018 by a private business regarding ferry services to Orkney. Reducing fares on ferry services on the Northern Isles ferry network remains a top priority for the Scottish Government and we will continue to pursue all avenues to deliver Road Equivalent Tariff. Given the State aid complaint, we need to await the outcome of that process.

Orkney / Shetland Internal Ferries Funding

- ✓ The Scottish Government understands the significant financial challenges that can fall on individual local authorities. This year's budget has made available a further £10.5 million in support for internal ferry services, bringing the total support in the last two years to £21 million. The Scottish Government is currently working on the most appropriate and fair allocation of these funds to the Councils involved.

Freight Fares Review

- ✓ Transport Scotland, under guidance of a working group of key stakeholders, is conducting a comprehensive review of ferry freight fares. We have always been clear that there is no commitment on timing, although work to conclude the review is on-going. Much work has already been done on this complex subject area and further information will be made available in due course.

MV Hamnavoe Dry Dock

- ✓ The MV Hamnavoe completed her short five day period of essential dry dock in January 2019. Serco NorthLink Ferries endeavoured to ensure that any disruption was kept to an absolute minimum. Contingencies included, additional sailings cascaded from Kirkwall, the Hamnavoe bed and breakfast offer being maintained on the replacement vessel and proactively advising customers of all the available alternatives.

Appendix D – Scrabster Harbour

CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 6th MARCH 2019

SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

The Scrabster harbour is managed by Scrabster Harbour Trust, established in 1841 and governed by its own legislation. The Trust seeks to serve the local community and all surpluses created are reinvested into the port.

1. TRAFFIC STATISTICS

We are now well into the final quarter of financial year 2018-19. The overall traffic statistics for the nine-month period on 31st December 2018 were as follows:

- Total vessel arrivals 1,896 compared with 1,719 in 2017-18
- Total vessel tonnage 6.683 million tonnes compared with 6.655 million tonnes in 2017-18
- Ferry Passenger numbers 138,617 up 6% on the previous year
- Cruise passengers 4,390
- Fish box landings 259,050, an increase of 24% on last year.
- Increase in oil and gas activity, maintenance of fish cargo volumes but a decline on the volumes of fuel being delivered by tanker.



Overall the Trust is having yet another satisfactory trading period and is on track for record revenues for a fifth successive year.

2. FERRY

The Trust has been contacted by several of the companies bidding for the next Northern Isles Ferry Services contract. It is understood that the deadline for the bidders submissions is the end of April with the contract being awarded late Summer 2019 for a 31st October start.

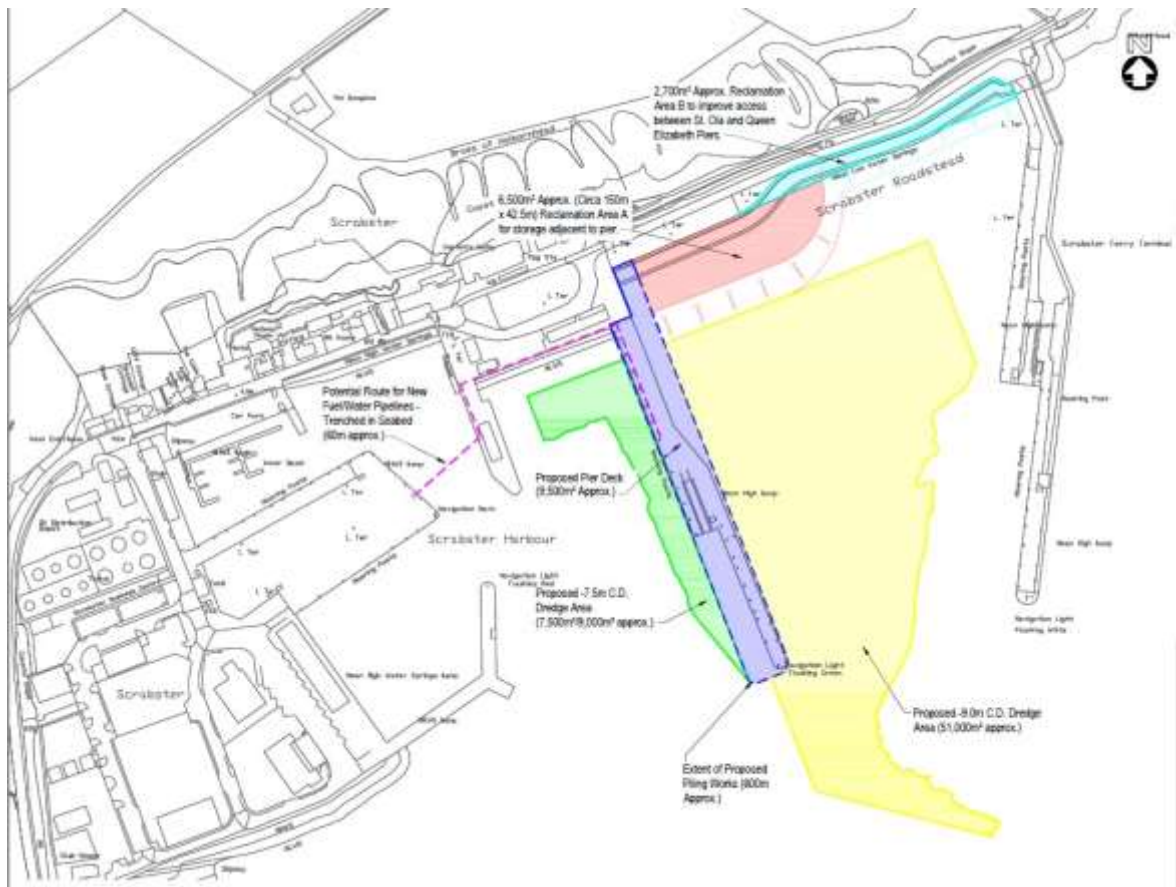
3. CRUISE

The 2019 cruise season begins on 29th April with the visit of Phoenix Reisen's Hamburg and end on 16th September with the call of the Amadea. In total fourteen vessels are expected to call bringing a potential 5,370 passengers to the area.

The Trust will again exhibit under the Cruise Scotland banner at the annual Global Seatrade event in Miami on early April.

4. DEVELOPMENTS

The Trust has continued to progress plans to redevelop the existing St Ola Pier. A contract notice was placed in early January 2019 requesting interest from the contracting community in the £17 million construction works. The initial submissions of interest are expected later this week. These submissions will be evaluated, and three bidders selected to go forward to a negotiated process leading to contract award.



Assuming satisfactory outcome to the funding discussions, the construction works could begin December 2019 and be complete in Spring 2021.

2th March 2019

Appendix E – Gills Harbour

REPORT FROM GILLS HARBOUR Ltd., GILLS BAY, KW1 4YB, FOR CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM OF 06.03.2019.

1) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ZONE. Gills Harbour was confirmed in Autumn, 2018, as the core of '*The Gills Bay Economic Development Zone*' in the Highland Council's CaSPlan, compiled with local participation. It involved input from all other relevant state-backed bodies and public agencies. The new designation was endorsed by the Scottish Government in October, after detailed scrutiny by the latter's 'Local Planning Reporters Unit'. GHL regards this as a very positive step forward.

2) INNER BASIN WORKS ENDORSED. The above will be used to aid promotion of GHL's Inner Basin as the main Caithness 24/7 all tides/all weather support base/hub for work-boats ... often of the 24/26 metres LOA steel-hull class, known by the *multi-cat* trade-name ... and costing c. £3.5/£4.0 million as fully equipped new-builds for tidal-stream developers in the adjacent Inner Sound & nearby E. Pentland Firth waters.

It is those 'narrows' that the twice-daily reversible currents flow most swiftly and are thus most efficient at generating electricity, using the new turbines technology developed in the second decade of the 21st C.

Gills Harbour is (uniquely) conveniently located in-between the two major 'white-water on every day of the year' tide-races ... known locally as *roosts* ... that can seriously

affect, or even put in danger, operations and manpower from such mini-ships in even moderately bad weather, with sea-sickness a known disincentive to technician recruitment/retention in all offshore 'renewables' projects/operations.

GHL is pleased to have had a ringing endorsement in Autumn, 2018, to its forward strategy from Mr Timothy Cornelius, CEO of SIMEC Atlantis Energy plc, (SAE), the developers of the MeyGen sub-sea tidal energy site c. 1 mile to 1.5 miles from its entrance channel. SAE is also internationally known as world-class designers/manufacturers of AR-series of tidal turbines.

The £3 million Inner Basin upgrading scheme has also won the backing of the owners/operators of the many-purpose workboats that have been involved in the pioneering project to date: such vessels' long-term involvement in marine energy projects in Far North waters was confidently forecast in an exhaustive mid-decade study that used actual (cost-saving) tidal works.

This was commissioned by Caithness-born Mr Calum Davidson, then Director of Energy & Low Carbon with 'local employment' agency Highlands & Islands Enterprise, before his untimely passing, aged 58, in late 2017.

3) DEATH OF THE SHORT-SEA ROUTE'S PRACTICAL VISIONARY. January 26th, 2019, saw the passing of Alfred Banks, aged 87, the practical visionary behind the restoration of the historic 'short sea route' to its role as the most important freight and passenger sea-gateway linking Caithness with Orkney.

It re-commenced when the South Ronaldsay farmer & fodder miller/distributor persuaded his sea-Captain brother Bill to return 'home' to re-start a summer passenger & light-goods service from John O'Groats in 1971.

The Banks's and others fabricated a temporary, mobile, extension to the little John O'Groats Pier from a redundant crane-jib and water-tank. Then-owners Caithness County Council secured the first-ever European grant to come to the Highlands & Islands for its permanent concrete replacement, after the UK joined the Common Market in 1973.

It ran to St Margaret's Hope with a converted former WWII-vintage air-sea rescue craft that the Banks family refitted and renamed *Pentalina*.

'Alfie', as he always was known, played a key behind-the-scenes role when he and Orkney bus and transport businessman Jim Peace, (who had hired outside 'professionals' in 1988/90 as port designers/etc.) failed establish Orkney Ferries plc as running a viable RO:RO link eight miles across the Firth from Burwick to Gills Bay.

Mr Banks Snr. lost a reputed several tens of thousands of pounds when the 'Business Expansion Scheme' company ... that raised most of its money by public share issue ... went into administration in 1990.

Unbowed, he invested a major capital input when his son Andrew established Pentland Ferries Ltd in 1997 as a private family business. The rest is recent, successful, history confirming Alfie as the most important local sea-transport visionary of the 20/21st C.

Gills Harbour Ltd was represented at the funeral service when Alfie, for five decades a Kirk elder, was laid to rest in

the kirk-yard of 17C. St Peters Church, in South Ronaldsay, on 02.02.19.

4) THE NEW GOOD-SHIP *ALFRED*. As most attendees will know, Pentland Ferries Ltd (PFL) family directors decided in Autumn, 2018, to name their brand-new 85 metre long, 3,000 tonne, catamaran vessel *Alfred* in his honour. Mr Andrew Banks was in late January out in the Far East supervising arrangements for the state-of-the-art British-designed ROPAX ship's launch when informed of his father's passing. The four-engine new-build vessel, that can take a load of 450 passengers with 100 cars (or alternatively 12 articulated trucks+ 54 cars) was entirely funded from internal company resources + a bank loan.

Alfred has three on-board generators plus four side-thrusters, all aimed at enhancing reliability. Scotland's newest ferry is expected to commence operations on the country's most successful 'mainland to island archipelago' route in early summer 2019. Launching is scheduled for late February.

5) GHL DEAL GOES TO LOCAL CONSTRUCTION COMPANY. Gills Harbour Ltd is pleased to have let a contract in early 2019 for the restoration of damage near the seaward end of 136 metre long Gills Pier to GMR Henderson Ltd of Wick, who won a tightly-fought tender. This will restore damage substantially caused during the prolonged so-called *Beast from the East* storms of one year ago. It is grateful for Marine Scotland's co-operation & help. GHL also thanks the Greencoat Stroupster WF Community Fund for its help in the separate project to install solar-powered lamps on the Pier.

The above is confirmation of the shell-fishing interests in Gills H and its Inner Basin redevelopment scheme, one that will aid local fishers and local tourism pursuits, as well as parties involved in marine renewables, all as recommended by internationally-known economist Tony Mackay in his 2018 *Gills Harbour Study*.

6) NEW MOVES FROM S.A.E. EXPECTED SOON. All four 1.5 MW turbines were operating normally at the MeyGen site in early 2019, after an overhaul in Nigg's Energy Park, each generating a reputed £100,000 monthly sales income for SAE.

In February 2019, SAE announced a deal with Engineering Technology Applications (ETA) of Romsey, Hants. for designing & manufacturing a single 'hub' to allow multiple turbines to be connected with one sub-sea export cable to (here) the shore facility at Ness of Quoys, on Gills Bay. This is a necessary step for the long-term future of tidal stream power, if it is to become a reliable and cost-efficient competitor with other renewables sources, incl. offshore wind.

While SAE awaits the outcome of its bid for a UK Government 'Contract for Difference' for MeyGen Phase 1C (30+ turbines), expected in the summer of 2019, it is said to be contemplating a bond-issue to fully finance the 'demonstration' installation of two of its latest Atlantis AR 2000 turbines, each of 2MW, that have been designed in conjunction with US defence corporation Lockheed Martin. This is commonly known as Project Stroma and it is understood that some EU funding assistance may be on the cards, a source that could be soon 'kicked into touch' by Brexit.

The above could mean probable turbines installation in 2020 with work-boats being definitely needed during such operations.

It is in the interests of the whole of the Caithness, Scottish and British communities that the mini-power station, as per MeyGen Phase 1C, proceeds. That is, if the UK aspires to retain its world leadership in tidal-stream arrays in the face of fierce 'current' competition from, amongst others, France, Korea, China; the latter had two fact-finding delegations at Gills H. in late 2018.

7) CARRIAGEWAY OF GILLS SPUR-ROAD 'SORTED'.

Some potholes appeared after a frosty spell earlier this winter on the busy, main carriageway of the 'spur road' from the A 836 route to the Harbour-side. GHG is grateful for the prompt action by Wick-based Highland Council roads engineer Mr Jonathan Gunn and THC's local 'Direct Labour Squad' in remedying this problem.

8) STAGECOACH PUBLIC BUS SERVICES.

Those have been contentious recently, but it is now possible to leave Kirkwall at 07:00 (weekdays) and arrive in Inverness at 12:50, with a minimum change-over time at Wick: but only partially vice-versa, leaving Inverness at 14:40 arriving at SMH via Gills H, but without a bus-link to Kirkwall.

Representatives from Stagecoach have stated at local bus user forums that they are in discussions with Pentland Ferries, with the former being requested to reinstate 'through ticketing' to/from Orkney for potential users from Central Scotland and all intermediate points in between. Services to/from Gills can no longer be directly booked through the (otherwise excellent) City-Link call centre.

One suggestion has been to retain the X 99 link at Dunbeath for Thurso, Scrabster via Halkirk, but continue the upwards X 99 beyond Wick via JO'G, Gills H, Mey, Dunnet and on to Castletown & Thurso, thereby maximising populations and tourism-related localities served. ENDS

Appendix F – Direct Rail Services

DRS Update - Caithness Transport Forum

March 2019

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'. Work in relation to the Exotics Programme continues and DRS are also working with MOD to commence Fuel Movements between MoD Vulcan and Sellafield.

Georgemas train trial

We recognise there has been delays however, DRS remains fully committed to a commercial train trial at Georgemas Junction. We're pleased to advise that DRS has invested in equipment to facilitate intermodal traffic and the customer, supplier and funding support remains. The new equipment is being tested in March at the railhead and then a date will be published for the live intermodal trial with a locomotive, where some of you will be invited along to attend.

Kind regards,

Rachael Storey

Communications & Marketing Manager