



STRONGER
TOGETHER

Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 10/03/2020

Time: 13:30

Location: Smith Room, Pulteney Centre, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (minutes)
Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Bill Mowat	Gills Harbour
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Dougie Cook	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Frank Roach	HITRANS
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail Alliance
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
William Mainus	Stagecoach Highland
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:

Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Peter Faccenda	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Lynda Johnston	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Julie McGee	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Cllr Nicola Sinclair	Highland Council
Jonathan Gunn	Highland Council
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
David Beaton	Stagecoach Highland
John Gunn	Stagecoach Highland
Paul Linhart-MacAskill	Transport Scotland

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 05.12.2019

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

3. Review of actions from last meeting

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

This action remains ongoing, per the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit update (**Appendix A**).

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

Trudy Morris noted that there is a need to look at this and a number of other actions (**M002/A004** and **M004/A010**) as a wider stream of work for the Forum to consider future priorities in light of e.g. climate emergency, local authority budgetary concerns, changing demographic profile of the region etc.

The aim would be to start at a high level with a refresh / revamp of the Transport Vision for Caithness and then to develop specific packages of work around e.g. intermodal transport, electric vehicles etc. that arise from these new priorities.

Roger Saxon noted that he had previously furnished suggested updates to the Transport Vision to David Swanson.

CTF(2019)M002/A004 – *Stagecoach and Chamber to discuss electric vehicle pilot* **COMPLETE**

See **M001/A010**

CTF(2019)M004/A001 – *Chamber & Dounreay Stakeholder Group to write to DRS & NDA regarding Georgemas freight trial* **COMPLETE**

This was done, a copy of the letter and response provided to attendees. New contacts at DRS have been received for future communications and the trial is planned for 18 March, with all places offered to Forum members now filled.

Roger Saxon queried why such a small number of places were made available.

CTF(2019)M004/A002 – *Derek Glasgow to seek answer on issues raised regarding catering on Wick services* **COMPLETE**

Trudy noted that this action is superseded and that this has been included in the letter to Alex Hynes and Transport Scotland at **A005**.

Derek Glasgow noted that the catering staff are now at full complement for the Far North Line.

CTF(2019)M004/A003 – *David Swanson to invite Aaron's of Wick to attend Forum meetings.* **COMPLETE**

Initial attempts were made to get contact details to enable this, however this is now no longer relevant with the company withdrawing its public services and returning to private hire only.

CTF(2019)M004/A004 – *Forum to write to Transport Scotland regarding NIFS contract and Hamnavoe replacement* **COMPLETE**

This was done and a copy of the letter and response made available to Forum members. The Northern Isles Ferry Services contract has now been confirmed as being awarded to Serco with CalMac challenge being dropped.

Further detail is available in the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit report at (**Appendix A**)

CTF(2019)M004/A005 – *Forum to write to Alex Hynes regarding issues on the Far North Line* **COMPLETE**

This was done, and a copy of the letters to both ScotRail and Transport Scotland made available to Forum members.

CTF(2019)M004/A006 – *Derek Glasgow to raise issues with pedestrian access to Thurso station* **ONGOING**

Derek noted that the Property Manager is investigating to see if funds can be made available for extra lighting and that he is awaiting a response to a quote submitted for this.

Cllr Bremner noted that he had discussed pedestrian access at a number of stations with Derek at an external meeting – Derek confirmed this was ongoing.

Cllr Donnie Mackay noted issues with parking at Thurso station as a result of new Highland Council parking enforcement. Trudy Morris noted that Highland Council and ScotRail were supposed to be discussing this issue and that she felt it unacceptable this had not yet been resolved.

There was some discussion of this and it was agreed that Derek Glasgow would provide details of the appropriate contact at ScotRail and Alex Macmanus would take this up with the appropriate person Highland Council.

CTF(2020)M001/A001 – *Alex Macmanus to take up issue of parking at Thurso station with Highland Council*

CTF(2019)M004/A007 – *Trudy Morris and Roger Saxon to take OHM G-PaTRA proposal to Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership* **ONGOING**

Frank Roach noted that the report for this was now finished and that he would forward it to enable this to be taken forward.

CTF(2019)M004/A008 – *Marco Bardelli to provide feedback on overnight roadworks in winter* **COMPLETE**

Davie Alexander clarified as the original raiser of this concern that he had concerns around working conditions for overnight winter works. Marco noted that this is a fair point and that safety and working

conditions are taken into account. Marco noted that the rationale behind overnight works is to minimise disruption where possible.

CTF(2019)M004/A009 – Chamber to take back issues regarding X99 to Stagecoach COMPLETE

This was done, William Mainus confirmed he would cover this in his update.

CTF(2019)M004/A010 – Trudy Morris to discuss revamp of Transport Vision for Caithness at CNSRP Delivery Group COMPLETE

See **M001/A010**.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Trudy Morris noted that requests had been made for reports to be submitted in advance of meetings and that this was not happening. She emphasised the need for this to enable more time to discuss issues.
- 4.2 Trudy raised that the spirit of the Forum is collaborative and that, while it is appropriate for concerns and issues to be raised and argued, cheap shots and inflammatory language should not be used. She noted that reports containing such language would not be circulated.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.1.1 No attendee was present but a written update was provided (**Appendix B**).

5.2 Wick Harbour

- 5.2.1 No attendee was present but a written update was provided after the meeting (**Appendix C**).

5.3 Gills Harbour

- 5.3.1 Bill Mowat provided a written update (**Appendix D**).
- 5.3.2 Mike Lunan asked if Bill could provide attendees with an update as to whether the *MV Alfred* was successful in winning the Ship of the Year award.
- 5.3.3 Marco Bardelli noted that signage at Latheron is being updated with regards to the North Coast 500 and that this will also include mention of the ferry crossing from Gills Bay.

5.4 Pentland Ferries

5.4.1 No attendee was present and no update provided.

5.5 Serco NorthLink Ferries

5.5.1 Kris Bevan provided an update to the Forum. Of note:

- This is the 6th consecutive year of car and passenger growth
 - In 18/19 passenger traffic was up around 8,500 and car traffic around 2,000
 - Freight was down slightly in 18/19
- The first months of 2020 have seen some impact on passenger numbers as a result of poor weather affecting sailings
- NorthLink continue to promote opportunities for travel to the Northern Isles, tying in with the Year of Coasts and Waters and onboard passenger announcements have been amended to reflect this
- The NorthLink exhibition unit has been on tour to various travel trade shows to promote opportunities for travel to the Northern Isles
- On service delivery, reliability in 2019 was 97.9% and punctuality 99.4%
- 97% of passengers surveyed relate their overall experience as positive
- 91% of onboard suppliers are sourced within 50 miles of NorthLink's home ports
- The *MV Hamnavoe* is back in operation following dry dock and now has a Changing Places facility on board. It has also undergone all necessary ship-side works to take on power at Stromness and is awaiting shore-side works to enable this
- NorthLink are currently recruiting for chefs and passenger services assistants

5.5.2 A written update was also provided by Transport Scotland Ferries Unit (**Appendix A**).

5.5.3 Trudy Morris noted that with regards to dry docking, CalMac also carry out their routine dry docks at the same time as NorthLink, leaving no spare capacity, and queried why this could not be scheduled better to allow replacement vessels to be made available. She queried whether this could be taken into account for the next dry dock period.

5.5.4 Kris noted that the schedule for dry docking was for a 1 week dry dock in 2021 and 2 weeks in 2022. He noted that the Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan would guide any decisions around vessel redeployments.

5.5.5 It was agreed that the Chamber would take up the issue of dry dock scheduling with Transport Scotland.

CTF(2020)M001/A002 – *Chamber to take up dry dock scheduling with Transport Scotland*

5.5.6 Mike Lunan queried whether the recent stormy weather had revealed any issues with onshore docking.

5.5.7 Kris noted that he was not aware of any issues. He noted that the weather had been consistently poor, highlighted issues around climate change, and noted that this would need to be taken into account for future planning.

5.6 ScotRail Alliance

5.6.1 Trudy Morris noted the letters written to ScotRail and Transport Scotland and her dissatisfaction with the response received from ScotRail. She noted that a number of issues remain to be dealt with including:

- Display screens at stations, the website and apps not showing correct information

- Confusion over use of service buses and provision of replacement bus services
- Ongoing issues with catering on services
- The connection between Glasgow-Inverness and Inverness-Wick remaining very tight

5.6.2 Trudy noted that a lot of good work had been done by the Far North Line Review Group and that this risked being lost if basic services were not run to an acceptable standard.

5.6.3 Derek Glasgow delivered an update to the Forum. Of note:

- The last 9-10 weeks have seen an improvement in PPM
- There have been further issues with points at Georgemas
- Some 40mph restrictions have been enforced during periods of poor weather
- Derek is now part of the programme team, which is looking at linespeed improvements and the enhanced RETB programme
- A site survey for the Lentrans Loop has now been done
- The timetable for the next 5-10 years is currently being reviewed

5.6.4 Trudy asked Derek to take back the issue of poor communication from ScotRail.

CTF(2020)M001/A003 – *Derek Glasgow to raise issue of poor communication with ScotRail and seek a response in advance of the next CTF meeting*

5.6.5 Cllr Bremner noted that he had met with Derek to discuss various issues including station accessibility and the importance of dealing with vulnerable passengers where services are cancelled or delayed. He noted that most passengers want the basics of a service such as heating and catering to be right, and that if these are done most passengers will be happy with the service.

5.6.6 Cllr Bremner further noted his concerns around the discontinuation of the Abellio franchise and what impacts this might have on reliability. He noted that where passengers do need extra time to transfer between services, staff are generally good at ensuring passengers know what is happening and ensuring that services are held.

5.6.7 Derek noted that a heating survey had been carried out and only one unit found to be not working. He updated the Forum that a new person has been taken on to deal with air conditioning on trains. On the point regarding vulnerable passengers, he noted that recent issues had been raised with the Accessibility Manager and the point made that a different approach needs to be taken in future

5.6.8 Cllr Bremner welcomed the update on heating and air conditioning and queried whether seals on windows had been looked at. Derek noted that a sample check had been done and four found to be faulty – these were programmed in to change

5.5.9 Cllr Bremner noted his feeling that journey time is not a major concern on the Far North Line due to the ability to work on the train, and queried whether any work was being done to improve commuter links between Wick and Thurso. He also raised a query regarding the Helmsdale Hub proposal.

5.6.10 It was noted that there is some resistance to the Helmsdale proposals as this would potentially mean train changes. With regards to commuter links between Wick and Thurso it was noted that HITRANS are working on a proposal for a battery train service on this route.

- 5.6.11 Mike Lunan noted that one issue appears to be displays at stations not showing when trains are delayed and instead moving on to display the next scheduled service. He noted that the ability to hold trains at Inverness to meet the connection from Glasgow is good and seems to be working well.
- 5.6.12 Derek noted that station staff have the ability to hold the train for up to five minutes, but then have to go to control to request a longer delay. He noted that the conductors do check for connecting passengers and inform station staff.
- 5.6.13 Frank Roach noted that the 16:00 Wick-Inverness service now makes a better connection to Glasgow. Trudy noted that the connection remains tight and the northbound service from Glasgow is consistently overrunning. Derek Glasgow noted that Network Rail are doing a review of performance on the Perth-Inverness stretch of the line.
- 5.6.14 Trudy enquired as to why the Inverness-Wick service could not run later – Derek noted that this relates to regulation on drivers' working hours.
- 5.6.15 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that there had been a marked improvement in passenger numbers on the Far North Line.
- 5.6.16 Cllr Bremner queried whether there was a consideration in terms of timing for bringing new HSTs onto the Highland Mainline. Derek noted that there is a plan for this and that there will be timing implications.

5.7 Direct Rail Services

- 5.7.1 No attendee was present, but Trudy Morris noted that the freight trial had been discussed and that updates were provided to attendees on the NDA's moves to create an integrated transport division.
- 5.7.2 Frank Roach noted that HITRANS had supported the freight trial at Georgemas. He updated the Forum that he had been attempting to involve some additional types of freight such as wood, waste and flagstone, but that this had proven not to be possible.
- 5.7.3 There was some discussion of the long-term opportunities for rail transport of waste out of the county, with the Seater landfill site now due for closure in 2025.

5.8 HITRANS

- 5.8.1 Frank Roach updated the Forum that HITRANS has recently produced a report on the Highland Main Line, and noted their disappointment with the outcome of the STPR1 process for the line. Frank noted that relatively few commitments have been met and the spend has been relatively limited by comparison to commitments made on road. He noted that a number of opportunities are developing to campaign for investment in the railway.
- 5.8.2 Frank updated the Forum that the strategy for decarbonisation of rail by 2035 is expected to be announced soon. He noted that this will mean that Class 158s will no longer be in service post-2035 and that this is one

reason for the battery train proposal. He noted that the next steps in the proposal are to do some demand work and to meet with Transport Scotland to gauge interest.

- 5.8.3 With regards to the battery train proposal, Frank noted that this would probably be run by a third-party operator rather than ScotRail, and that he looked forward to discussing the proposal in more detail with CNSRP.
- 5.8.4 Frank updated the Forum that he did not now expect cycle carriages to come to the Far North Line due to the speed restrictions they would require.
- 5.8.5 Frank noted that HITRANS had received some European funding to build a Mobility-as-a-Service platform across multiple modes of transport in the region, offering seamless, single-ticket travel. It was noted that there may be some issues implementing this on ferries.
- 5.8.6 Frank noted that some gauging work is being done on the Far North Line as part of the process of establishing a Scottish gauge across the network. Mike Lunan queried if this would also establish weight-bearing capacity – Frank noted he assumed this would be the case.
- 5.8.7 Bill Mowat noted that he would have thought there would be demand for cycle carriages on the Far North Line – Frank agreed but noted that it appears they will be brought in on the West Highland Line but not the Far North.
- 5.8.8 Cllr Bremner queried the rationale behind this. Frank noted that a study carried out two years ago had looked at what cycle capacity was required on the West Highland Line and had found that demand was being met, with most trains on the line having six cycle spaces by comparison to the two available on the Far North Line.
- 5.8.9 Roger Saxon raised his concerns that issues with speed restrictions had not been realised earlier. Trudy queried what these restrictions would add to the journey time – Frank noted that he was not sure.
- 5.8.10 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that he wished all the best for the success of the freight operation at Georgemas.
- 5.8.11 Alex Macmanus queried whether the intention for the battery train was to operate a Wick-Thurso shuttle service. Frank noted that this is the case and that the train is capable of doing 40 miles between charges.
- 5.8.12 Alex noted that with proposed parking charges coming in, there may be more demand for such a service. Trudy noted the importance of getting the public transport infrastructure in place before bringing in charges.
- 5.8.13 Cllr Bremner queried whether Highland Council had been approached as a potential operator – Frank noted that he was not sure if local authorities were able to run rail services.

5.9 Berriedale Braes

- 5.9.1 Trudy Morris queried as to the expected finish date for works at Berriedale and the exact location of the exit point for the new stretch of road.
- 5.9.2 Marco Bardelli confirmed that works were still expected to finish for Spring 2020, weather dependent. With regards to location, he noted that the road ties in near the existing layby at the north end. Trudy noted that this is still quite a sharp curve – Marco noted that it is a longer, sweeping curve but one which will offer the ability to maintain speed in both directions.

5.10 BEAR Scotland

- 5.10.1 An update on BEAR Scotland's proposed programme of works for the coming year was provided to attendees (**Appendix E**) and Marco briefly updated the Forum on this. He noted that the programme is currently in draft and is based on BEAR's assessment of the network post-winter. Once confirmed, the programme will appear online as previously. He noted that around £2m of investment was being made in resurfacing in the coming year.
- 5.10.2 Roger Saxon queried the division between capital and revenue spending, and noted that there may be an ambition to realign sections of the A9 North of Inverness in the transport vision for the region.
- 5.10.3 Marco noted that major capital investment in the A9 would be considered as part of the STPR process and that it can be more difficult to deliver smaller schemes. He noted that the overall roads budget has decreased from previous years.
- 5.10.4 Davie Alexander raised a query about structural maintenance and drainage works and noted that there were a number of areas with drainage issues. Marco noted that structural maintenance tends to involve more sub-surface works, strengthening the structure of the road. He noted that drainage is fundamental to the life of the road and that those drainage works included in the programme are main works and that there will be smaller drainage interventions carried out across the network.
- 5.10.5 Cllr Donnie Mackay queried why some drainage materials were being removed – Marco noted that these have a lifespan as they are used to filter water and get clogged, so have to be replaced.
- 5.10.6 Cllr Bremner noted his feeling that BEAR's programme of works is good and welcomed the public visibility of the programme. He felt it was important that the public know the difference between roads which are Highland Council's responsibility and those which are part of the trunk road network. He further noted that the Community Councils have been engaged in this work and that it is good to see areas of concern mentioned being addressed. He noted that Highland Council have a similar programme of works but that this is not publicly available.
- 5.10.7 Cllr Willie Mackay queried whether the speed monitoring at Latheronwheel was in response to the local campaign on this – Marco confirmed this to be the case.

5.11 Highland Council

- 5.11.1 A written update was provided by Jonathan Gunn (**Appendix F**).
- 5.11.2 Cllr Bremner confirmed that the resurfacing of Riverside car park in Wick has commenced.
- 5.11.3 Marco Bardelli noted that Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland have been working with Highland Council to ensure consistent signage with regards to the North Coast 500 route.
- 5.11.4 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that he and Cllr Bremner have been meeting regularly with Highland Council roads and that a system is in place to monitor every issue raised by members of the public. Trudy Morris queried if it was possible for the Forum to have sight of this document.

CTF(2020)M001/A004 – *Cllr Bremner to liaise with Jonathan Gunn on reporting to Caithness Transport Forum*

- 5.11.5 Cllr Bremner queried if it would be possible for Marco Bardelli and a Highland Council roads officer to come to a meeting of the Association of Caithness Community Councils. Marco confirmed that either he or a representative of BEAR Scotland would be able to do so.
- 5.11.6 Mike Lunan noted that in Thurso he had encountered four drains with standing water and queried how these would be dealt with. Cllr Bremner noted that Highland Council had responsibility for this but that they needed the community to report issues in order to deal with them.
- 5.11.7 Trudy noted that this message would be useful to communicate as part of the press communications for the Forum.

CTF(2020)M001/A005 – Chamber to include message on roads reporting in press communications for Forum

5.12 Stagecoach

- 5.12.1 William Mainus delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach. Of note:
- Stagecoach Highland is now a separate company to the Aberdeen business
 - The next 6 months will see a focus on the business in Caithness. Stagecoach has been trying to find new fleet and hope to start seeing some of this in the new livery in the area and operating on the X99 soon
 - They are looking at the possibility of making the X99 non-stop after Dornoch, but there are some issues to be resolved
 - The last southbound service is to be extended all the way to Inverness
 - Work is in progress to try and improve links with Pentland Ferries services from Gills Harbour
- 5.12.2 Cllr Bremner noted that with regards to members of the public raising concerns, the preferred route is now for them to do this via Community Councils. He noted that an invitation had been extended to Stagecoach to attend a meeting of the Association of Caithness Community Councils and queried whether they would also be willing to attend individual Community Council meetings. William confirmed that Stagecoach would be happy to send a representative to Community Council meetings.
- 5.12.3 Trudy Morris noted that the Chamber would add a note about raising bus service issues via Community Councils to the planned press communication.
- 5.12.4 Cllr Bremner noted that the next tenders for Highland Council services would be in 2022.
- 5.12.5 Cllr Bremner noted that he had previously raised that vehicles used on the Glasgow-Kilmarnock service have a much improved interior compared to the X99, but that passenger numbers on the X99 had been raised as a reason why this could not be replicated. He asked William if there was any possibility of Stagecoach looking at this.
- 5.12.6 William noted that Stagecoach are looking at bringing eight new vehicles into the area to serve the requirements of the Dounreay and schools contracts and of the X99.
- 5.12.7 Cllr Bremner noted that smaller coaches would be welcome as these can more easily access housing estates, and queried if there were any plans to increase the number of these. William noted that there are no plans at present but that this may change with the next round of Highland Council tenders.
- 5.12.8 Trudy queried when the contract with Dounreay was due for renewal and noted that the Chamber could feed back to Dounreay with regards to vehicle types. William noted that this would be in Summer 2022 and

that Stagecoach and Dounreay were already in discussions regarding vehicle types. Roger Saxon noted that the existing Dounreay contract does not specify coaches.

5.12.9 Trudy noted the need to consider futureproofing of services in the area. Cllr Bremner noted that Highland Council will need to consider how they shape their own requirements prior to issuing tenders.

5.12.10 Bill Mowat welcomed Stagecoach's willingness to attend Community Council meetings and queried an issue previously raised regarding booking services to Gills Harbour via Citylink. William confirmed that tickets booked to Thurso will be accepted for travel to Gills Harbour as the fare is the same, and noted that they hoped to introduce a new booking system giving more flexibility.

5.12.11 Trudy noted that the March meeting of the Highland Community Planning Partnership had a focus on transport, and Cllr Bremner noted that the next National Planning Framework would shape a range of considerations around planning, transport and connectivity.

5.13 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

5.13.1 Trudy gave a brief update to the Forum on progress with the Chamber's work towards a Public Service Obligation from Wick to both Aberdeen and Edinburgh, noting that the business case for this had now been formally submitted to Transport Scotland and that a discussion was scheduled with officials later in the month. She noted that the NDA had also written in support of the business case, and that a concern remains that both routes from Wick are fragile.

5.13.2 Dougie Cook gave an update on behalf of Highlands & Islands Airport Ltd. Of note:

- Eastern Airways will not be reinstating their evening flight for the summer schedule
- Passenger numbers are down 13% year-to-date, largely due to the reduction in Eastern's schedule
- HIAL will be reviewing opening hours again as a result of changed schedules
- Aircraft movements are up 1% despite the reduction in scheduled flights – Dougie highlighted the work of Far North Aviation here
- Dougie's own role has changed to General Manager North and he will be leaving the fire service. He now has responsibility for Kirkwall as well and will have an Airport Manager at Kirkwall working under him
- Security is back to full staff complement but ATC staffing continues to be a concern. The current ATC complement is four with one trainee expected to qualify in September
- On the ATMS programme, the plan is now for Wick to be served by a radar approach and Flight Information Service Officers (FISOs), which means some jobs will be retained in Wick. The plan is for this to be in place by December 2023
- BOWL are still planning to relocate their hangar but plans for this have been delayed by 3-6 months
- Flybe going into administration has not directly affected Wick, although it may lead to some changes in connectivity via Edinburgh
- COVID-19 has had an impact on schedules, with Loganair removing 10 flights from the Wick-Edinburgh route and planning to reduce by 10% across Scotland. HIAL continue to look at business continuity in this regard

- The UK is planning to come out of EASA which could mean complex changes in regulation – the hope is for initial regulatory alignment
- A number of improvements and investments have been made at the airport:
 - Loop taxiway expected to be completed by the end of the financial year, weather dependent. This will give a seven-year guarantee and is around a £100K investment
 - Drainage improvements – some historical issues have been resolved and this has given a chance to look at more options for capture and treatment
 - Survey completed on heating system in the terminal and G & A Barnie engaged to carry out remedial works. Around £250K is set aside for new heating and options are being explored – this will be a renewable solution
 - Terminal doors are currently being replaced
 - Lighting maintenance works being carried out by G & A Barnie
 - DVOR was due to be phased out but Wick is now one of 20 across the UK retaining this – works to replace the current system will take around 3-4 months

5.13.3 Dougie noted the planned closure of Scatsa Airport in Shetland, which will mean most traffic from there diverting to Sumburgh. He noted that there may be opportunities for Wick John O’Groats to pick up some traffic as a result of this.

5.13.4 Trudy noted that the Flybe logo is still being displayed on flight information screens – Dougie noted that this is being addressed.

5.13.5 Trudy noted the positives of investment in the airport.

6. Press Communications

6.1 It was discussed that a number of pieces of positive news had been received and that some communication should be made to the press on these.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Roger Saxon queried whether the Caithness Bus Users Group would be continued – Trudy Morris noted earlier discussions on raising bus service issues via Community Councils.

7.2 Roger Saxon noted that he would be standing down as Chair of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group and that this would be his last Forum meeting. Trudy Morris thanked him for his contributions over the years.

8. Date of Next Meeting

8.1 This is proposed to be on 15 July via videoconferencing, with details to be confirmed.

9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

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

CTF(2019)M004/A006 – Derek Glasgow to raise issues with pedestrian access to Thurso station

CTF(2019)M004/A007 – Trudy Morris and Roger Saxon to take OHM G-PaTRA proposal to Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership

11. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2020)M001/A001 – Alex Macmanus to take up issue of parking at Thurso station with Highland Council

CTF(2020)M001/A002 – Chamber to take up dry dock scheduling with Transport Scotland

CTF(2020)M001/A003 – Derek Glasgow to raise issue of poor communication with ScotRail and seek a response in advance of the next CTF meeting

CTF(2020)M001/A004 – Cllr Bremner to liaise with Jonathan Gunn on reporting to Caithness Transport Forum

CTF(2020)M001/A005 – Chamber to include message on roads reporting in press communications for Forum

Appendix A – Transport Scotland Ferries

Caithness Transport Forum

10 March 2020 Transport Scotland Ferries Unit - Update

RET on Northern Isles Ferry Service

- The Scottish Government is engaging positively with the European Commission following a complaint made by Pentland Ferries about our proposals introduce RET on Northern Isles ferry services.
- We need to wait until we have a clear and agreed way forward before making any reductions to fares on Pentland Firth routes, however we are engaging positively with the European Commission in this regard.
- Ministers remain committed to pursuing all avenues to deliver RET for the Northern Isles.
- As an interim measure, passenger and car fares on routes to Shetland were reduced by 20% in June 2018.
- Scottish Ministers have also delivered fare reductions for islanders, including a 20% reduction on Aberdeen-Kirkwall-Lerwick routes on cabins and a three year fares freeze for passengers and non-commercial vehicles from January 2020.
- These build on the 30% discount for passenger and vehicle fares already enjoyed by islanders.
- These are benefits the Scottish Government has introduced separate to those set out in the bid from Serco and are not affected by the contract extension.

Northern Isles Ferry Service Tender

- Serco was chosen as the preferred bidder following a fair, open and transparent tendering exercise.
- The tender was structured to attract the Most Economically Advantageous operator. Given the essential lifeline nature of these services, the contract bids were assessed on the basis of an assessment ratio of 65% price and 35% quality.
- A commitment to the Scottish Government's fair work policy was a condition of the tender and formed part of the evaluation process. The contract will deliver pension protections, a no compulsory redundancy guarantee and closer working relationships with the unions.
- The next contract to operate the Northern Isles Ferry Services will be awarded to Serco NorthLink Ferries by the end of March 2020.
- Transport Scotland has now completed its engagement with the European Commission in relation to outstanding state aid issues. CalMac Ferries has also withdrawn its legal action.
- In order to complete the award process and allow a mobilisation period, the current contract has been extended by a period of up to six months to ensure continuity of services for Caithness, Orkney and Shetland.
- The new Northern Isles contract will deliver real benefits for Northern Isles communities. These benefits include;
 - ten existing cabins upgraded to premium level on the Aberdeen-Kirkwall-Lerwick routes
 - a full refurbishment of the terminal lounge at Hatston (Kirkwall)
 - earlier boarding at Aberdeen harbour
 - extended opening hours of NorthLink's customer services centre.
 - The flexibility to allow timetabled freight and ferry services to be amended to better reflect changes in demand across the year and from sector to sector.
- Once the new contract is awarded, Transport Scotland will publish a nonsensitive version of the contract on its website.

MV Hamnavoe Dry Dock 2020

- The MV Hamnavoe completed her scheduled essential dry dock in January 2020. A freight vessel was utilised to provide cover.
- Transport Scotland officials explored the potential of a vessel from the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) fleet being reassigned to provide cover in January 2020. However, Due to CalMac's own intensive dry dock schedule and redeployment plans to cover their own fleet relief, no viable vessel from the CHFS fleet was available.
- SNF also investigated the operational suitability and feasibility of utilising the MV Pentalina but confirmed that she was not suitable on several grounds. There were a number of factors including vessel operating restrictions which applied on the Pentland Firth, along with infrastructure and berth fit at Scrabster Harbour which rendered the vessel unsuitable for the route conditions.
- During MV Hamnavoe's dry dock a new "Changing Places" facility was fully installed. This fully accessible facility has an adult-sized, height adjustable changing bench, a hoist and a centrally placed toilet. NorthLink have worked closely with the Scottish charity PAMIS to ensure these are to specification and we are delighted that the Scottish Government and the operator have come together collaboratively to fund and install these facilities, making NorthLink the first ferry operator to have these toilets on all passenger vessels.
- Work during dry dock has also been completed on commissioning the MV Hamnavoe's shore connection/cold ironing project. The innovative ship shore connection at Stromness is part of the Stromness Multi-modal low carbon transport and active travel hub and will utilise local renewable energy to help decarbonise the MV Hamnavoe, which will contribute to improved air quality, reducing noise and carbon emissions in the local area providing a benefit to Orkney residents.

Freight Fares Review

- Following a commitment in the Ferries Plan 2013-2022, Transport Scotland, under guidance of a Working Group of key stakeholders, is currently conducting a comprehensive review of ferry freight fares.
- The existing ferry freight fares structure is extremely complex, with differences in, for example, rates per mile, categories of freight, rules of carriage and discounts, across the various ferry networks.
- Much work has been done to assess the existing freight fares structure, generate options for a future structure, and assess the impacts of any potential changes.
- The Working Group agreed on a preferred freight fares structure, which is on a cost neutral basis, at a meeting in March 2017. Since then, officials have been conducting further analysis to assess the impact of any potential changes on individual fares, hauliers and sectors, with regular discussions with Ministers.
- Further details will be made available once conclusions have been reached and decisions made.
- Fares policy, including freight and non-freight, will be reviewed as part of the work on the next Ferries Plan, so there is the opportunity to consider a holistic solution to bring the Freight Fares Review to a conclusion.

END

March 2020

Appendix B – Scrabster Harbour Trust

CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 10th March 2020

SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

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

The traffic statistics for the three quarters of the financial year 2019-20, the nine-months to 31st December 2019 were as follows:

- Total vessel arrivals were 1,710 compared with 1,896 in 2018-19
- Total vessel tonnage amounted to 6.721 million tonnes compared with 6.833 million tonnes in 2018-19
- Ferry Passenger numbers were 140,201 up 6.1% on the previous year.
- Fish box landings amounted to 208,887 boxes, a decrease of 19.4% on last year.
- Oil and gas vessel tonnage was identical to the same period last year.
- The weekly Faroese fish cargo volumes were 28.5% higher.
- Coastal tanker fuel volumes were 3.3% down.

2. ACTIVITY UPDATE

- Smyril Line commenced a new ro-ro cargo service from Faroes on 18th January 2020. This means Scrabster now has two weekly international cargo services.
- Timber shipments connected with the Halsary Wind Farm continue. To date almost 30,000 tonnes has been shipped from Scrabster.
- There has been strong developer interest in the port connected with the planned Scotwind Offshore Wind Leasing round.
- The port supported the mobilisation and demobilisation of the vessels involved in the latest pipeline tow out from S7's Wester yard.

3. DEVELOPMENTS

A contractor for the St. Ola Pier Redevelopment project has been selected. The finalisation of funding and consenting arrangements is nearly complete. The works are anticipated to commence next month with an expected completion date of summer 2021.

The project budget is almost £20 million and will bring immediate economic benefits during the construction phase and deliver further capacity at Scrabster particularly aimed at the energy and cruise sectors.

4. CORONAVIRUS

In keeping with the rest of the nation, the Trust is actively monitoring the situation and follows the relevant guidelines, advice and updates received from the Department of Transport, British Port Association, Health Protection Scotland and the Highland Council.

The cruise sector has attracted a lot of attention in connection with the illness. The Scrabster cruise season does not begin until early May so we will have the benefit of experience at other cruise ports.

Appendix C – Wick Harbour Authority

Wick Harbour

Business update for Caithness Transport forum. March 2020

Overview

- Wick Harbour continues to prosper, and the future looks very promising with further offshore windfarm projects close to Wick a real possibility over the next few years. Leisure and fishing are also greatly contributing to the overall success of the harbour.

Offshore wind

- Beatrice Offshore Windfarm has now entirely moved on from construction to O&M working. During the winter months there has been two vessels working from the harbour and this is expected to increase to around the previous years level from the end of March. There is also expected to be a further painting campaign which would mean further vessels operating from the port.
- Moray East windfarm is under construction and very encouraging meetings have been held with one of the main contractors, who have stated that Wick is their favoured port to operate from during construction. **Interestingly, they have stated that they will be flying in up to 60 personnel for crew changes to Wick on a weekly basis, with a similar number of return seats south, which can only be good news for Wick Airport. At present they are unsure if this will be carried out by private charter or scheduled flights. Much will depend on how the operations of the airport pan out.**

The above contractor also stated that they are looking at Wick with a more long-term plan, with a view to the next round of windfarm leases and the draft sectoral plan.

- Moray West windfarm continues in the planning and survey stage and is hopeful of making a start on the windfarm by 2022. Very constructive meetings have been held between WHA and Moray West and we await further positive developments.
- In the future further offshore wind business may come in the form of floating windfarms which have been mooted for construction off the east Caithness coast.

Cargoes

It has been a relatively quiet winter period with regards to cargoes. However, as we write this, we have a barge alongside delivering 2 towheads to Subsea7. A further 3 shipments of towheads are due sometime in May /June.

Also expect to have shipments of the usual Tankers, Lime, Salt and other general cargo and an increase in timber import, with fuel for the Caithness Heat & Power plant.

Fishing

- Fish & shellfish landings by value during 2019 showed a marked improvement over the previous few years. Crab landings were buoyed by good prices, although this fell off somewhat towards the end of the year, with problems in the Chinese market. Landings were also boosted by an increase in vessels fishing for squid close to Wick and landing at the port.

Leisure

- Around 300 visiting yachts were welcomed to Wick Harbour during the 2019 season. These came from all over the world from countries as far afield as New Zealand, Russia and the USA. A large contingency arrived from the Scandinavian countries as well as Holland and Germany. The trend is for vessels to stay in port for longer periods and crew numbers approaching 700, this must be a great boost to the local economy.
- Locally, the marina is proving very popular with local vessel owners and each year runs at almost full capacity.
- The harbour a visit from the *MV Hebridean Princess* cruise vessel and has also on numerous occasions played host to the sailing ship *Thalassa*, which takes its passengers (mostly German & Dutch) on a cruise around northern distilleries. The Blyth Sailing Trust vessel *Williams 2* also visited on its inaugural trip around Britain

High Water Protection Gate

Tenders for the HWPG are now complete and have been assessed and we are now working on our final funding package. All being well, it is hoped that this project will get underway in spring/summer 2020. On completion this will double the berthing capacity of the harbour and enable the whole harbour to be utilised 24/7/365 and enable WHA to work towards further contracts which will benefit the local economy greatly

Appendix D – Gills Harbour

C.T. FORUM 10.03.20. GILLS HARBOUR REPORT.

1) **ALFRED PERFORMS ADMIRABLY:** The first two months of the year ... and especially February 2020 ... saw a series of deep-low atmospheric 'depressions' crossing or skirting Northern Scotland bringing in fierce Westerly winds and gales.

On the east-flowing floods, this brought Atlantic-origin swells surging into the narrowest eastern part of the Pentland Firth.

This was the first winter for the brand-new 2019-built ROPAX ship *Alfred* on the Firth's short-sea route linking Gills Bay to St Margaret's Hope.

The 85 metre catamaran vessel was specially designed for the 15-mile route by the Southampton-based Specialist Ship Design unit of BMT (previously British Maritime Technology), a company originally formed in the mid-1980s through the privatisation of the British Shipbuilders Research Assn. and the National Maritime Institute.

By the time that the New Year Westerly storms arrived, the officers and crew of *Alfred* had become fully familiarised with the superb close-quarters handling of the impressive new vessel .

The ship is powered by four Yanmar engines linked to 'quad screw' propulsion and four rudders, whilst the vessel has powerful fore and aft 'side thrusters'.

Her catamaran configuration means that there is little rolling motion on passage, but she has to face sizable flood-tide swells, although the well-known Pentland Firth 'floating breakwater' of the Merry Men of Mey *roost* (tide-race) keeps those at bay on the west-flowing ebbs.

Alfred's state-of-the-art technology plus the berthing skills of her two masters, other officers and crew has allowed her to perform most commendably on the Gills Bay to St. Margaret's Hope route at times when the prevailing Westerly conditions were almost at their worst.

Her arrival on the seaway has certainly hanelled enhanced winter sea-connectivity links for islanders and those with business there, not to mention winter tourism, something that here had not reached Iceland's off-season level.

Family firm Pentland Ferries Ltd has announced that its trans-Pentland fares on *Alfred* are being 'frozen' at £16:00 per adult and £38:00 for cars for 2020.

2) MEYGEN TIDAL-STREAM ELECTRICITY-GENERATING SITE:

The Atlantis AR 1500 tidal turbine was removed from the Inner Sound site in late January, 2020, for maintenance and a planned upgrade at Global Energy's Nigg dry-dock site on the Cromarty Firth. The upgrade will add to its generating output.

SIMEC Atlantis Energy announced late in 2019 that it was opening an office in Nagasaki, Japan, near where it stated that several hundred islands are swept by tidal streams. It is installing a 500 KW tidal turbine in a joint-venture near the port.

Locally the company has stated that it aims to run 'a private wire' from its shore station at Ness o'Quoys, near Canisbay Kirk, to the planned new 'World's First Ocean-powered Data Centre'. This concept was first mooted almost a decade ago for a site near St John's Point in East Mey, but has been enthusiastically revived in recent months

3) WAITING FOR WEATHER

'Waiting for weather' is the watchword for several 'small works' projects mainly to enhance access between the waters of Gills Harbour's Inner Basin and the original stone-built Gills Pier that dates back to 1905.

Canisbay community-owned company Gills Harbour Ltd is examining conducting further improvements at the South end of its boat-hauling area, in the vicinity of the original 'sail shed'.

It is also in detailed talks with representatives of Scottish and Southern Energy over additional electricity connectivity at the harbour.

HIE's Caithness and Sutherland manager Mr Eann Sinclair has suggested that the community company route its wish to get some professional help in design works on its Inner Basin redevelopment via the Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership and that he has already met Ms June Love in this context.

Previously it had been hoped to source the expertise via the Dounreay decommissioning framework, which it seems has so far not really 'got off the ground'.

The study will follow on from the Gills Harbour Report of 2018 by international Inverness-based economist Tony Mackay ... whose family came from Wick ... that strongly recommended that the company follow a three-way justification for the key Inner Basin scheme; (a) sustainable inshore fishing etc;(b) various tourism related activities and (c) marine energy in the Pentland Firth and its Inner Sound.

It is interesting to note that the East Pentland Firth's first whale-watch vessel is to be based in South Ronaldsay. There is no suitable all-tides harbour accommodation on its Caithness shore.

4) FIRST UK FERRY COMPANY TO WIN GREEN TOURISM AWARD, *MV ALFRED* ALSO IN RUNNING FOR 'SHIP OF THE YEAR' PLAUDIT.

In early February, Pentland Ferries Ltd became the first ferry company in the UK to have achieved a 'Green Tourism Award', largely in respect of its new flagship *MV Alfred*.

Mr Andrew Banks, the family firm's MD stated: 'Our green credentials are very important to us, so we are very proud to be the first ferry company in the UK to achieve a 'Green Tourism Award'.

He added: 'The *MV Alfred* is more than 60% more efficient in terms of fuel consumption and emission levels than other comparable ferries operating in Scotland. This is at the centre of a much wider energy-efficient drive by Pentland Ferries that includes reducing waste, recycling, using low energy lighting and an electricity-generating aero-turbine to power the vessel overnight'.

The vessel is also a nominated finalist in the 'Ship of the Year Award' sponsored by the '*International Cruise and Ferry Review*' magazine that 'will celebrate the game-changing vessels that entered service in 2019'.

PFL director Ms Kathryn Scollie revealed in February that *Alfred*

had reached the final five in the international competition and stated that she was surprised and delighted with the nomination by the publication ... available in print and e-format ... that calls itself

the 'Global Guide to Passenger Shipping' and claims to be 'a definitive resource for decision-makers in the cruise and ferry industries'.

The winner will be announced this Month (03) in its 2020 Spring issue.

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Appendix E – Transport Scotland Roads

Transport Scotland

Roads Maintenance

Draft 2020/21 works programme

Caithness and Sutherland area

Route	Scheme		Scheme Type
A9	Cambusavie	85,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Golspie	75,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Achrimsdale	260,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Thurso South	175,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Navadale Rbt & approaches	50,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Loch Stemster	250,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A99	South of Mid Clyth	110,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A99	Bruan	200,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A99	South of Wick	100,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A99	North Hempriggs	125,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	South of Dunbeath	100,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Helmsdale	165,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Evelix Garage	206,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Doll South	50,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	North of Ousdale	48,000	Structural maintenance/resurfacing
A9	Thurso Ph 2	60,000	Footway resurfacing
A99	Wick	30,000	Footway resurfacing
A9	Brora	50,000	Footway resurfacing
A9	Dornoch to Latheron	40,000	Signing
A99	Route Priority	30,000	Signing
A9	Lothmore to Portgower	60,000	Drainage
A9	Latheron to Georgemas	60,000	Drainage
A9	Dunrobin Castle	50,000	Drainage
A9	Route Priority	100,000 (Sutherland/Caithness only)	Road Markings
A99	Reisgill concrete repairs and parapet replacement	50,000	Bridge work
A9	Dalnabo Concrete Repairs	300,000	Bridge work
A9	Evelix Cuthill Links Bridge Parapet Replacement	200,000	Bridge work
A9	Allt na Frithe Scour Repairs	10,000	Bridge work
A9	Clunes Burn Scour Repairs	10,000	Bridge work
A9	Mound Sluices gate seal	600,000	Bridge work
A9	Cromarty Bridge scour repairs	1,000,000	Bridge work
A9	Mound Sluices Minor Maintenance	5,000	Bridge work
A9	Lochend Scour Repair		Bridge work

Appendix F – Highland Council

A brief update from our roads team is that, we are currently resurfacing the riverside car park in Wick, with the planning and regulating done it is intended to start laying the surface course on the 10th of March weather permitting. The new cycle shelter is in and there is a new travel hub (bus shelter) planned to replace the existing shelter. Funding has also been approved for some electric car charging points in the car park and we are currently waiting on a date for the cabling works to start.

Work is continuing to fill potholes around the county.

It is still our intention to carry out a few resurfacing jobs before the end of the financial year, at Freswick, Mey and Lyth.

A contract has been awarded to GMR Henderson to replace all the main directional signs around the NC500 tourist route, they are expected to start replacing all the signs anytime now and these will be up in advance of the start to the main tourist season.

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