

STRONGER  
TOGETHER

# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

**Date:** 13/08/2020

**Time:** 10:00

**Location:** Virtual Meeting – held over Zoom

## Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (minutes)
Ken Hossack	BEAR Scotland
Michael Willmot	Far North Line Community Rail Partnership
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Kathryn Scollie	Pentland Ferries
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail Alliance
Gail Ross MSP	Scottish Parliament
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
William Mainus	Stagecoach Highland
Davie Alexander	Thurso & Wick Trades Union Council

## 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:

Andrew Butler	Direct Rail Services
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Dougie Cook	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland
Paul Linhart-MacAskill	Transport Scotland

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 10.03.2020

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**

An update was provided by the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit (**Appendix A**), which noted that the Scottish Government continues to work on a mechanism for delivering RET for Orkney and Shetland.

Trudy Morris noted not clear what impact will be with regards to State Aid rules once the UK leaves the European Union. It was agreed that the Forum would write to Transport Scotland on this matter.

**CTF(2020)M002/A001** – *Forum to write to Transport Scotland to clarify State Aid position on RET post-Brexit*

Gail Ross noted that she and Liam McArthur have been working on this issue and that she could put in some written questions on the matter.

**CTF(2020)M002/A002** – *Gail Ross to raise written questions on the matter of RET for the Northern Isles Ferry Services*

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

Derek Glasgow noted that his facilities person had been to Thurso to have a look at this matter and has passed a recommendation on to the Head of Facilities. He noted that he is hoping for a response soon.

Trudy queried when Derek was expecting a response? Derek noted that he was hoping for this within the month, and that he would bring it up at upcoming meeting

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

Trudy noted that the report was received from Frank and he has been invited to present on this at the CNSRP meeting on 8 September.

Trudy further noted that CNSRP are looking at variety of projects around sustainability and net-zero in the region.

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

David Swanson noted that he had been in contact with Alex Macmanus on this and that Alex continues to seek an update on this matter.

Trudy noted that the parking issue was put on hold during COVID but that officers are back on streets. She noted that this issue goes back to the fact that there is parking outside station but only for a limited time and that there were issues with lack of parking facilities at the station and people getting tickets.

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

The matter was raised with Paul Wheelhouse MSP and a response received from Transport Scotland Ferries Unit – both letters were circulated to Forum members.

Trudy noted that per the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit update, they continue to look for a suitable replacement vessel in market. She noted that the issue raised was that the CalMac drydocking schedule conflicts with NorthLink's, leading to lack of vessel capacity.

**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** COMPLETE

Derek noted that he had spoken to Alex Hynes and the head of internal communications on this matter and that Alex formally apologised on behalf of ScotRail. Derek noted that processes had been put in place to ensure that any future communications with the Forum would be vetted by himself and the head of internal communications prior to responding.

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

No update was received from Cllr Bremner on the matter and no report received from Highland Council roads.

Trudy noted that COVID had impacted on this and updated that Council employees were not able to join due to issues with Zoom, but that David Swanson would seek an update from Highland Council and circulate.

**CTF(2020)M002/A003 – David Swanson to seek an update from Highland Council roads and circulate to Forum**

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

Trudy noted that no press report was issued as it was not felt appropriate due to the impacts of COVID-19. She noted that the aim is to issue a press report including any positive news regarding from the current meeting.

## 4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Further to the meeting, an update on the RET situation was received from Pentland Ferries, clarifying that the particular State Aid case referred to in the update from Transport Scotland was closed in 2019, and that this cannot therefore be acting as an impediment to the introduction of RET on the Northern Isles Ferry

Services. The Forum will seek clarification on this matter in its communication to Transport Scotland under Action A001 from this meeting.

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.1.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix B**). Sandy Mackie updated the Forum on key developments, noting that the update covered the past, present, and future of operations at the Harbour.
- 5.1.2 Sandy noted that the Trust had its financial year end just prior to COVID-19 crisis and entered that difficult period in robust health and that the Trust will be publishing results for this year at forthcoming AGM. At the moment, results are just below record levels experienced in 2018/9, with a slight decrease in arrivals for last year and tonnage, both attributable to less fishing vessels and less cruise activity.
- 5.1.3 Post-March, Sandy noted that Scrabster Harbour has been affected as everyone has by COVID-19 and the necessary health restrictions put in place. Looking at the results for Q1 (Apr-Jun), port revenues are down 30%, arrivals down 11%, and vessel tonnage down 17%.
- 5.1.4 Looking at individual sectors, the areas most affected are travel-related – the lifeline ferry link and cruise ships. In the period to June, Scrabster has seen a 97% decline in passenger numbers on ferry with major impact on port revenues, and no cruise ships have called at the port.
- 5.1.5 Fish box landings for the period to June are up, but that there has been an overall reduction in landing values. General cargo is significantly up, reflecting transport of timber. Fish cargoes up and imports from the Faroe Islands on Tuesday and Saturday continued. Fuel imports are up.
- 5.1.6 Sandy noted that Scrabster Harbour are trying to manage way through the situation, and that they have a challenging set of circumstances as the port is an essential piece of infrastructure. This means it has had to keep operating while putting in appropriate safeguards to protect staff and customers. A lot of the Government assistance made available did not apply to Scrabster, although they have made use of furlough scheme. Sandy noted that if part-time furloughing had been in place since the beginning of lockdown they would have made more use of the scheme but recognised that this was an emergency response and could not cover all circumstances.
- 5.1.7 Sandy updated that the situation has improved since beginning July due to increased ferry activity and easing of social distancing. He noted that there has been slow growth on the ferry side, they are seeing an increase but passenger numbers are nowhere near what would be considered normal. He noted that he was not sure of plans regarding extending the summer timetable of three sailings beyond August and that Kris Bevan may be able to update on this.
- 5.1.8 With regards to the cruise sector, the expectation is that there will not be much cruise activity in the UK this year. Companies are liaising with agencies to plan for a return to operations and working on ways to reassure patrons that they will be safely looked after, but Sandy noted it will be a difficult sell to restore confidence. Sandy noted that when we do get the first cruise ship in Scotland, it is expected that there will be some community resistance, as the region has seeing with tourism in general since the easing of restrictions. He noted that there are some lessons to be learned from the current summer season to assist with this.

- 5.1.9 Sandy updated the Forum on the major development on St. Ola Pier, noting that the Trust had managed to sort out consenting, financing and procurement for this £18.5m project during the period of lockdown. He noted that a Highland-based company, RJ McLeod, is the contractor for the project. While their ability to come onto site was delayed due to restrictions on non-essential construction, the contractor was able to mobilise in June and have made good progress. Piling began this week and will continue through to Spring 2021. Dredging activity will happen after Easter and, because of delays relating to COVID, the anticipated completion date is October 2021.
- 5.1.10 Sandy noted that this has been a challenging period made more challenging by taking on a complex project, but it is hoped that economic stimulus will come to the area as a result of these works. He noted that community benefits are written into the contract and that they are using a Highland-based contractor. He further noted that Scrabster are hoping to issue something within the month to update the local community on the project and its economic benefits.
- 5.1.11 Looking to future, Sandy noted that Scrabster have had dialogue with some companies interested in the ScotWind offshore leasing rounds. He noted his feeling the transition to greener energy future can bring potential to the port and that energy can continue to be a major part of Caithness economy going forward.
- 5.1.12 Trudy thanked Sandy for his report and noted how positive it was considering the challenges faced as a result of COVID. She queried the point regarding increased fish box landings but reduced value, and asked Sandy if he could explain this.
- 5.1.13 Sandy noted that there has been significant restriction on markets as a result of COVID, with a loss of some existing demand in the hospitality industry. He further noted that a lot of the Scottish landing effort makes its way to continental markets which were impacted by COVID. He explained that the situation hasn't been consistent, with some of the previously higher value species attracting negligible values, reflecting the very uncertain and changing times. While activity continues to be good, what fishermen are receiving continues to be variable.
- 5.1.14 Sandy further noted that the situation should have improved as a result of the initial period of easing but that things are not back to normal and this will be reflected in prices. He also noted that the shellfish market is seeing significant restrictions, for example around exporting to China, and is seeing a lower price per kilogram as a result.

## 5.2 Wick Harbour

- 5.2.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided.

## 5.3 Gills Harbour

- 5.3.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided.

## 5.4 Pentland Ferries

- 5.4.1 Kathryn Scollie provided an update on behalf of Pentland Ferries.

- 5.4.2 With regards to the *MV Alfred*, Kathryn noted that this had arrived home last November and performed well considering the poor weather in January and February. She praised the captains for how well they handled the boat in challenging conditions. She noted that unfortunately they had not had the summer they had been expecting with the new ship but were hopeful that next year might be better.
- 5.4.3 Kathryn noted that the *MV Pentalina* is currently berthed in Hatson in Kirkwall and has been on sale since the *Alfred* took over the route. Pentland Ferries have had three buyers interested but due to COVID restrictions this process has come to a halt, however they are hopeful that things will get moving again as restrictions lift. They have a charter this weekend for the *Pentalina* from Gills Bay to Lyness in Hoy to move plant and equipment for new power line.
- 5.4.4 With regards to COVID, Kathryn noted that they have been operating at slightly reduced capacity but managing bubbles well. *Alfred* has more areas than the *Pentalina* so it has been easier to space everybody out in line with physical distancing. Kathryn provided passenger figures based on each phase of lockdown, and as a month-by-month breakdown:
- By phase:*
- Initial lockdown – 3% of previous year
  - Phase 1 – 5% of previous year
  - Phase 2 – 10% of previous year
  - Phase 3 – 46% of previous year (to date)
- By month (inc. freight)*
- Apr – down 85% on previous year
  - May – down 80% on previous year
  - Jun – down 75% on previous year
  - Jul – down 50% on previous year
- 5.4.5 Kathryn noted that staffing pre-COVID was at 85 and is now at 65, this has included redundancies and some staff naturally leaving company. She thought that if next year is back to normal they will be introducing more vacancies again but expected that this level will stay same or slightly less over winter. The company took full advantage of furlough scheme, with 37 staff initially furloughed and 15 currently furloughed, including staff on flexible furlough.
- 5.4.6 Kathryn updated on St. Margaret's Hope, noting that Pentland Ferries had secured a Marine Scotland licence for an extension to their marshalling area there which is going to extend the area available for traffic queueing. She noted that plans are drafted and ready for submission for a new terminal building, including a passenger waiting area, but that this is on hold at the moment.
- 5.4.7 With regards the update on RET, Kathryn noted that as far as Pentland Ferries are aware the EC has closed the case and that Transport Scotland have been asked to draft another mechanism and come back with this. She noted that she could provide an update to the Forum on Pentland Ferries' understanding of the situation.
- 5.4.8 Trudy thanked Kathryn for her update and noted that it was useful and encouraging to hear what is happening, and that it is good to see passenger numbers starting to pick up. She noted that it would be useful to get clarification from Pentland Ferries on the RET rollout. It was agreed that Kathryn would provide this to the Forum.

**CTF(2020)M002/A004** – Kathryn Scollie to provide update on Pentland Ferries understanding of the rollout of RET on services to the Northern Isles.

## 5.5 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.5.1 Kris Bevan provided an update to the Forum. He noted that throughout the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, NorthLink have been using updates on the website, e-newsletters and social media to keep the public updated on what restrictions are and any updates around travel. He noted that he would direct Forum members to the NorthLink website for the most up-to-date information on this.
- 5.5.2 Kris noted that, in summary, since lockdown commenced, passenger volumes have been down around 87%, non-commercial vehicles down 84%, and freight down 18%. Kris clarified that these are network-wide figures and not specific to the Pentland Firth, but that they are reflective of the overall situation.
- 5.5.3 Kris updated that restrictions put in place as a result of COVID resulted in a huge fall in passenger volumes, with NorthLink essentially restricting their service only to essential travel, meaning that those travelling had to have key worker letter or demonstrate a sufficient reason to do so. Kris noted that as Scottish Government have moved into Phase 2 and 3 of easing, these restrictions have been lifted and the peak *Hamnavoe* timetable introduced, scheduled to run through to 1 September. He noted that NorthLink has had feedback from key stakeholders asking whether this can be extended in line with aspiration to extend the tourist season and that this is currently sitting with Transport Scotland for consideration.
- 5.5.4 With regards to restrictions, Kris noted that NorthLink have been working closely with Transport Scotland to work through the Transport Transition Plan. Onboard services been changed, with a restricted catering offering the Hamnavoe B&B service only reintroduced on 15 July in line with lifting of restrictions on tourism. He noted that a significant amount of risk assessment work is being done, and that any reintroduction of services is being done in conjunction with staff, unions, and regulatory authorities.
- 5.5.5 A written update was also provided on behalf of the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit (**Appendix A**)
- 5.5.6 Trudy thanked Kris for his update and raised an issue that she had been made aware of regarding group bookings, where a tour company was advised at short notice that their bookings had been cancelled. She asked if Kris could update on NorthLink's policy regarding group bookings.
- 5.5.7 Kris confirmed that NorthLink are not accepting group bookings, and that all the operators they have spoken to so far have not been able to give sufficient assurances that the 1m social distancing rules can be adhered to. Trudy queried whether a booking would be taken if the company could give this assurance – Kris noted that if reassurance could be given, NorthLink would look at the policy again.
- 5.5.8 It was agreed that Trudy and Kris would liaise regarding the specifics of the issue raised and the NorthLink group bookings policy.

**CTF(2020)M002/A005** – *Trudy Morris and Kris Bevan to liaise on issues around group bookings on NorthLink Ferries*

- 5.5.9 Trudy noted that it was positive to hear that things are picking up.
- 5.5.10 Kris Bevan noted that with regards the dry dock in 2021, he was not able to add anything to Transport Scotland's response, but that he could give reassurance that NorthLink will continue to look at the market for available vessels. Trudy reiterated the point regarding managing CalMac and NorthLink dry dockings to ensure vessel availability.

- 5.5.11 Gail Ross noted that the Forum had just heard that the *Pentalina* was on the market. Kris noted that NorthLink had looked at this but that it was not suitable for the ports at which NorthLink operate.

## 5.6 ScotRail Alliance

- 5.6.1 Trudy Morris noted that the thoughts and prayers of the Forum members were with those affected by the derailment at Stonehaven.
- 5.6.2 Derek Glasgow delivered an update to the Forum. He noted that during the COVID lockdown, services ran essentially as normal, and that as of Phase 3 there has been an increase in passenger numbers up to about 40% of normal patronage. He noted that there have been some delays in recent weeks but that he would class the situation as normal train running and that there are no major issues on the Far North Line
- 5.6.3 Derek noted that as far as the future is concerned he attends the Far North project meeting with Transport Scotland and Network Rail and that this is in the GRIP 3 design phase for future works on the Far North Line, looking at areas including the Lentrans loop and motorised points. He noted that once the GRIP 3 phase is completed the process would move to GRIP 4, where monies will be allocated. He noted that details are to be confirmed but that there will be improvements coming to the line.
- 5.6.5 Derek updated briefly on the aim to decarbonise rail by 2035, noting that a decision would need to be made soon on the future of the 158s on the Far North Line, noting that it takes around seven years to bring new trains into the network.
- 5.6.6 Trudy queried the timescale for completion of the GRIP3 phase. Derek noted that with regards to the GRIP process, GRIP 1-3 is design GRIP 4 is allocation, and GRIP 5-6 onwards is the actual delivery of the work. He noted that over the next year or so GRIP3 should be finished and the process will then move to GRIP4 to decide what is to be allocated to the Far North Line with regards to infrastructure improvements.
- 5.6.7 Trudy queried the plans for reinstating catering services on the Far North Line. Derek noted that he had no guidance on when this might happen.
- 5.6.8 Mike Lunan further queried the timescale for completion of GRIP 3, asking whether Derek had meant a year from the present or within the calendar year. Derek clarified that he expected this to be finished by December 2020.

## 5.7 Direct Rail Services

- 5.7.1 No attendee was present. Trudy and David Swanson both noted that they had received an update from DRS that they are looking at a new date for the proposed freight trial at Georgemas.



5.7.2 Trudy noted the positive news on a timber freight trial from Caithness to Inverness. Mike noted that the trial seems to have gone well so far. He praised the work that Frank Roach at HITRANS had done to get everyone round table to enable this trial to take place.

## 5.8 Far North Line Community Rail Partnership

5.8.1 Michael Willmot gave a presentation regarding a proposed Far North Line Community Rail Partnership (CRP) (**Appendix C**). He noted that he has been involved with the Far North Line for some time and set up Helmsdale Station CIC in 2009 with object to restore the station building. This was set up as a not for profit organisation. The restored station building attracts some additional tourism and at the end of the year any trading surplus is divided between local charities, station maintenance and promotion of the Far North Line. Michael noted that it was always the intention once they had got that part of operation working properly, to extend it into a full Community Rail Partnership.

5.8.2 Michael noted that a CRP is a partnership between the rail service and the communities that it serves. The idea is that it brings together a wide range of interests to promote the line and all associated features and amenities that it leads to. This often involves employing a CRP officer to establish links with local communities, attractions etc. In return for taking part, communities and businesses might expect to have a say into how services operate.

5.8.3 Michael noted that a CRP is very different to a Rail Users Group, and that the Far North Line already has a very effective Rail Users Group in the form of Friends of the Far North Line (FoFNL). What a CRP can do to complement this is make contacts and build partnerships with the communities that the line serves. There are currently two CRPs in the Highlands – West Highlands & Highland Mainline

5.8.4 On the aims of a CRP, Michael noted that these vary around the UK, and that there are currently 11 CRPs in Scotland and over 50 in England & Wales. He has had three meetings of interested parties around a Far North Line CRP and what has become apparent is two main strands – economic benefit from tourism & social benefit through improved rail services and integrated transport. On this basis, the aims of a Far North Line CRP would be:

- Promoting the line and businesses, attractions and communities it serves
- Sustaining local communities along the line
- Encouraging travel by rail and sustainable transport
- Working positively with other transport providers on integrated timetabling and ticketing
- Improving station environments and access along the line

5.8.5 With regards to achieving these aims, Michael noted that this would be achieved firstly by bringing together a network of organisations & individuals along route to provide collective local knowledge, and then by establishing a SCIO with trustees and management group to provide strategic direction and oversee the work of CRP officers.

5.8.6 Michael noted that he has had positive discussions with a range of organisations. With regards to the involvement of Gray's School of Art, he noted that at Helmsdale Station they have a photographic darkroom where Gray's come up and run residential schools for students, and that Gray's would be keen to be involved in any promotion of the CRP.

5.8.7 Michael updated the Forum that a number of things have already been achieved towards setting up a CRP:

- Contact with a large number of supportive organisations and individuals

- Promise of £25,000 funding to engage a CRPO
- Draft SCIO application documents prepared
- Promise of financial support from ScotRail
- Support from Network Rail & Transport Scotland who have been observers at meetings
- Contacts with other CRPs

- 5.8.8 With regards to next steps, Michael noted that the key point is to find volunteers to act as trustees and officers of SCIO. He emphasised that for this to be successful the CRP needs to be grounded in local communities and have local people involved.
- 5.8.9 As a final point, Michael noted that this is part of slightly wider scheme working on to encourage use of public transport by tourists throughout Caithness & Sutherland. He and his wife recently tackled the North Coast 500 just using public transport which was interesting and enjoyable experience, and he has since had interest from others looking to do the same.
- 5.8.10 Trudy thanked Michael for his presentation and noted the need for increased development and use of the line.
- 5.8.11 Mike Lunan also thanked Michael for his presentation. Mike noted that that the bottom line from FoFNL's point of view is that the CRP and FoFNL are separate organisations with common agenda on many areas and some subtle differences. He wished the CRP all the luck it needs to get off the ground and to do things that FoFNL is not set up to do. Mike noted that there had previously had some community involvement in FoFNL but if the CRP is able to engender more community support then this would be welcome.
- 5.8.12 Mike continued, noting that the CRP's priorities are subtly different to FoFNL's. He noted that while the English CRP model focuses largely on branch lines, Scotland doesn't have branch lines and that it is hard to articulate an argument that is right for every community on the route. He noted that one area where there could be conflicting needs is at the southern end of the route, where moves such as reopening of Conon Bridge station and the proposed reopening of Evanton could be to the detriment of end-to-end travellers.
- 5.8.13 Michael noted that with regards to the model, the North Staffordshire CRP works closely with the equivalent group to FoFNL and each recognise that they have different tasks. The users group there are a campaigning organisation whereas the CRP is a partnership approach, enabling each to work according to their strengths. He noted that he would hope to develop some kind of working relationship and reiterated that an invitation is on the table to FoFNL to provide a trustee for the CRP.
- 5.8.14 Michael further noted that the CRP would be concentrating just on the Caithness & North Sutherland end of the line, as it is too long for a single CRP and noted that the character of the line Tain southwards is more commuter focused rather than the north end of the line with more tourism focus.
- 5.8.15 With regards to the invitation to put forward a trustee, Mike noted that FoFNL have looked at this and have declined, as they feel that the legal framework would mean that in the case of any conflict of interest the trustee would have to side with the CRP.
- 5.8.16 Davie Alexander noted that the presentation and proposal was interesting, but that there was not wider public awareness of it. He asked if the Forum could assist with putting this out to the wider community?
- 5.8.17 Michael noted that a piece had been placed in the Northern Times and that coming to the meeting today was part of making more people aware of the CRP proposal.
- 5.8.18 There was some discussion of this and it was agreed that David Swanson would liaise with Michael on how best to promote the CRP to the wider community.

## 5.9 Berriedale Braes

5.9.1 This matter was covered under BEAR Scotland's update below.

## 5.10 Highland Council

5.10.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided.

## 5.11 BEAR Scotland

5.10.1 An update on BEAR Scotland's proposed programme of works for the coming year was provided to attendees (**Appendix D**) and Ken Hossack briefly updated the Forum on this, noting that it was largely routine resurfacing and drainage works being undertaken.

5.11.2 Ken noted that with regards to Berriedale Braes, no works were undertaken from March-July as result of COVID. The current plan is to have the work generally finished by end August, however he noted that the remaining work is resurfacing which is weather-dependent.

5.11.3 Ken drew attendees' attention to scheme not included on the circulated programme, this being BEAR's NC500 signage scheme which includes some locations in Caithness. He noted that work on this is due to start 14 September

5.11.4 With regards to overall programme, Ken noted that BEAR have been in a similar position to everybody else in that from end March through to June they were only able to undertake emergency works. He noted that they have a big programme to undertake this year, and that they would normally have 12 months but only really have 9 months as a result of COVID. He noted that BEAR are still hopeful that they will be able to achieve that programme by the end of the year as planned.

5.11.5 Ken noted that BEAR had received some additional funding from Transport Scotland and were proposing to use that funding on additional resurfacing schemes in Caithness & Sutherland in February and March 2021. He noted that as this is additional funding, work still needs to be done to get this to a phase where works can start. He noted that the proposal was for five additional schemes on the A99 at the following locations:

- Lybster
- North of Thrumster
- South of Borrowston
- South of Ulbster
- Ulbster

5.11.6 Trudy noted that it was positive to hear of progress on Berriedale and on the additional funding and proposed works. She queried whether there had been any feedback from hauliers on the new road alignment at Berriedale.

- 5.11.7 Ken noted that no feedback had been received as yet but that, as traffic management was ongoing, hauliers would likely not see the full benefits and impact until works have been completed. He noted that his experience so far has been that delays due to traffic management have been relatively short.
- 5.11.8 Gail Ross noted that she wished to record her thanks for the community work that has been done as part of the programme. She noted that she had been out to the estate at the start of the year to view the works and explained about the improvements also being made in and around village. She noted that a lot of positive work was going on with the community in that people are not aware of and thanked BEAR for that.
- 5.11.7 Davie Alexander noted that he had seen the improvements in the road. He queried whether any issues were envisaged in winter months with regards to the gradient and frosty weather. Ken noted that the stretch of road has always been problematic due to the incline and that the gradient will still be there. He noted that the removal of the hairpin should make it easier to negotiate that section of road and assist with both preventative and reactionary treatments.
- 5.11.8 Trudy queried whether Sandy Mackie had any input, as issues had previously been raised with the perception of Berriedale as a barrier to doing business in the north. Sandy noted that he felt this was a welcome investment and that as Scrabster works with the oil and gas industry in Aberdeeen they would be positively communicating these changes

## 5.12 Stagecoach

- 5.12.1 William Mainus delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach. He noted that during lockdown the Caithness region was worst hit with regards to passenger numbers, with a drop of 90% in adult/child passengers and 94% in concession card holders.
- 5.12.2 William updated the Forum that as they increased their mileage in the region to 51% of where it was previously, and as last week adult/child passengers are down around 52% on previous and concessions around 70%. He noted that with the schools going back this week, mileage was now sitting at around 82% of pre-COVID levels.
- 5.12.3 William noted that Stagecoach have put in a revised network in the area and that they have tried to speed the X99 journey up. He noted that there has always been an aspiration to do speed the service up after Dornoch, but that cutting out Tain has also helped to increase available seat space on the service.
- 5.12.4 William updated the Forum that Stagecoach have four newer buses operating in the area under the new livery, and that while there have been some teething problems with these their engineering team are undertaking preventive maintenance to address any issues.
- 5.12.5 As a final point, William noted that they had hoped to get the new network out sooner but that there were other circumstances preventing this. He noted that they continue to monitor passenger numbers and as these rise they are hoping to increase mileage in Caithness.
- 5.12.6 Trudy queried whether all pre-COVID services in the area are back up and running. William noted that they are not quite back to that level, and that they are trying to match demand and bring services back online in line with that.
- 5.12.7 Trudy queried how many X99s are currently running. William noted that there are two on weekdays and Saturdays and one on Sundays.

- 5.12.8 Gail Ross noted that she had been in contact with David Beaton regarding the Staxigoe route, and that while she had initially had a quick response back, she had not heard back on a further email as to whether the service would come back once schools returned. She asked if William could update on this. William noted that service 75 was now back in operation on weekdays but not weekends.
- 5.12.9 Trudy noted a concern that many bus services are marginal and that the impacts of COVID and reduced passenger numbers will mean the area is left with less services. William noted that this is a challenge for Stagecoach and that in the last financial year the Caithness region was expected to lose money, so COVID has brought additional challenges.

### 5.13 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.13.1 A written update was provided on behalf of HIAL (**Appendix E**)
- 5.13.2 Trudy updated the Forum on the Chamber's efforts to secure a PSO from Wick. As reported at previous meetings, the Chamber has been lobbying government for a PSO route and having continual meetings including one recently with Gail Ross and agency partners, at which they strongly reiterated need for a service and the support available for this from agencies. Trudy noted that they are still not getting answer on the business case and being told that it will be reviewed as a matter of urgency.
- 5.13.3 Trudy noted that the Chamber has also written to Michael Gove to see if they could galvanise any UK Government support, as he had showed interest in the airport. She noted that one thing which came up in the last meeting was putting in an emergency arrangement as an interim measure as there are no longer any scheduled services operating out of Wick. She noted that Transport Scotland continue to insist that there is a State Aid issue with this, but that the Chamber has commissioned a consultant to look at potential mechanisms by which this might be achieved.
- 5.13.4 Trudy highlighted from the written update that aircraft movements at Wick have been the highest in the HIAL region as a result of helicopter flights, oil and gas operations, and emergency flights, and that this has been positive in terms of retaining opening hours and staffing.
- 5.13.5 Trudy noted that she would seek further clarification on the point from the report regarding security staff being furloughed. She noted that the Forum had been assured that no kneejerk reactions to staffing as a result of loss of scheduled services and that she would seek clarification from HIAL on this.

**CTF(2020)M002/A007** – *Trudy Morris to seek clarification from HIAL regarding furloughing of security staff*

- 5.13.6 Trudy noted that it is encouraging to see capital projects continuing, noting that these had been delayed as a result of COVID.
- 5.13.7 Gail Ross supported Trudy's points regarding the PSO and noted how disappointed she was that there had been no further movement from Transport Scotland on the business case. She noted that Transport Scotland were pushed hard by local partners at the last meeting and were under no illusions as to the importance of this issue locally.
- 5.13.8 Gail updated the Forum that she had written to the Cabinet Secretary several times and had now written to the First Minister as she had not received a satisfactory response. She noted that she was extremely worried about how long HIAL can keep the airport running when there are no scheduled flights, and what the knock-on effects of the airport closing would be.
- 5.13.9 Gail noted her understanding that there is a limited pot of money to be spent across the country but that Transport Scotland need to remember they represent the whole of the country and that they need to look

to the future of the region as well. She felt that Transport Scotland had listened to what was said in the last meeting and would be very surprised if they did not present the business case to the Cabinet Secretary as something to take forward.

- 5.13.10 Trudy thanked Gail and noted appreciation of her support on this matter. She noted that the key is try to get some emergency arrangement in place, and that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority has been very supportive on this. She noted that the State Aid concern is down to interpretation and that, for example, the Chamber was initially told their proposal for a Dual PSO was not viable but that the interpretation of this has changed.
- 5.13.11 Davie Alexander noted that Transport Scotland have had the business case for a long time and that he was surprised at the statement that it could take 9-12 months to get a PSO in place. He queried whether this was the usual timescale. Trudy noted that there are elements of the process which have fixed timescales, such as procurement, and that she felt the quickest a PSO could be put in place would be around 6 months.
- 5.13.12 Davie queried whether it was felt there is a will in Transport Scotland to take this forward at speed. Trudy noted her feeling that this was not the case and that this is why there is a need to resolve the State Aid concern and get an interim service in place. She noted that it was thought something similar had been done on the Dundee-Stansted PSO.

## 6. Press Communications

- 6.1 Davie Alexander noted that everyone has been operating under extremely difficult circumstances and should be commended on the good work they have done during difficult times.
- 6.2 It was agreed that a press release would be put out from the Forum highlighting this message and any positive news from the meeting.

**CTF(2020)M002/A008** – Chamber to issue press release on behalf of Forum, highlighting good work done during COVID-19 and positive developments

## 7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 No other business was raised.

## 8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 It was noted that this would be scheduled for some time in November, and that if a virtual meeting was still required, this would take place over Teams to allow for greater attendance.

## 9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

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

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

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

## 10. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2020)M002/A001** – *Forum to write to Transport Scotland to clarify State Aid position on RET post-Brexit*

**CTF(2020)M002/A002** – *Gail Ross to raise written questions on the matter of RET for the Northern Isles Ferry Services*

**CTF(2020)M002/A003** – *David Swanson to seek an update from Highland Council roads and circulate to Forum*

**CTF(2020)M002/A004** – *Kathryn Scollie to provide update on Pentland Ferries understanding of the rollout of RET on services to the Northern Isles.*

**CTF(2020)M002/A005** – *Trudy Morris and Kris Bevan to liaise on issues around group bookings on NorthLink Ferries*

**CTF(2020)M002/A006** – *David Swanson and Michael Willmot to liaise on promotion of Far North Line CRP*

**CTF(2020)M002/A007** – *Trudy Morris to seek clarification from HIAL regarding furloughing of security staff*

**CTF(2020)M002/A008** – *Chamber to issue press release on behalf of Forum, highlighting good work done during COVID-19 and positive developments*

# Appendix A

Caithness Transport Forum

13 August 2020 Transport Scotland Ferries Unit - Update

## **Northern Isles Ferry Service contract commencement**

- Following the formal award and signing of the Northern Isles Ferry Service contract on the 22 April 2020, the new contract successfully commenced on the 30 June at 14:01 with no disruption to Northern Isles Ferry services.
- Transport Scotland and Serco NothLink Ferries (SNF) continue having regular progress review meetings on outstanding commitments.
- A non-commercially sensitive copy of the new contract will be published on Transport Scotland's website in Autumn 2020.

## **COVID-19 implications**

- The Scottish Government is acutely aware that supporting island communities to move out of lockdown is a complex issue, and appreciate that many islanders are particularly dependent on sectors that are worst hit by the impact of the public health measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- We are now in Phase 3 of the route-map. In this phase, permissible categories of activity and travel are the same across Scotland, including to and within our islands.
- In line with work on other modes of public transport SNF have taken a risk based approach to setting out how services can operate safely and ensuring that physical distancing measures remain in effect. This includes consideration of how passengers will board and move around the vessel and terminals, provision of signage and markings and blocking off some seating to ensure physical distancing.
- The operator has put in place measures to keep passengers and crew safe, including provision of hand sanitiser, intensive cleaning regimes, sole occupancy of cabins, signage and queueing systems. Passengers have to play their part and wear face coverings (unless exempt), listen to safety announcements and follow all instructions from the operator closely. This is especially relevant given recent local restrictions to the Aberdeen area, given its role as a major transit hub, by both air and ferry to/from the Northern Isles.
- On the 7 August the First Minister announced that those from outside Aberdeen City can transit through the city, for example transferring from a Ferry to Train/Bus/Air, provided Aberdeen City is not their final destination.
- Aberdeen local restrictions and impact on services is regularly reviewed with Transport Scotland officials and SNF continue to highlight guidance through their website and direct to booked passengers.



## **Physical distancing**

- The move to Phase 3 from Friday 10 July, allowing 1 metre distancing, with mitigating measures in place, has increased the available passenger capacity to 60% on the Northern Isles vessels.
- Maximum capacity given 1m physical distancing is 355 on Aberdeen based vessels and 370 on Pentland Firth. Current forward projection to end of August shows no capacity concerns.

## **Managing demand**

- To ensure sufficient capacity on the Northern Isles from 4 July SNF are operating to their normal seasonal timetable and their booking system is open to book for all travellers till end of December 2020. To allow physical distancing on-board there are restrictions on the numbers that can sail.
- A set number of 30 spaces per journey continues to be allocated for key workers and NHS patients to ensure essential travel demand is managed.
- SNF continues to work closely with NHS Shetland to ensure NHS patient transfer can be fast tracked and accommodated.
- Transport Scotland continues to work closely with the operator on the options around the transition from lockdown and in conjunction with the Transition Phasing Plan.
- To date the restricted available capacity on passenger ferries has fully met passenger demand and all travel requests have been managed successfully.
- In line with further easing of lockdown restriction and latest Scottish Government guidance from the 15 July SNF opened B&B services on board of the passenger vessel Hamnavoe.
- The operator continues to monitor passenger and freight volumes, forecast demand and changing situation whilst engaging with key stakeholders and TS on lockdown easing and options across their entire fleet.

## **Freight services**

- Northern Isles freight connections are being maintained successfully with freight volumes almost meeting the volumes for the same period in 2019.
- Since the 6 July SNF have been operating a slightly reduced peak freight ship timetable with no indirect call north on Friday or south on Saturday. Following the operator's analysis of volumes and increase in deck utilisation figures Friday northbound call only was reintroduced to the freight time table.
- To ensure safe and continual freight services to and from the Northern Islands the operator continues securing freight vessels for freight services only – with no passenger travel allowed (minimal capacity of 12 pax per sailing). The decision is monitored and reviewed regularly as Scotland will be moving through the Route Map phases.

## **RET on Northern Isles Ferry Service**

- The implementation of our preferred ferry fares policy of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) on Northern Isles ferry services has not yet been possible because of a State aid complaint that was made to the European Commission.
- The Scottish Government has engaged with the European Commission following a complaint made by Pentland Ferries about our proposals to introduce RET on Northern Isles ferry services.
- The Scottish Government will continue working to establish an agreed mechanism for delivering RET for Orkney and Shetland, although this work has been delayed due to resourcing issues relating to Covid 19.
- 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 which was only possible because it does not directly impact on the Pentland Firth.
- These build on the 30% discount for passenger and vehicle fares already enjoyed by islanders.

## **Ferry Vouchers and Cabin Fares**

- Due to the Covid-19 Government travel restrictions in place and the closure or reduction of transport services, we understand there will be many people who had an existing booking for a ferry journey they are no longer able to make.
- For this reason Transport Scotland have agreed with SNF that where someone had an existing booking for March 2020, they can rebook using their 19/20 vouchers for a journey within the next 6 months (up to the end of September 2020). The ferries operator will manage this process directly.
- A decision was also taken to suspend multi-occupancy cabins during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was instituted to ensure the safety of passengers and island communities from the potential spread and transmission of Covid-19. Guidance on 1 metre physical distancing has prohibited the sale of the shared cabin fare which was offered previously to National Concessionary Ferry (NCT) vouchers holders on overnight services.
- Instead SNF have correctly offered cabins to passengers with the proviso that the difference between shared cabin costs and full cabin use for sole occupancy is covered.
- Transport Scotland are in regular contact with the operator who is exploring the sole cabin cost issue and the future of the shared cabin offer given current and future health guidance. We continue seeking advice from SNF and are finalising advice on the impacts of any change to the current sole occupancy policy in regard to NCT

vouchers.  
END  
August 2020

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# Appendix B

## CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 13<sup>th</sup> August 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. FINANCIAL YEAR 2019-20

Since the last Transport Forum, the Trust has completed the financial year 2019-2020. The detailed performance and financial results will be set out in our annual report which will be published after our scheduled AGM at the end of September. The year 2019-2020 was a further very successful trading year with draft profits just below the record level of the previous year.

Total vessel arrivals in 2019-2020 amounted to 2,291 and total vessel tonnage 8.390 million tonnes. Both figures are down on the 2018-2019 levels with the reduction coming mainly from the fishing and cruise sectors.

### 2. CURRENT YEAR 2020-21 & COVID 19

For the current financial year, in common with most of the economy, the Trust has been affected by Covid-19 and the associated public health restrictions. Total port revenues are down 30% for the first quarter compared with the same period last year.

Total arrivals in the three-month period ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 amounted to 497 vessels, down 11% on last year. Total vessel tonnage amounted to 1.928 million tonnes, down 17% on last year. The majority of the decline is attributable to the restrictions affecting the lifeline ferry link and there being no cruise ships. The rest of the Trust's activity sectors have held up very well despite Covid-19.

- Ferry Passenger numbers, for the three-month period to June 2020 amounted to 1,527 passengers compared to 50,564 passengers last year a 97% decline.
- Fish box landings amounted to 64,960 boxes, a 10% increase on last year but landing values are considerably lower than last year.
- General Cargo amounted to 22,222 tonnes, eleven times last year's figures. This reflects the continued shipment of harvested timber from the Halsary wind farm site.
- Fish Cargoes amounted to 4,465 tonnes, 15% up on last year.
- Fuel Imports amounted to 9,113 tonnes, 17% up on last year.

Ports are regarded as essential services, so the Trust has had to balance keeping the port operational whilst implementing actions to stop the spread of the virus and protect our staff and users.

Accordingly, the Trust could only make limited use of the furlough scheme. The Trust has received no other assistance during the period.

Our financial and activity position will have improved with the resumption of the ferry summer sailing schedule at the beginning of July. The position has been assisted by the easing of the social distancing guidance allowing greater carrying capacity on the ferry.

With regard to Cruise vessels, it is unlikely that there will be any cruise activity in the UK this year. The sector faces a long recovery period and business casualties are expected.

### 3. DEVELOPMENTS

Following an OJEU advertised procurement process, RJ MacLeod (Contractors) Limited were selected as the preferred contractor for the works. Against a very challenging set of circumstance the Trust has been able to progress and complete to various elements necessary to allow the works to begin.

A NEC4 Engineering & Construction Contract with a contract value of £18.567 million was signed by the respective parties at the beginning of April 2020. Highlands and Islands Enterprise are providing £3 million of grant assistance for the project, with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority providing £5 million. The remainder of the project funding is coming from the Trust through a combination of cash and borrowing.

Due to the Scottish Government restriction on non-essential construction sites, the contractor was unable to mobilise to site until mid-June. The initial demolition and preparatory works have gone very well. The first shipment of steel piles for the works is expected in Scrabster this week with the driving of piles scheduled to commence next week.

The programme has been affected by the Covid related delays. The piling programme will continue over winter and well into spring. The dredging activity is currently scheduled for April 2021. The project is expected to be complete in the final quarter of 2021.

The key parties for the works are

- **Main Contractor - RJ McLeod**
- **Designer - Wallace Stone**
- **Piling Sub-contractor - SPI McGrattan**

This is the same team that successfully constructed the Jubilee Pier at Scrabster

Project management and site supervision is being provided by RPS Ireland.

#### **4. SCOTWIND LEASING ROUND**

The ScotWind Offshore Wind Leasing round was launched in June and is the first round of seabed leasing for offshore windfarms in Scottish waters for a decade. Decisions on the outcome of the leasing round are expected during the first half of 2021. The potential for offshore wind development off the north coast offers a significant opportunity for the port and Caithness.

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# Appendix C

## A Community Rail Partnership for the Far North Line?



**Michael Willmot**

**Director, Helmsdale Station CIC**

[www.helmsdalestation.co.uk](http://www.helmsdalestation.co.uk)

**Chair, North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership**

[www.northstaffsrail.org.uk](http://www.northstaffsrail.org.uk)

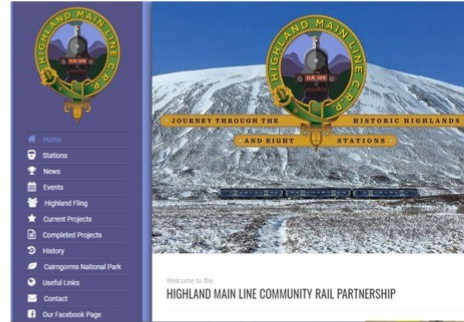
## What is a Community Rail Partnership (CRP)?

- Forms a bridge between the railway and its local communities
- Brings together a wide range of interests along the rail corridor to develop and promote jointly the line and all its associated features and amenities
- Can include transport providers to contribute to improved integrated and sustainable transport provision
- Often employs a Community Rail Partnership Officer who makes contacts and develops joint promotions and advertising
- In return for 'putting their wares on the Far North Line stall' – bringing together all the businesses, services and tourist attractions that the line can lead to for the prospective visitor, local communities might expect a say in the specification and marketing of local rail services

## Currently there are two CRPs in the Highlands



West Highland CRP



Highland Mainline CRP

- On the West Highland Line the **West Highland Community Rail Partnership** works collaboratively with the **Friends of the West Highland Line**

## Aims of a CRP

- The aims of community rail partnerships around the UK vary depending on the economic and social circumstances of each region and the purpose for which travellers use each route.
- For the communities along the northern part of the Far North Line, in Sutherland & Caithness, the priority is for
  - economic benefit derived from tourism
  - social benefit for inhabitants through an improved rail and integrated transport service to access employment and educational, social and wellbeing opportunities.
- The population includes a growing number of non car drivers, many of whom rely on public transport and a growing concern for a small carbon footprint lifestyle.



## Aims of a Far North Line CRP

- To promote the Far North Line and the businesses, services and visitor attractions which can be reached on it – especially in Caithness & Sutherland
- To sustain local communities through promoting the social, economic and tourism potential of rail travel; improving station facilities and supporting social enterprise developments
- To encourage travel by rail and by other sustainable transport modes – including walking, cycling and e-bikes, to widen the range of locations that can be reached and to stimulate small carbon footprint travel, slow travel and ecotourism
- To work positively with other transport providers in the region in support of public transport integrated timetabling, and where possible, integrated ticketing
- To improve station environment and access along the line through station adoption and other initiatives and so develop links between the railway and the communities which it serves

## How can the Aims be achieved?

- By bringing together a network of organisations and individuals from along the route - collectively providing local knowledge about attractions, amenities and services of appeal to tourists; hence promoting the region.
- By establishing a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated organisation) with Trustees and a Management Group which would oversee the project work undertaken or the work of an employed Community Rail Partnership Officer (CRPO) to:
  - Gather Information and develop a website and printed material
  - Liaise with other organisations committed to promoting the line and region it serves
  - Develop links with communities and FONL to ensure service improvements best serve the travel needs of local resident
  - Encourage volunteers to ‘adopt’ and improve the appearance of stations
  - Seek funding for further improvements in the way the line serves its local residents , businesses and tourist attractions

## Supportive Organisations, Agencies and Businesses involved in consultations so far

- Caithness Chamber of Commerce
- Caithness & North Sutherland Fund
- Caithness Voluntary Group
- Clyne Heritage Society
- Dunrobin Castle
- Ferrycroft Visitor Centre, Lairg
- Friends of Brora Station
- Friends of Kildonan Church
- Garbh Allt Community Initiative
- Golspie Station House
- Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen
- Heart of Sutherland Tourism
- Helmsdale Station CIC
- Helmsdale & District Community Council
- Helmsdale & District Development Trust
- HIE (Angela Simpson)
- John O' Groats Trail
- Kyle of Sutherland development Trust
- North Highland Initiative
- Northern Pilgrims' Way
- RSPB Forsinard
- Sam's Bike Shed, Golspie
- ScotRail (Ros Houldsworth)
- Thurso Community Development Trust
- Timespan, Helmsdale
- Transform Scotland
- Venture North
- West Highland CRP

## What is already achieved

- Contacts with over 25 organisations, agencies and businesses supportive of the initiative
- Promises of c £25k of funding (personal donations would be increased by gift aid) to engage a CRPO for up to 12 months as a start-up phase
- Draft SCIO application documents prepared (with thanks to Alan Tait at Caithness Voluntary Group)
- Promised financial support from ScotRail
- Support from Network Rail & Transport Scotland who have been kept informed of developments as observers
- Contacts with Community Rail Network and other CRPs already established in Scotland

## What is needed now

- Volunteers to act as trustees and officers of the SCIO and Management Group members to provide support and strategic direction for the work of the CRPO (it is essential that the CRP is grounded in the communities it serves)
- Submission of the SCIO application form
- Adoption of FNL CRP Aims and objectives and job description for the CRPO
- (Restoration of confidence in safe travel by public transport)

Contact Michael Willmot at [helmsdalestation@gmail.com](mailto:helmsdalestation@gmail.com)

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# Appendix D

NW Trunk Road Unit Caithness and Sutherland		BEAR Scotland works programme 2020/21			
Route	Scheme Name	Work Description	Start	Finish	Value £
A99	A99 South of Mid Clyth	Resurfacing	29-Jun-20	02-Jul-20	100,000.00
A99	A99 Wick	Footway Improvements	06-Jul-20	02-Oct-20	30,000.00
A9	A9 Thurso	Footway Improvements	13-Jul-20	07-Aug-20	50,000.00
A9	A9 Lothmore to Portgower	Drainage Improvements	13-Jul-20	14-Aug-20	60,000.00
A99	A99 Route Priority Roadmarkings & Studs	Roadmarking Refreshment	13-Jul-20	09-Oct-20	75,000.00
A9	A9 Achrimsdale	Resurfacing	20-Jul-20	29-Jul-20	240,000.00
A9	A9 North of Ousdale Machine Patching	Resurfacing	24-Aug-20	26-Aug-20	35,000.00
A9	A9 Clashmore to Golspie	Embankment Repairs	24-Aug-20	04-Sep-20	60,000.00
A9	A9 Loch Stemster	Resurfacing	27-Aug-20	04-Sep-20	175,000.00
A9	A9 Scrabster	Resurfacing	07-Sep-20	08-Sep-20	50,000.00
A99	A99 South of Wick	Resurfacing	09-Sep-20	14-Sep-20	105,000.00
A9	A9 Evelix Garage	Resurfacing	09-Sep-20	17-Sep-20	250,000.00
A9	A9 1585 Dornoch	Bridge Parapet Repair	14-Sep-20	15-Sep-20	10,000.00
A99	A99 North of Hempriggs	Resurfacing	15-Sep-20	18-Sep-20	90,000.00
A9	A9 Thurso South	Resurfacing	20-Sep-20	01-Oct-20	240,000.00
A9	A9 Golspie	Resurfacing	20-Sep-20	23-Sep-20	105,000.00
A9	A9 Berriedale to Latheron	Embankment Repairs	21-Sep-20	02-Oct-20	50,000.00
A9	A9 Dornoch to Latheron Sign Replacement	Signing Improvements	21-Sep-20	09-Oct-20	40,000.00
A9	A9 Navidale Roundabout	Resurfacing	27-Sep-20	29-Sep-20	50,000.00
A9	A9 Helmsdale	Resurfacing	30-Sep-20	07-Oct-20	140,000.00
A9	A9 South of Dunbeath	Resurfacing	05-Oct-20	12-Oct-20	100,000.00
A9	A9 Brora	Footway Improvements	05-Oct-20	27-Nov-20	50,000.00
A9	A9 Doll South Machine Patching	Resurfacing	12-Oct-20	13-Oct-20	50,000.00
A99	A99 Bruan	Resurfacing	13-Oct-20	21-Oct-20	160,000.00
A9	A9 Strathsteven	Resurfacing	14-Oct-20	15-Oct-20	60,000.00
A9	A9 Dunrobin Castle	Resurfacing	16-Oct-20	23-Oct-20	150,000.00
A9	A9 North of Tacher	Resurfacing	22-Oct-20	27-Oct-20	105,000.00
A9	Dunrobin Castle	Drainage Improvements	28-Oct-20	11-Nov-20	50,000.00
A9	A9 1900 C88 Lochend (Achavanich)	Culvert Scour Repair	21-Sep-20	25-Sep-20	15,000.00
A99	A99 20 Reisgill (Lybster)	Bridge Parapet Replacement and Concrete Repairs	02-Nov-20	29-Jan-21	100,000.00
A9	A9 1587 Evelix Cuthill Links (Dornoch)	Bridge Parapet Replacement	01-Mar-21	26-Mar-21	50,000.00

# Appendix E

Caithness transport forum update August 2020.

## Airlines

Following the removal of the Wick – Aberdeen route from the schedule by Eastern Airways Wick currently has no scheduled operators.

## COVID-19 Operations

The airfield has been operating with reduced hours throughout the current pandemic and has serviced the Oil and Gas sector for refuels and training, Wiking helicopters tasking out to the Beatrice windfarm and Emergency flights.

HIAL have had a large amount of staff working from home and a small percentage have been furloughed. For those who could not work from home social distancing in the workplace, PPE and enhanced cleaning regimes were introduced from the start of lockdown.

## Aircraft Movements

Throughout the aviation industry aircraft movements have been slashed due to the current pandemic with many airlines and airports experiencing financial difficulties as a result.

## Movements at HIA / Wick

All of the other HIA airports saw aircraft movements down between 65%-95% in the month of May.

Wick had a reduction in movements by 20% due to the additional traffic mentioned above.

## Projects

HIA in general has not cancelled any projects for the 20/21 financial year and although challenging to complete some of these major projects on time during this time we are on course complete many of them before the end of the financial year.

Wick specifically will has projects initiated to;

- Improve the Emergency Water Supplies used by the Airport Fire Service
- Carry out concrete repairs to the main apron
- Refurbish the heating system for the Terminal and service buildings
- Refurbish the hangar access road

## Staffing levels

Half of the Security staff at the airport continue to be furloughed

ATC is still currently understaffed and has 4 ATCO's from a compliment of six, the trainee ATCO has returned to training following a period of furlough.

AFS and engineering are fully staffed.

## Opening hours

Following the withdrawal of the two scheduled operators HIA has assured staff there will be no quick decisions on the operating hours.

During the lockdown the airport management has engaged with stakeholders and slightly reduced the hours Mon-Fri in order to lengthen the opening on Sunday. This has proved to be successful and we are reviewing the situation to see if the hours can be maintained.

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