

STRONGER
TOGETHER

Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 12/11/2020

Time: 10:00

Location: Virtual Meeting – held over Zoom

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (minutes)
Peter Faccenda	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Allan Tait	Caithness Voluntary Group
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Dougie Cook	Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd
Julie McGee	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Frank Roach	HITRANS
Catherine Currie	Pentland Ferries
Kathryn Scollie	Pentland Ferries
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
William Mainus	Stagecoach Highland
Davie Alexander	Thurso & Wick Trades Union Council
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland
Malcolm Bremner	Wick Harbour

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
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 13.08.2020

- 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*
COMPLETE

Trudy Morris noted that the Forum was not aware of any progress on this matter and that it was now covered under actions **M002/A001** and **M002/A002**.

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

Alex Macmanus noted that the Council had notification in early September that ScotRail had commissioned a station parking strategy. As part of the initial exercise, the group undertaking this work consulted with local authorities including Highland Council, to obtain their views on parking in their areas and understand where parking enforcement is happening at stations.

The issues with parking at Thurso have been taken forward by Shane Manning at Highland Council and the relevant information put on to consultants.

Trudy queried the timescale for this work to be completed. Alex noted that the consultants were looking to complete their work by mid-late October so he would assume by end of year.

CTF(2020)M003/A001 – *Chamber to follow up with ScotRail regarding timescales for station parking work*

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

Trudy noted that a report had been received from Jonathan Gunn at Highland Council roads on the morning of the meeting.

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

Trudy noted that this was done – the letter and response were shared with attendees (**Appendices A and B**).

Trudy noted that the Forum will continue to keep this on their radar and go back to Transport Scotland for further information once the details of any trade deal with the EU are known.

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

Gail lodged a written question on 18/08/2020 and received the following response from Paul Wheelhouse MSP on 26/08/2020:

“As I confirmed to Parliament, in the Chamber on 20 August 2020, Transport Scotland has had further engagement with the European Commission on potential options for looking at reducing fares on the Pentland Firth. EC officials have written to Transport Scotland expressing their immediate views and the next step is for Transport Scotland officials to take forward those views which have been provided by the EC officials and then look to identify plausible, compliant options for introducing reduced fares on the Pentland Firth.

“As I explained in the Chamber, the work to undertake those next steps has been impacted by deployment of key officials during the Covid-19 pandemic response, but I gave an undertaking to the Member, and repeat that commitment in this response, that as personnel are now in many cases returning to their posts that this work will be picked up as soon as possible.”

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

As **CTF(2020)M001/A004**.

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

This was done and the Forum subsequently wrote to the Minister on this matter (**Appendices A and B**).

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

This was done – further detail on this matter is covered under the relevant agenda item.

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

Trudy noted that this was done and a press release issued to local media. A 15 year old local, Innes Morgan, subsequently responded and is in the process of developing a social media presence for the Partnership. The Partnership remains in need of local people to serve as trustees for the charitable organisation which would need to be established to progress with the proposal.

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

Trudy noted that this was done and confirmation received from HIAL that they have no intention of making security staff redundant once the furlough scheme closes. She noted that the furlough scheme is

now set to continue until March 2021, as opposed to the previous end date of October 2020 when this action was undertaken.

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

A press release was drafted in agreement with various attendees mentioned and issued a few days after the meeting

4. Matters Arising

4.1 There were no matters arising.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.1.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix C**). Sandy Mackie covered some of the key points in the report in a verbal update to the Forum.
- 5.1.2 Sandy noted that the Trust had been impacted by COVID-19 as everyone else, and that revenues were down as a result. He noted that this is largely due to lost ferry revenue and that the rest of business has performed largely in line with expectations.
- 5.1.3 Looking at individual sectors, oil and gas has been badly impacted by COVID-19, however recent reports have suggested that the West of Shetland will be a growth area for the industry. General cargo is up – largely due to timber shipments. Cruise is very badly affected and Cruise Scotland are working to come up with a standard that can be applied across all Scottish cruise ports to give confidence to the sector.
- 5.1.4 The Ola Pier project is well underway with contractors having been on site for around 150 days and piling works expected to be complete early January 2021. Following this, the Trust looks forward to the construction of the pier and dredging operations.
- 5.1.5 Sandy noted that at the last meeting of the Forum he had updated on the local benefits of the project. He updated the Forum that these include local employment by the main contractor, long-term occupancy for accommodation providers, and a range of the local supply chain being involved in the works. He noted the importance of these benefits to the area, given the current circumstances.
- 5.1.6 Sandy updated the Forum that – as with everyone – uncertainty remains both in the short and the long term. Brexit is still to come and the Trust is trying to ensure that it has all the necessary authorisations and compliance in place for both the port operations and the businesses operating in and around the port. Sandy noted that this is difficult given the timescales and that he has some concerns about the level of resourcing this will required from Highland Council Environmental Health Officers. He noted that there have been suggestions that some Marine Scotland resource could be used to assist with this.
- 5.1.7 The Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy has been published, allowing the ScotWind leasing round to proceed, and Sandy noted that this is good news for the region. He noted that some optimism needs to be tempered, as the target is for 11GW of installed capacity compared to just 1GW at present. For this to be

achieved will require significant investment in grid infrastructure and this may have a bearing on the timescales.

- 5.1.8 Sandy noted that there has been some recent discussion regarding freeports, largely driven by the UK Treasury. These would give participating ports some advantages in terms of tax, customs and planning. Sandy noted that a number of ports in the Highland area have expressed an interest and that Scrabster has some concerns that freeports in the region would displace current activity and create a two-tier system. He noted that this is a devolved matter and that it remains to be seen how the Scottish Government will approach this.
- 5.1.9 Trudy noted that it is positive to hear of the local benefits to business of the Ola Pier works. With regards to the cruise sector, she queried if Scrabster is expecting no cruise ships next year and is looking instead to 2022.
- 5.1.10 Sandy noted that this is not the case and that the cruise sector is looking at how best to restart operations – he noted that cruise activity has resumed in the Mediterranean, showing that this is still possible. Guidance has been provided by the UK Government for passengers, operators and ports and the general feeling is that while cruise activity is not encouraged at the moment it remains possible.
- 5.1.11 With regards to cruise, Sandy noted that Scrabster has 17 bookings in place for next year and that none of these have indicated they intend to cancel at present. He noted that when cruise activity does resume, he expects this will happen as round-UK cruises rather than foreign boats. There is a recognition across the industry that reassurance and rebuilding does need to happen, and that the work Cruise Scotland is doing is part of that. Sandy noted that the key thing is to make cruise operations as safe as possible and manage the risks going forward.
- 5.1.12 Roger Saxon queried whether Sandy expected that Scrabster would need any additional infrastructure for health inspections post-Brexit. Sandy noted that this is being explored at the moment but that the guidance is not particularly clear. The hope is that existing infrastructure such as the Fish Market will be able to be used, as this already has a number of the required designations in place. If there is a requirement to operate as a Border Control Post, Scrabster would need to get authorisations in place to enable this to happen and the timescale for this would be 1 July 2021. Sandy noted that the Trust has engaged professional customs support to enable it to navigate the requirements of Brexit.
- 5.1.13 With regards to cruise bookings, Peter Faccenda queried how many of these were from foreign vessels and how many from UK vessels. Sandy noted that he could not give a breakdown but that there were a mixture of both.

5.2 Wick Harbour

- 5.2.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix D**) and Malcolm Bremner gave a verbal update to the Forum.
- 5.2.2 Malcolm updated the Forum that Wick Harbour had several calls recently from companies looking for land around the harbour with regards to offshore wind developments. He noted that things had been slow in starting this year but that work is now progressing for the Beatrice Offshore Wind Farm next year, with six boats already booked in Wick and another four to six likely.
- 5.2.3 In addition, Malcolm noted that Wick has had Crew Transfer Vessels (CTVs) in for work on the Moray East windfarm – there are now four CTVs based in Wick and a further four are likely for next year. Wick also has survey vessels for Moray West and various vessels for tidal energy works in the Pentland Firth operating

from the harbour. In total, Malcolm estimated that Wick would have 12-14 vessels operating from the harbour from Spring 2021 – he noted that the harbour has previously handled this level of activity.

- 5.2.4 With regards to specific sectors, Malcolm updated the Forum that cargo volumes at Wick have been good, mainly due to works for Subsea 7. Fishing volumes have been down due to prices and marketing issues. Leisure traffic has been down, and it was June/July before the marina saw any visiting yachts.
- 5.2.5 Malcolm updated the Forum that works on the High Water Protection Gate are proceeding and that a number of other improvements have either been made or are due to be undertaken around the harbour. He noted that a dredging campaign would be beginning next Spring and that this will be using a grab rather than a suction dredger.
- 5.2.6 Trudy noted that it was good to hear so much positive news from Wick.

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 Pentalina*, Kathryn noted that this remains berthed in Kirkwall and is on the market for sale. Since the last meeting of the Forum, the *Pentalina* has since completed a further two charters to Lyness and another is due this weekend (weather permitting).
- 5.4.3 Kathryn noted that with regards to COVID-19 the systems for managing passengers and social distancing onboard are working well. She noted that passenger figures have remained largely the same since tourism opened in July. The figures they have would show that the tourist season has been extended, with passenger volumes at around 57% of normal from the opening of tourism throughout phase 3.
- 5.4.4 Kathryn noted that booking patterns have changed, with passenger bookings now generally coming in 12-36 hours before the day of travel. She noted that this has made planning quite difficult and that there have been a few times where onboard store levels have struggled as a result.
- 5.4.5 With regards to staffing, Kathryn noted that there have been no further redundancies since the last meeting. Staffing levels remain at around 65 and Pentland Ferries is taking advantage of the furlough scheme, with around 20% of staff on full or flexible furlough.
- 5.4.6 Kathryn finished by updating the Forum that works have started on the extension of the Pentland Ferries marshalling area.
- 5.4.7 Trudy thanked Kathryn for her update and noted that it was positive to hear of progress on the marshalling area. With regards the *Pentalina* charters, she queried whether these were commercial or private – Kathryn noted that these are commercial charters relating to work on power lines at Lyness.

5.5 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.5.1 Kris Bevan provided an update to the Forum on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries.
- 5.5.2 With regards to passenger numbers, Kris noted that these are now down about 50% year-on-year, with non-commercial vehicle traffic down 31% and freight around 2%. Kris noted that these figures are network-wide but are reflective of the position across all services, and that they are a significant improvement on the figures given at the last meeting.
- 5.5.3 Kris updated the Forum that NorthLink continue to follow the Scottish Government guidance on travel and transport. With the introduction of the new system of protection levels, NorthLink are now leaving it up to individual passengers to determine whether they meet the criteria for travel. There continues to be a limit to the number of passengers and some onboard services are still reduced – Kris advised that full details can be found on the NorthLink website.
- 5.5.4 With regards to group tours, Kris noted that there had been some publicity around this in the past few weeks. He updated the Forum that NorthLink are not at present taking any group bookings for 2021 – this is a provisional decision and is in part due to limits on the number of passengers.
- 5.5.5 Kris noted that there is no longer public transport connectivity seven days a week from Inverness-Scrabster-Orkney.
- 5.5.6 Kris advised the Forum that the next dry dock for the *MV Hamnavoe* is scheduled for 17 January 2021 – NorthLink are seeking replacement tonnage but in the absence of that this will be supplied by one of the freight vessels.
- 5.5.7 Trudy queried whether the decision on group bookings was applying for the whole of 2021. Kris emphasised that this is a provisional decision based on the information currently available, and that the position may change. He noted that NorthLink is keeping in touch with all its key group tour customers regarding expected volumes and what control measures and risk assessments they have in place.
- 5.5.8 Trudy noted that this is having an impact on consumer confidence and forward planning for businesses, and queried how much notice businesses could expect if this policy changes. Kris noted that this will depend on the guidance that comes out from Scottish Government.
- 5.5.9 Alex Macmanus enquired regarding a recent news report on a group of workers who had been turned back while attempting to travel to Orkney. Kris noted that there were a number of factors with the booking in question, notably that it involved around 36 people in six or seven different vehicles, leading to issues around social distancing, and that the passengers involved were travelling from level 3 areas. He noted that NorthLink had passed the information on to Police Scotland who then made the decision not to allow these passengers to travel to the islands.
- 5.5.10 A written update was also provided to the Forum by the Transport Scotland Ferries Unit (**Appendix E**).

5.6 ScotRail Alliance

- 5.6.1 Trudy Morris noted that no update had been received and asked the Forum if they had any issues that could be fed back to the ScotRail Alliance. She noted that Kris had mentioned the loss of seven day public transport connectivity.
- 5.6.2 On the matter of public transport connectivity, Frank Roach noted that the train timetable remained as before. William Mainus noted that from a Stagecoach point of view they had opted to continue offering a single daily service on a Sunday primarily for the benefit of residents of Caithness and Sutherland. He noted

that both the ScotRail and NorthLink Ferries contracts are issued by Scottish Government and that he felt it should be up to these parties to link up rather than rely on bus operators.

- 5.6.3 Mike Lunan noted that Network Rail had yet to update on infrastructure plans for the Far North Line. It was agreed that the Chamber would feed back the points regarding ferry connectivity and infrastructure plans to the ScotRail Alliance.

CTF(2020)M003/A002 – *Chamber to follow up with ScotRail Alliance regarding ferry connectivity and Far North Line infrastructure plans*

5.7 Direct Rail Services

- 5.7.1 No attendee was present. Trudy Morris noted that the Forum and Dounreay Stakeholder Group had written to Direct Rail Services regarding plans for a commercial freight trial. As the impacts of COVID-19 are likely to be here for some time, it was suggested that DRS look at filming or livestreaming this to help reduce the number of people present in person. DRS had responded to say they are looking at options and are hoping to deliver something before Spring 2021.

5.8 HITRANS

- 5.8.1 Frank Roach updated the Forum on recent developments in rail freight, noting the success of recent timber freight trials operating out of Georgemas with support from the Scottish Strategic Rail Freight Fund. He noted that this had demonstrated the ability of the railway to act at relatively short notice to support freight paths, and that this trial had proven the concept could work.
- 5.8.2 Frank noted that following the trial, Norbord and timber suppliers are looking at the possibility of Georgemas acting as a “super-terminal” for timber loading. One infrastructure issue which may need to be resolved is lorries having to travel a circuitous route due to restrictions on travelling via Halkirk. The operation gave an income stream to the owners of the Georgemas terminal and has led to additional proposals for freight other than timber.
- 5.8.3 Frank will be working with the owners of the terminal to identify other commodities that may be possible via Georgemas – he noted that town gas for Wick and Thurso is rail freighted to Inverness and has potential to migrate to rail further north, along with supermarket containers and flagstone. The freight scene is now better for Caithness than it has been for many years, due to renewed enthusiasm of the terminal owners.
- 5.8.4 Peter Faccenda noted that this is very positive and that CNSRP is happy to be involved in developing future freight opportunities. Peter mentioned the longer-term possibilities for creation of hydrogen in the region and transport of this via rail – Frank noted that he would cover this shortly.
- 5.8.5 Roger Saxon noted that the Dounreay Stakeholder Group was considering doing a study on freight but did not want to cut across the work Frank is doing if progress is being made. June Love noted that the study proposed is not generally on rail freight but on whether the NDA side of the terminal is fit for purpose for commercial freight. If not, the response then is that work needs to be done to restore functionality once it is no longer required by Direct Rail Services for their operations.
- 5.8.6 Frank noted that one thing the trials had shown was that deployment of personnel had to be managed carefully to make the operation viable, and that with a fixed crane there is some built-in inefficiency as the driver has to shunt the train with every container taken off. He noted that where it is possible to move

lorries or craneage alongside the train, rather than moving the train itself, this is likely to be cheaper and more efficient. He further noted that even if the crane is not useable this does not rule out the use of that siding for commercial freight, as it can be accessed from the other two sidings, giving some additional flexibility.

- 5.8.7 Frank delivered a presentation on alternatively powered trains to the Forum.
- 5.8.8 This focused first on the feasibility of running a Battery Multiple Unit between Wick and Thurso. With regards to plans for decarbonisation of the railway, the current proposal is for electrification by 2035 to Tain, with some other solution for the rest of the Far North Line. Feasibility work carried out in 2018 showed there is capacity on the Wick-Thurso line, the distance is right for battery trains, and there is local opportunity to use constrained wind.
- 5.8.9 Frank noted that he had presented on this opportunity to Transport Scotland, restating the battery train concept and the potential for extending this to hydrogen, taking advantage of the cluster of energy expertise in Caithness and Orkney and shifting to a hydrogen-battery solution. As hydrogen requires around 3.5x the storage space of conventional diesel, this mean a hydrogen train would likely require refuelling at the Caithness end of the network as well as in Inverness.
- 5.8.10 On the matter of hydrogen, Frank touched on the bid for freeport status for Invergordon, which is based around offshore wind opportunities and the possibility of an advanced production line for offshore wind at Nigg. He noted that new offshore wind will create a significant quantity of electricity and that this creates further opportunities for hydrogen production.
- 5.8.11 Frank updated the Forum on the Inverness Transport Hub project, noting that Network Rail have now purchased a lot of land around Inverness Station to enable this to progress. This will be a fully-integrated transport hub with buses co-located alongside trains, creating opportunities for alternative fuelling of both.
- 5.8.12 Frank noted the possibility of creation of hydrogen from waste, with the Longman site having a proposal for incineration. This combines with an opportunity to move domestic waste from Caithness following the closure of the Seater landfill.
- 5.8.13 Frank finished by noting that with regards to future fuel, hydrogen will deliver opportunities Scotland-wide. He noted the opportunity to repurpose existing trains to hydrogen-electric and gather evidence for the procurement of a new fleet of electric rolling stock.
- 5.8.14 Peter Faccenda noted that he had a few thoughts on Frank's update. Firstly, he noted the potential for hydrogen from methane, which had some interest locally and would potentially give a longer future for West of Shetland fields.
- 5.8.15 With regards to the Wick-Thurso battery train proposals, Peter noted his feeling that the region would make a good test environment, with two battery companies locally and significant expertise. He noted the opportunity to provide a test environment and centre some research and development efforts in Caithness.
- 5.8.16 Peter noted that Frank had highlighted a number of exciting opportunities and that he was keen to see a more active and collaborative approach locally to develop these. Trudy noted that there had been an action to ask Frank Roach to present at a CNSRP meeting and the ongoing work CNSRP is doing on a sustainability hub. It was agreed that Frank and Peter should liaise on a date for Frank to discuss future rail opportunities at a meeting of the CNSRP.

CTF(2020)M003/A003 – *Peter Faccenda and Frank Roach to liaise on discussion of future rail opportunities*

5.9 Berriedale Braes

- 5.9.1 Trudy noted that following completion of the works at Berriedale, this would be taken off the agenda for future meetings.

5.10 Highland Council

- 5.10.1 A written update was provided by Highland Council roads (**Appendix F**)
- 5.10.2 David Swanson updated the Forum on discussions with Stagecoach, Highland Council and HITRANS regarding the Wick Riverside development. He noted that a key concern raised was bus access down Whitechapel Road and that HITRANS had proposed a potential solution involving narrowing the curve at the top of the road to prevent parked vehicles obstructing access.

5.11 BEAR Scotland

- 5.11.1 An update on BEAR Scotland's programme of works was provided to attendees (**Appendix G**) and Marco Bardelli provided a verbal update to the Forum.
- 5.11.2 Marco Bardelli noted that BEAR are well into their programme despite challenges with the shutdown of the construction sector until July 2020. This has left 9 months to carry out a full year programme, but good progress is being made with the majority of the programme expected to be completed before the onset of winter and a few schemes undertaken in the new year.
- 5.11.3 Marco noted that he has not been able to get out and see works in person as usual, but that he has been endeavouring to engage remotely where possible. He noted that he is always happy for Forum members to contact him with any issues and noted a change of personnel in the BEAR North West unit.
- 5.11.4 Marco updated the Forum that the first draft programme for the coming year is expected from BEAR shortly and that he will be able to update on the future programme at the next meeting. Marco noted his expectation that the level of funding committed would be similar to the current year.
- 5.11.5 With regards to Berriedale, Marco noted his understanding that it is open and working well. Trudy noted that she has heard only positive feedback.
- 5.11.6 Alex Macmanus noted that there had been previous discussions around other areas of concern on the A9 and queried whether these would be considered going forward – he drew particular attention to Cambusavie and Newport.
- 5.11.7 Marco noted that there is always an open invitation to suggest areas of potential improvement. With regards to Cambusavie he noted that a fair amount of work had been done to improve the road within the current alignment. In terms of changing the overall alignment, he was happy to take comments but noted that this is not within the maintenance remit – he drew attention to the ongoing strategic transport review. Marco noted that there can be an issue where improvements fall below the strategic level but above the maintenance level, so there may be one or two areas like that where some additional focus is needed.

5.12 Stagecoach

- 5.12.1 William Mainus delivered an update on behalf of Stagecoach. He noted that they had started increasing mileage in August and are currently operating at about 78% of the mileage from last year. With regards to passenger numbers, these are sitting at around 40% of last year but this is mainly down to movements for schools. Concession holders are still sitting at about 30% of last year.
- 5.12.2 William noted that the X99 journey had been speeded up to give a faster run to Inverness and that this seems to be popular and more reliable. He reiterated the decision to continue running a single service on Sundays to give residents some access to Inverness and Raigmore.
- 5.12.3 Within Caithness, William noted that there had been some comment on reduction in commercial services. He updated the Forum that this is due to the reduction in passengers and that he cannot see Stagecoach increasing mileage in the region for the foreseeable future, but that they are doing their best to avoid reducing mileage further.
- 5.12.4 Allan Tait noted that he had seen some comment about the removal of the Saturday service from Lybster-Wick and queried whether William could provide him with further details of where Stagecoach have reduced or removed mileage. There was some discussion of the details of this and it was agreed that William would provide details of this to Allan.

CTF(2020)M003/A004 – *William Mainus to provide details of removed services to Allan Tait*

- 5.12.5 Roger Saxon queried whether the proposals for a Thurso-Wick rail shuttle would impact bus services – William noted that they would likely reduce the viability of bus services on that route.
- 5.12.6 Trudy Morris noted that there is a concern that even following the pandemic it will be difficult to get passenger numbers back on public transport and return services which have been cut. William noted that there has been some support for the industry from Scottish Government, and that there is a concern that if Highland Council face budgetary constraints they may have to cut tendered services. He noted that it could be three or four years before commercial passenger numbers are back to where they were pre-COVID.
- 5.12.7 Trudy queried if this was due to people not travelling – William noted the expectation that working patterns would change long-term and that they are not expecting the same number of staff to be working in offices as before.
- 5.12.8 Trudy noted this as a matter for the Forum as restrictions start lifting and it was something that would have to be monitored and managed. William noted that there may be initial concerns amongst passengers who have become used to socially-distanced services about returning to the same capacity as before.

5.13 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.13.1 A written update was provided on behalf of HIAL (**Appendix H**) and Dougie Cook provided a verbal update to the Forum.
- 5.13.2 Dougie noted that there are currently no scheduled services operating from the airport. He updated the Forum that HIAL has taken part in a number of stakeholder events, including one session with the HIAL Board. He reiterated the support of HIAL for Wick John O’Groats Airport. While there have been no announcements yet regarding a PSO, Dougie noted that this remains hopeful.

- 5.13.3 With regards to COVID-19, HIAL have implemented restriction on General Aviation travel from higher tier areas into lower tiers, and this is being managed by airport managers. HIAL have also introduced their own airport COVID levels, with Wick at the lowest level of zero. Dougie reassured the Forum that people would not be travelling into the area via the airport without good reason.
- 5.13.4 On staffing, a large number of staff continue to work from home and HIAL do continue to take advantage of the furlough scheme, in particular for security staff. For those who cannot work from home, precautions including social distancing, enhanced cleaning regimes and use of PPE are in place. Security remains at full complement, with ATC staff currently at 3. The ATC trainee was furloughed per CAA guidance and a tentative validation date is now February 2021. Dougie noted that the industry as a whole is in a perilous situation, but that HIAL has a no redundancy policy which has benefited staff.
- 5.13.5 Dougie noted that passenger movements are down 74% year-to-date and aircraft movements down around 30%, but that this is not as bad as expected. He noted that passenger movements are down a similar amount across HIAL airports, and that Wick has seen the smallest drop in aircraft movements, with Barra next lowest at 41%. He noted that in context, however, he had previously been predicting a 20% increase in movements for this year.
- 5.13.6 Capital projects have continued to be carried out at the airport, with upgrades to the emergency water supply, repairs to concrete on the apron and refurbishment of the hangar access road all complete. Dougie noted that a refurbishment of heating in the terminal building along with significant guttering works are still to be carried out, and noted the continued investment made by HIAL into Wick.
- 5.13.7 Dougie noted that opening hours had changed since the introduction of lockdown, when the airport moved to a skeleton service for oil and gas and offshore wind operations. These have now been extended but changed slightly as there is not a need to cater for scheduled operators. Dougie noted that he is in discussion with SSE and Far North Aviation about what they need in order to operate.
- 5.13.8 With regards to Brexit, Dougie noted that there is some uncertainty around ferry flight operations post-Brexit as this is essentially classed as a transfer of goods. He noted that Far North Aviation are seeking reassurance on this and that HIAL continue to assess the impact of Brexit on their supply chain.
- 5.13.9 Trudy Morris thanked Dougie for his update and noted it is positive to hear of the continued investment from HIAL. She noted that since the last meeting, Caithness Councillors had put forward a motion at full Council in support of the PSO and that this had been passed. While this still needs to be discussed as part of the Council's budget for next financial year, she noted this as an important step forward.
- 5.13.10 With regards to the PSO, Trudy noted her frustration that the Chamber was still awaiting a response to the business case from the Cabinet Secretary, but that they continued to lobby on this and that Gail Ross MSP was assisting in this.

6. Press Communications

- 6.1 This was discussed and it was felt best to wait until the first meeting of 2021 before issuing any press communications.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Marco Bardelli noted that Highland Council were proposing to introduce some changes to their network in Wick and Thurso under the “Spaces for People” project to provide more space for active travel. He noted his concern at the length of time this was taking and his understanding that for Thurso this may involve a speed restriction for the whole town.
- 7.2 Alex Macmanus noted that as far as he was aware there had been proposals put forward for both Wick and Thurso but no decisions made as yet. It was agreed that Alex would look into this and report back to the Forum.

CTF(2020)M003/A005 – *Alex Macmanus to report back on Wick/Thurso proposals under Spaces for People*

8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 It was noted that this would be scheduled for 11 March 2021

9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

No actions ongoing

10. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2020)M003/A001 – *Chamber to follow up with ScotRail regarding timescales for station parking work*

CTF(2020)M003/A002 – *Chamber to follow up with ScotRail Alliance regarding ferry connectivity and Far North Line infrastructure plans*

CTF(2020)M003/A003 – *Peter Faccenda and Frank Roach to liaise on discussion of future rail opportunities*

CTF(2020)M003/A004 – *William Mainus to provide details of removed services to Allan Tait*

CTF(2020)M003/A005 – *Alex Macmanus to report back on Wick/Thurso proposals under Spaces for People*

Appendix A – Letter to Paul Wheelhouse re: State Aid



Paul Wheelhouse MSP
Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Date: 16/10/2020

Our ref: TM/CTF/2020/PW03

Dear Mr Wheelhouse,

I am writing to you today in my capacity as Chair of the Caithness Transport Forum to request an update on the progress with rolling out Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) on the Northern Isles Ferry Services (NIFS). In particular, the Forum would like to hear from you with respect to two areas – the position on State Aid matters following Brexit, and an update received at the last meeting regarding the specific mechanism by which RET is to be rolled out.

On the first point, our understanding is that State Aid remains a key sticking point in the negotiations between UK Government and the European Union on the form of any post-Brexit trade agreement. While we appreciate that the situation remains fluid until an agreement is reached, we would like to understand Transport Scotland's working assumptions on how they will proceed with any State Aid related matters come 1 January 2021 and how this may impact on the planned rollout of RET.

On the second point, we were concerned following the last meeting of the Forum in August 2020 to receive an update from Pentland Ferries, clarifying that the existing State Aid case relating to RET was closed in 2019. Our understanding is that Transport Scotland have been asked to look at a mechanism for delivery which is compatible with EU State Aid legislation.

Our concern is that we are now more than two years on from Scottish Government's original deadline for rollout of RET on the Northern Isles Ferry Services and appear to be no further forward in delivering a solution. It seems evident that a State Aid compliant mechanism must exist, as RET has been in place across the full Clyde and Hebridean Ferry Services since 2015.

We note from recent press reports that the work on rolling out RET has been paused as a result of COVID-19. While we appreciate the pressures of the current situation, we increasingly have to accept that the impacts of COVID-19 will be with us for some time and that there is a need to move forward with long-term developments such as this.

We would appreciate an update from you in advance of the next Caithness Transport Forum meeting on 12 November 2020 as to how Transport Scotland intends to restart and progress this important work.

Yours sincerely,



Trudy Morris
Chair, Caithness Transport Forum

Appendix B – Transport Scotland response re: State Aid

Aviation, Maritime, Freight & Canals
Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, G4 0HF
alison.wills@transport.gov.scot



Trudy Morris
Caithness Transport Forum
By email: david@caithnesschamber.com

Your ref:
TM/CTF/2020/PW03

Our ref:
2020/0003893

Date:
11 November 2020

Dear Ms Morris

Thank you for your letter of 16 October to Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands. I have been asked to reply.

I can confirm that Transport Scotland officials have been able to restart work to consider fares on ferry routes across the Pentland Firth. However, this work is at an early stage and is subject to the continued resource pressures and ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19.

The UK Government announced on 9 September 2020 that the UK would follow World Trade Organisation (WTO) subsidy rules and other international commitments, replacing the EU state aid laws, from January 1 2021. This position is notwithstanding the fact that, at the time of writing, negotiations on a free trade deal between the UK and EU continue, with state aid/subsidies one of the most problematic areas of discussion.

The European Commission wrote to Transport Scotland in 2019 to set out the views of officials who had been involved in the case and had met with Transport Scotland officials. However, the information contained within the letter continues to inform the options being explored by Transport Scotland. Clearly, however, this letter and the information within it pertains to the relevant legal conditions that exist with the UK as part of the European Union.

The current and continuing uncertainty around the EU Exit strategy including the potential for a 'no deal' scenario means that it is impossible to predict with absolute certainty what rules will apply from 2021 onwards. There are some fundamental, key differences between the current WTO subsidy rules and those rules which have been in place under EU regulations (and which the EC letter refers to).

As things stand, we expect guidance on implementation and operation of the UK subsidy regime to be published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy prior to implementation and we will consider the impact of this on ferry services in detail. This will however take some time and we do not intend to make any immediate changes to ferries policy.

As you will be aware, since 1 January 2020, islanders travelling on Aberdeen-Kirkwall-Lerwick routes have received a 20% reduction on cabin fares and a three-year freeze on passenger,

www.transport.gov.scot



 Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

non-commercial vehicle and cabin fares. This package of measures builds on the 30% discount already in place for islanders.

Of course, as a key stakeholder, we will be sure to keep the Caithness Transport Forum informed of further developments as these matters progress.

I hope this is helpful.

Warm regards



Paul Flynn
Ferries Policy
Transport Scotland

Appendix C – Scrabster Harbour Trust



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 12th November 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. PORT ACTIVITY

Port activity continues to be impacted by Covid-19 and the associated health restrictions. Total port revenues are down 31% for the half year to 30th September 2020 compared with the same period last year. The reduction in revenue is almost entirely due to the reduction in ferry traffic and the absence of cruise vessels. In aggregate our other revenue sectors continue to hold up well compared to original budget.

Total arrivals in the six-month period ended 30th September 2020 amounted to 1,029 vessels, down 11.5 % on last year. Total vessel tonnage amounted to 4.34 million tonnes, again 11.5 % down on the previous year.

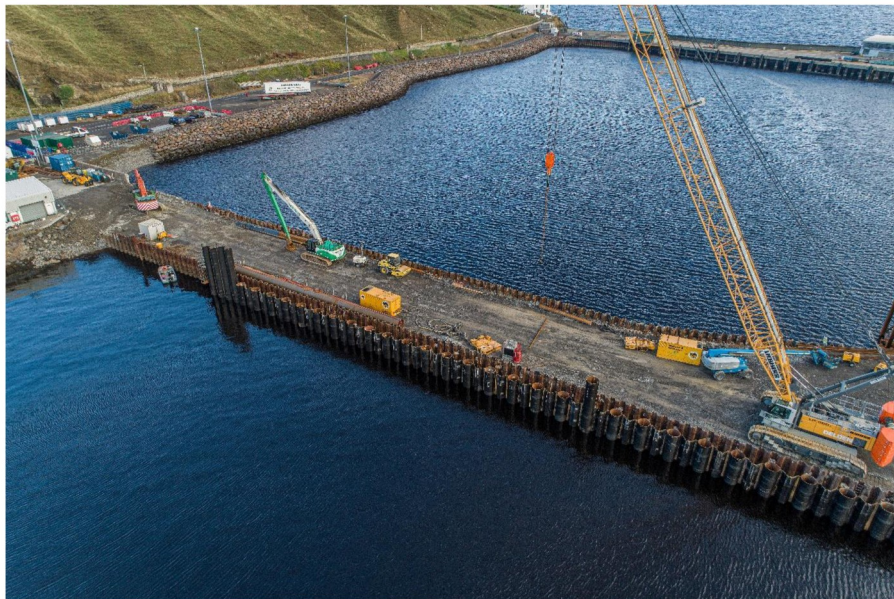
- Ferry passenger numbers, although there was an improvement from July, are 75% down compared to last year.
- Fish box landings in the half year amounted to 120,143 boxes just below last year's figure. However, the value of the catch landed is lower than the previous year. This is in line with the position at other Scottish fishing ports.
- Oil & Gas/Energy activity has been significantly affected by the Covid-19 crisis with arrivals and vessel tonnage down 37%.



- General Cargo volumes are up 800 %, mostly due to continued timber shipments.
- Faroes fish cargo volumes are down 14%, but the revenue impact is cushioned as we have two carriers operating weekly services.
- Oil tanker volumes are 6 % up on last year.

2. OLA PIER DEVELOPMENT

The contractor, RJ McLeod, has now been on site for over 150 days. The construction activity continues to be driving the steel tubes and sheet piles to form the new combi-quay walls. The contractor continues to make good progress with 14 piling gates out of a total 40 gates already completed including the driving of 72 steel tube piles out of a planned 180 tubes.



The piling is expected to continue into 2021 with dredging activity expected to commence around February 2021.

The forecast completion date for the project is currently late September 2021.

3. FORWARD LOOK

- Serco Northlink have announced that the Hamnavoe will have its annual dry-docking beginning 10th January 2021.
- Due to Covid-19 there remains significant uncertainty regarding the near to medium future
 - There is still not full clarity on the implications of Brexit. As a port we are taking steps based on the current guidance, to ensure that we are compliant. This compliance relates to our approvals and infrastructure.
 - Brexit will create additional work for others, particularly the local authority Environmental Health Officers, who will be responsible for the checks to be undertaken in any Border Control Post and issuing Export Health Certificates. It is important that the right level of resource is available at the right time.
 - The Oil & Gas sector has been badly impacted by Covid-19. Longer term West of Shetland is forecast to be the main and only growth sector of the UKCS over the next decade.
 - It will take time for Cruise activity to resume and for confidence in cruising to be rebuilt. The Trust are members of Cruise Scotland who are working on a common standard that will apply and operate at all Scottish cruise ports.
 - There is great potential for many Scottish ports to benefit from the development offshore wind. The Marine Sector Plan for Offshore Wind was published by Scottish Government recently. This allows the Crown Estate Scotland's Scotwind Leasing round to progress with decision on awards expected in 2021.

Scottish Government has published a target of installed capacity of 11GW by 2030, compared with the 1 GW currently installed. This is a major scaling up of capacity but will require associated significant investment in the electrical distribution network.

Appendix D – Wick Harbour Authority

Wick Harbour

Business update for Caithness Transport Forum. November 2020

Overview

- Wick Harbour, in common with most businesses in the country, has felt the adverse effects of the Coronavirus pandemic and as a result a reduction in harbour activity and income, as compared to the previous year. Core business remains stable, but fishing, leisure and windfarm non- essential work has suffered as a result.

Offshore wind

- Work on Beatrice Windfarm O&M carries on as normal, and 5 vessels were working from March through to October, carrying out scheduled maintenance. This has now dropped back to two vessels for the winter months as days at sea can be severely restricted due to adverse weather. Non-essential maintenance on the BOWL windfarm was shelved this year due to the Covid19 pandemic, but this has been re-scheduled to begin in Spring 2021 and will involve a number of extra vessels working from the harbour next year.
- Construction on the Moray East windfarm has gathered pace and there is a hive of activity on the windfarm. Although Fraserburgh was selected as the O&M base for this project Wick Harbour has also benefitted, with construction vessels working from the harbour for several months now. Again, they have downscaled for the Winter, but have intimated that they will return in the Spring of 2021 and will, in all probability be utilising several more vessels than used this year.
- We are already receiving enquiries from various companies with regards to the next rounds of licencing for the Crown Estate, Scotwind leases, which gives us great confidence that this is going to be an ongoing industry for Wick harbour, as our location is right on the doorstep of some of the new leases.

Cargoes

- Seven shipments of on-shore windfarm components have recently been discharged at Wick and previous to that 3 shipments of towheads for Subsea7's pipeline projects arrived at the port and were transported by road to their base in Sinclair Bay. Other cargoes received have been lime, coal, and a shipment of road salt due this week. There have been no exports from Wick this year.

Fishing

- Fish & shellfish landings by value have decreased due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Many markets for shellfish have disappeared and prices for landings have been severely affected. This is unlikely to alter until there is a marked improvement on the Covid front.

Leisure

- The leisure sector has also been severely disrupted due to the Covid pandemic. It was not until mid-July that a limited yachting season got under way. Despite this there were around 100 visiting yachts which visited the marina (a drop of around 70% on our usual numbers) Most notably, there were very few foreign arrivals, also average lengths of stay were down.
- Locally, numbers of vessels using the marina was down from usual numbers, with many owners deciding to keep their vessel out of the water for the season.
- Although Wick is not really a recognised cruise port, we normally get a limited number of visits from a some of the smaller operators during a year. Again, due to Covid, this fell away completely this year.

High Water Protection Gate

- Progress has been slower than anticipated due to a variety of circumstances, not least Covid19! however, we are still advancing and hopefully nearing a decision shortly.
- Should this project go ahead it will be a game changer for the harbour, as we can safely berth vessels in both the Inner & Outer Harbours all year round and in all weathers.

Outlook

The business outlook for Wick Harbour remains buoyant. We are expecting a busy year next year, with Beatrice windfarm playing catch up on work which was scheduled for this year. In addition, the Moray East windfarm is likely to contribute a notable increase in business for the harbour with the on-going construction of the field and the likelihood of several vessels using Wick as their base. Moray West is still a year or two down the line, but Wick remains in the frame to be awarded the O&M base for this windfarm. Cargo numbers are forecast to be stable as per this year, but fishing and leisure are unlikely to improve dramatically, unless the Covid pandemic is under control.

Ian Cormack

Deputy Harbourmaster

Wick harbour

Appendix E – Transport Scotland Ferries Unit

Caithness Transport Forum

12 November 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.
- The contract runs from 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2026 with an option for further 2 years extension subject to satisfactory agreement between the Operator and Transport Scotland.
- The value of the contract, based on the full-life duration of eight-years is worth £349,645,798 exclusive VAT.
- Transport Scotland (TS) and Serco NorthLink Ferries (SNF) continue having regular progress review meetings on commitments.
- A non-commercially sensitive copy of the new contract will be published on TS website by end of 2020.
- The new contract allows Scottish Ministers to flex the terms of the contract and fares regime to reflect changing market conditions and the needs of the local communities and businesses who rely on the ferry services. Any changes must comply with the State Aid rules, be affordable and offer value for money to the taxpayer.

COVID-19 implications

- The new contract also allowed vital funding support and operational flexibility in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring the ferry services continue to meet the needs of islanders and businesses throughout these unprecedented times and into the future.
- TS officials maintain the regular dialogue that has been established with SNF in order to monitor the impact COVID-19 restrictions will have on the public contract for Northern Isles Ferry Services during 2020 and beyond.
- 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.

Managing demand

- To ensure sufficient capacity on the Northern Isles from 4 July Serco NorthLink are operating to their normal seasonal timetable and from 1 October 2020 their booking system is open to book for islanders and visitors for the year 2021.
- However to allow physical distancing on-board there are restrictions on the numbers that can sail and advanced booking are required on many routes to allow operator to maximise capacity.
- SNF continues to work closely with NHS Boards to ensure NHS patient transfer can be fast tracked and accommodated.
- 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

- During lockdown and the transition SNF freight connections were maintained and the volumes remain steady with only a slight drop off for comparative period in 2019.
- SNF continues to monitor the freight volumes, forecast demand and changing situation whilst engaging with key stakeholders and Transport Scotland on lockdown easing and options across their entire fleet.
- 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.
- Transport Scotland officials have been able to restart work to consider fares on ferry routes across the Pentland Firth. However, this work is at an early stage and is subject to the continued resource pressures and ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19.
- The UK Government announced on 9 September 2020 that, as things stand, the UK would follow World Trade Organisation (WTO) subsidy rules and other international commitments, replacing the EU state aid laws, from 1 January 2021.

- The current and continuing uncertainty around the EU Exit strategy including the potential for a 'no deal' scenario means that it is impossible to predict with absolute certainty what rules will apply from 2021 onwards.
- As things stand, we expect guidance on implementation and operation of the UK subsidy regime to be published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy prior to implementation and we will consider the impact of this on ferry services in detail. This will however take some time and we do not intend to make any immediate changes to ferries policy.
- 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.

END

November 2020

Appendix F – Highland Council Roads

From the Start of March through to the end of July our local roads squads were working with Skeleton staff due to some Shielding and others who volunteered to go and help out the waste service as they too had a lot of staff shielding and were struggling to have the manpower to keep up with the weekly bin collections.

The staff who remained with roads were undertaking safety defects (potholes) on the main roads and verge cutting for road user safety.

No surfacing or surface dressing was done this summer due to the lockdown. It is our intention to resurface 2 sections of road one near Lyth and the near Georgemas later this month.

We have recently taken delivery of a new hot box to make permanent hot tar patches easier to do over the cold winter months. Going forward it will be our intention to do more permanent hot tar patches and reduce the amount of temporary patches done with cold tar.

This summer/ autumn we have done some bridge works mainly involving parapet repairs and erosion to training walls, at Auchorn Dunbeath, Gills Bay, Lyth and Reay.

We are currently refurbishing a footbridge at West Gills Thurso,

Other current works are pothole filling and replenishing grit bins in towns and villages and grit piles out on steeper braes out in the countryside.

Local contractor GMR Henderson has now erected the vast majority of the new NC500 signs along the entire route with just a handful yet to do. All the ones in Caithness are now erected.

Appendix G – BEAR Scotland

NW Trunk Road Unit Caithness and Sutherland		BEAR Scotland Works Programme 2020/21 Roads 06 November 2020 update				
Route	Scheme Name	Work Description	Start	Finish	Status	Value £
A99	A99 South of Mid Clyth	Resurfacing	29/06/2020	02/07/2020	Completed	100,000
A99	A99 Wick	Footway Improvements	06/07/2020	18/12/2020	On Site	46,000
A9	A9 Thurso	Footway Improvements	13/07/2020	03/09/2020	Completed	50,000
A9	A9 Lothmore to Portgower	Drainage Improvements	13/07/2020	18/12/2020	On Site	40,000
A9	A9 Achrimsdale	Resurfacing	20/07/2020	30/07/2020	Completed	240,000
A9	A9 Loch Stemster	Resurfacing	24/08/2020	28/08/2020	Completed	175,000
A9	A9 North of Ousdale Machine Patching	Resurfacing	31/08/2020	01/09/2020	Completed	35,000
A9	A9 Scrabster	Resurfacing	02/09/2020	03/09/2020	Completed	50,000
A99	A99 South of Wick	Resurfacing	07/09/2020	09/09/2020	Completed	105,000
A9	A9 Evelix Garage	Resurfacing	10/09/2020	21/09/2020	Completed	250,000
A99	A99 North of Hempriggs	Resurfacing	10/09/2020	11/09/2020	Completed	90,000
A9	A9 1585 Dornoch	Bridge Parapet Repair	14/09/2020	15/09/2020	Completed	10,000
A9	A9 North of Tacher	Resurfacing	14/09/2020	16/09/2020	Completed	105,000
A9	A9 1900 C88 Lochend (Achavanich)	culvert scour repair	21/09/2020	25/09/2020	Completed	15,000
A9	A9 Golspie	Resurfacing	22/09/2020	27/09/2020	Completed	105,000
A9	A9 Thurso South	Resurfacing	11/10/2020	26/10/2020	Completed	240,000
A9	A9 Navidale Roundabout	Resurfacing	11/10/2020	14/10/2020	Completed	50,000
A9	A9 Doll South Machine Patching	Resurfacing	12/10/2020	13/10/2020	Completed	50,000
A9	A9 Helmsdale	Resurfacing	27/10/2020	02/11/2020	Completed	140,000
A99	A99 20 Reisgill (Lybster)	Bridge Parapet Replacement and Concrete	02/11/2020	29/01/2021	Not Started	100,000
A99	A99 Bruan	Resurfacing	04/11/2020	11/11/2020	Completed	160,000
A9	A9 Strathsteven	Resurfacing	16/11/2020	17/11/2020	Completed	60,000
A9	A9 Dunrobin Castle	Resurfacing	18/11/2020	25/11/2020	Completed	150,000
A9	A9 Berriedale to Latheron	Embankment Repairs	20/11/2020	14/12/2020	Completed	50,000
A9 / A99 / A835	North Coast 500 Signing	Erection of new signs and posts	30/11/2020	26/02/2021	Not Started	50,000
A9	A9 Brora	Footway Improvements	30/11/2020	27/11/2020	Not Started	50,000
A99	A99 Lybster Resurfacing	Resurfacing	21/02/2021	25/02/2021	Not Started	120,000
A99	A99 North of Thrumster	Resurfacing	28/02/2021	07/03/2021	Not Started	150,000
A9	A9 1587 Evelix Cuthill Links (Dornoch)	Bridge Parapet Replacement	01/03/2021	26/03/2021	Not Started	50,000
A99	A99 South of Borrowston	Resurfacing	08/03/2021	15/03/2021	Not Started	140,000
A99	A99 South of Ulbster	Resurfacing	16/03/2021	22/03/2021	Not Started	120,000

Appendix H – Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL



Caithness transport forum update November 2020.

Airlines

Wick JOG Airport currently has no scheduled operators following the removal of services to Aberdeen and Edinburgh earlier in the year.

There have been two stakeholder sessions held since the August update between HIAL and the Chamber of Commerce, Local councillors, NDA, FNA and other third parties with informative discussions held and some positive feedback on the proposed PSO routes.

COVID-19 Operations

HIAL has implemented restrictions on General Aviation travelling from a higher tiered area to a lower.

HIAL continues to have a large amount of staff working from home and has continues to take advantage of the furlough scheme. For those who cannot work from home social distancing in the workplace, PPE and enhanced cleaning regimes have been in place since the outbreak.

In addition to the Scottish Government guidance on area levels HIAL has introduced Airport COVID states as part of the contingency plans to maintain operations.

Wick JOG Airport is currently COVID State 0 – no staffing issues

Aircraft Movements

The aviation industry nationally and globally is in a perilous position and HIAL are in the fortunate position of having Transport Scotland as its main stakeholder.

Movements at HIA / Wick JOG

Total passenger movements in Wick now show a 74% reduction on year to date (Group average is 74%)

Aircraft movements are down by 30% which is the lowest drop of the HIAL group airports (Barra next lowest 41%)

Projects

As detailed in the last update HIA continues to carry out capital projects, to date Wick has completed;

- Upgraded the Emergency Water Supplies used by the Airport Fire Service
- Carried out concrete repairs to the main apron

- Refurbished the hangar access road

Projects due for completion this financial year;

- Refurbish the heating system for the Terminal and service buildings
- Replacement of

Staffing levels

Security is now up to full complement albeit still furloughed.

ATC staffing is now at 3, unfortunately our SATCO has not regained his medical certificate due mainly to COVID restrictions.

Our trainee ATCO was furloughed at the start of lockdown in line with company guidance and in consultation with the CAA, this combined with a lack of guaranteed traffic has meant his validation has been moved to February 2021 but this date is tentative.

Opening hours

The airfield has expanded its operating hours from the lockdown operating times and has engaged with the Oil and Gas sector for refuels and training, Wiking helicopters tasking out to the Beatrice windfarm and Emergency flights.

Brexit

There is still uncertainty around the operation of ferry flights post Brexit as it is essentially a transfer of goods from one country to another, Far North Aviation is seeking guidance.

HIAL is currently assessing the impact of Brexit on our supply chain.