



STRONGER
TOGETHER

Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 20/09/2021

Time: 10:00

Location: Virtual Meeting – held over Microsoft Teams

Present

David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (chair)
Fiona Levack	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (minutes)
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Jonathan Gunn	Highland Council
Maree Todd	MSP
David Cameron	Pentland Ferries
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
William Mainus	Stagecoach in the Highlands
Davie Alexander	Thurso & Wick Trades Union Council
Alan McCabe	Transport Scotland Ferries
Fiona Lucas	Transport Scotland Ferries
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland Roads

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:

Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Dougie Cook	Wick John O'Groats Airport/HIAL
Ian Cormack	Wick Harbour

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 07.06.2021

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

3. Review of actions from last meeting

CTF(2021)M002/A001 - *Forum to write to UK Government to seek clarity on legal position with regards to subsidies* **ONGOING**

David Swanson noted that the Forum had contacted BEIS and subsequently made introductions between relevant parties in BEIS and Scottish Government. He asked if Transport Scotland were able to provide an update on this matter.

Alan McCabe noted that there was no further update at this time.

David noted that he felt this was unacceptable given the work the Forum had done to progress this matter and how long the issue of Road Equivalent Tariff had been going on for. He asked Maree Todd MSP if she could progress this matter with the Minister.

Ms Todd noted that she was already working on this issue on behalf of a constituent and that she would take this up on the Forum's behalf also.

CTF(2021)M003/A001 – *Maree Todd MSP to take up issues with Road Equivalent Tariff / subsidies with Graeme Dey MSP*

David Cameron noted that he had spoken with Kathryn Scollie prior to the meeting and that Pentland Ferries had arranged several meetings with Transport Scotland to discuss RET but that each meeting had subsequently been cancelled.

CTF(2021)M002/A002 - *Cllr Raymond Bremner to provide update on Highland Council roads to the Forum* **COMPLETE**

Cllr Bremner gave a comprehensive update to the meeting which was noted under the Highland Council Roads agenda item.

CTF(2021)M002/A003 - *David Swanson to attend Highland Council roads meeting and feedback* **COMPLETE**

David Swanson noted that he had been invited to attend a meeting between the Highland Council Roads team and the Association of Caithness Community Councils on this matter and that this had provided a comprehensive update on the roads budgets.

He noted that Cllr Bremner would be updating more fully on the matter under the relevant agenda item, but that his understanding is that a funding package is in place for this year which is sufficient to cover all capital works on the roads within Caithness and that work is well underway on this.

CTF(2021)M002/A004 - *Cllr Raymond Bremner to invite Graeme Dey to attend a meeting of the Forum* **COMPLETE**

David Swanson noted that a formal invite was sent on behalf of the Caithness Transport Forum and was rebuffed. He noted that he was not happy with the response that had been received from the Minister and that none of the issues raised had been addressed.

Cllr Bremner noted that he had also written to Graeme Dey and had an acknowledgement of the request, but no confirmation yet of his ability to attend

Maree Todd MSP noted that she had written to Graeme Dey with regards to the airport and had received a response. She noted that she has met with Mr Dey regarding a range of transport issues and noted that it was unlikely the Minister would attend a meeting of the Forum unless there were national issues being raised.

David noted that it would have been polite to have received a full response to the issues raised in the letter. Davie Alexander suggested that the Forum write again to the Minister to express their disappointment. Ms Todd noted that she would also write to the Minister to raise issues on the Forum's behalf.

CTF(2021)M003/A002 – *Forum and Maree Todd MSP to write to Graeme Dey MSP to express disappointment at response received to previous correspondence and raise issues again*

CTF(2021)M002/A005 - *David Swanson to liaise with HITRANS on PR around Whitechapel Rd works* **COMPLETE**

David Swanson noted that he had lost sight of this issue and that the time for this specific action was past. He suggested that the Forum issue some positive PR instead on the more generally positive news regarding the Highland Council's work on roads and the Spaces for People project.

CTF(2021)M003/A003 – *Forum to issue positive PR on roads and Spaces for People project*

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 A**). 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 is now well into this financial year. Overall activity is better in port this year than last which reflects the relaxation of COVID restrictions.
- 5.1.3 Vessel arrivals are largely similar to last year, tonnage is well up and reflects the full summer ferry schedule but still lags the pre-COVID position. Passenger numbers are up but not up to 2019 levels yet. Cargo and fish box landings are both down but both are beginning to recover. Energy-related tonnage is down on last year due to limited oil and gas activity but this has been partially offset by marine renewable activity.
- 5.1.4 The Ola Pier project continues to progress well in terms of quality, time and cost and remains on track for projected completion 8 October. Several potential problems relating to materials supply have been overcome and the opening of the pier is provisionally set for early November 2021.
- 5.1.5 The domestic cruise season is now complete with 8 calls to the Harbour since July - 4 in the bay and 4 alongside. Next year the 4 in the bay will be able to use the Ola Pier. Calls from larger lines have been very regulated with regards to COVID and only organized tours permitted to ensure bubbles are preserved. Smaller lines are more flexible in allowing independent tours and exploration of the locality.
- 5.1.6 The Trust continues to progress its application to become a Border Control Post and are through the first hurdle and have been approved in principle subject to a range of agencies inspecting the premises. Goal posts have changed slightly with regards to SPS checks which will now be introduced from 1st July 2022. The Trust is continuing to try and gain full approval at the earliest opportunity.

5.1.7 Scrabster Harbour Trust AGM is to be held on 24th September, in a face-to-face event in the Ferry Inn.

5.1.8 With regards to Border Control Posts and associated issues, David Swanson noted that the Chamber had written to Ivan McKee MSP on this matter and were awaiting a response.

5.2 Wick Harbour

5.2.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix B**).

David Swanson noted Malcolm Bremner the current Harbourmaster is retiring on 31st October. He noted the thanks of the Forum to Malcolm for all his hard work over the years and best wishes to Ian Cormack the new Harbourmaster.

5.3 Gills Harbour

5.3.1 No written update was provided and no representative was present at the meeting.

5.3.2 David Swanson noted that he would make contact and ask for a written update to be provided for circulation along with the minutes.

5.4 Pentland Ferries

5.4.1 David Cameron gave an update on behalf of Pentland Ferries. Of note:

- Bookings continue to be very good until the end of October.
- Excellent coach bookings have been made up until the end of December. One company has booked for 800 passengers. 2022 numbers look very positive for coach bookings
- Freight volumes continue to grow.

5.4.2 David Cameron noted that one of the biggest problems facing Pentland Ferries at present is staffing. David Swanson noted that he would pick this up separately with David Cameron and could also speak with colleagues in the Chamber's Developing the Young Workforce team.

CTF(2021)M003/A004 – *David Swanson to pick up with David Cameron with regards to staffing issues*

Matthew Reiss mentioned that Thurso High School are always interested in any job opportunities and to speak with Craig Omand.

5.4.3 Pentland Ferries were congratulated on winning a prestigious Good Practice Award at the Scottish Environment Business Awards, making them the first ferry company in the UK to win

this type of award. This award looked at a wide range of items and activities including fuel usage, use of disposable cups, food waste and energy.

5.5 Serco NorthLink Ferries

5.5.1 Kris Bevan provided an updated to the Forum on behalf of Serco Northlink Ferries. Of note:

- Year to date there have been 1126 sailings scheduled of which 1110 completed – 16 cancelled due to weather & 24 delays.
 - Reliability is 98.6% before relief, 100% after relief (for events outwith the operator’s control)
 - Punctuality is 97.8% before relief, 100% after relief.
- Peak trip timetable (3 trips per day) finished on 31st August, 3 sailings on a Saturday continues until 23rd October.
- The lifting of Covid restriction on 9th August increased capacity up to 600 passengers.
- Group tours/bookings are operating again for companies that can provide relevant risk assessments which are reviewed by the Marine and Operational team to their satisfaction
- Face covering continues on board with 95% uptake and a zero-tolerance approach in place.
- Volumes through Scrabster compared to 2019 figures:
 - Passengers down 42%
 - Cars / non-commercial vehicles down 27%
 - Freight up slightly 3%
- COVID restrictions were in place for the first part of 2021 and this continues to have an impact, although numbers are coming back over the summer.

5.6 ScotRail Alliance

5.6.1 A route performance profile was provided (**Appendix C**). Derek Glasgow also provided an update to the Forum on behalf of the ScotRail Alliance. Of note:

- With regards to the overall business response to COVID, a consultation for a new timetable (May 22) is taking place. This does not directly affect the Far North Line or Aberdeen-Inverness – the only real effect is travel Inverness-Edinburgh is now via Stirling.
- Locally there has been an earth slip, a tree on the line and a couple of problems with the radio system within the last six weeks. This has affected performance, as have a couple of train-related issues. Performance remains around 80-90%
- Passenger volumes are coming back but not as quickly as expected.
- Works on the Far North Line – a planning application is in place for a new antenna at Wick station, request to stop kiosks are starting to get rolled out and planning permission is in for Dunrobin for this. Other work includes a workload assessment on signalling due to increased freight paths.

- 5.6.2 Cllr Matthew Reiss asked Derek Glasgow about limited parking at Thurso Railway station and whether there were any plans in place to extend the car parking. Derek noted that there was a review taking place of parking across ScotRail stations and that the person overseeing this strategy is aware of the situation at Thurso. He agreed to provide contact information to Cllr Reiss for the person within ScotRail carrying out this work.

CTF(2021)M003/A005 – *Derek Glasgow to provide relevant contact information to Cllr Reiss regarding station parking review*

David Swanson asked whether Derek could give an update on Scottish Government's plans for decarbonization of rail and removal of diesel trains from the network. He noted that the Forum was interested to understand plans for replacement rolling stock on the Far North Line. Derek mentioned that he thought this would likely be a combination of hydrogen and electric but that had yet to be decided by Government over the next 3 to 4 years as it takes 7-8 years to make a decision on rolling stock.

Derek felt that he was not in a position to give further information at this stage.

David noted that he appreciated that but that the Forum was very interested in this matter and keen to be kept updated as plans progress.

5.7 Direct Rail Services

- 5.7.1 A brief written update was received from Direct Rail Services

- DRS continue to seek a commercial partner for freight flows in the area
- Dounreay work continues and will do for the foreseeable future
- Currently in the process of arranging a meeting with Chris Connelly, Rail Director, this is due to take place on 12th October. An invite will be sent to Forum members who are interested in what the future of Georgemas looks like.

5.8 Highland Council Roads

- 5.8.1 Cllr Raymond Bremner shared a table of capital works with the Forum and spoke to this. Of note:

- Virtually the whole program is complete, this is the first time this has been achieved in many years.
- Two projects marked as not completed – one at Oldhall is subject to booking of the planer, but due to start 27th September, Ormlie Road works are due to start week commencing 20th September
- Some overspends shown are due to bigger areas being resurfaced than previously planned.

- Areas in white are not budgeted for, they may be completed at the end subject to what monies may be available.
- The estimated total spend is £1.15m, more than 5 or 6 times what has been spent on roads in previous years.

5.8.2 Cllr Bremner stated that the Road Infrastructure programme for 2021/22 has made excellent progress and the budget is nearly spent. Over and above committed spend by Highland Council, a further funding commitment of £20m has been given for roads in the Highland, and further boosted by another £10m split between capital works and capital machinery. Five new JCB pothole machines have been ordered including one for Caithness.

5.8.3 Cllr Bremner further noted that during the remaining period between now and March he felt there was a need to see if there are ways to lobby or otherwise influence council to find other spending mechanisms that we can engage in to realise capital funding that can go towards improvements in road structure. He noted that the whole roads infrastructure programme has been referred to the Council's Redesign Board to come up with a strategy to look at the road structure over the Highlands.

5.8.4 Sandy Mackie noted that this was welcome news and that improvements were much needed. He noted that the situation with roads had been widely discussed in the media and various figures mentioned and asked what the total investment required is to bring the network up to standard. He noted his feeling that what is needed to be proactive rather than reactive.

5.8.5 Jonathan Gunn noted that it was identified in April that around £3.5m work needed to be done and that over the summer a further £1.5m was found to be added to the list. At a minimum £5m worth of works would be needed just in Caithness to get the network back to the status quo without wear and tear on top of it, and realistically around £7m to get back to a fairly good standard of roads.

5.8.6 David Swanson noted the very positive update and work done by Jonathan and the rest of the Roads team to date. He felt it would be worth the Forum writing to the Highland Council with regards to the investment that is still required, noting that the Forum would be interested in being part of any future strategies or discussions on spending mechanisms. It was agreed that this should be done and that the letter should also recognise the achievement to date on the roads network.

CTF(2021)M003/A006 – *Forum to write to Highland Council regarding future investment in roads network and recognising achievement of Roads team to date*

5.8.7 Cllr Bremner noted that that the Forum should be kept informed regularly of decision/discussions on the moving picture and the outcomes of this strategy.

5.8.8 Cllr Willie Mackay stated that the Forum should acknowledge the time Raymond Bremner has spent on this over the summer and also acknowledge the work of the Roads Team, who have

had no extra resources to fulfil this programme of work.

5.8.5 Cllr Matthew Reiss noted that he is the Vice Chair of Corporate Resources and that with regards to Sandy's question, very roughly the thinking is that a figure of around £200m is required across Highland. Cllr Reiss noted that the budget released for roads this year has been achieved through prudent saving elsewhere over the last few years and there is no guarantee Highland Council can maintain this figure going forward.

5.8.6 Jonathan Gunn provided the following update:

- The majority of remaining capital works will be completed by September/October
- Revenue patching works will then take place in Thurso/Wick over the winter.
- The Council has purchased 5 JCB Pothole Masters including one for Caithness & Sutherland which should help with fixing potholes across the towns
- The reason no surfacing has been done in Wick this year is due to ongoing Scottish Water works. These will be undertaken once Scottish Water have finished their work to upgrade the mains water network in the town
- Some outstanding drainage works remain to be done as well as coastal erosion at Johns O'Groats.
- On Spaces for People, all 7 pedestrian crossings have been complete as well as new speed restrictions and the new footpath to Milton is now completed
- Highland Council is looking to make some temporary Traffic Orders with regards to 20mph speed restrictions in Thurso permanent.

5.8.7 Cllr Bremner noted that he believed Scottish Water provided monies to the Council in other areas where road works had been undertaken, and that he wanted to ensure that money for works in Caithness was ringfenced for the area rather than sent to central coffers

5.8.8 Cllr Bremner also noted that the £20m extra this year and next will be supplemented by an extra £10m and that at the end of next year this money will no longer be available. He noted that there is planning to do to ensure that the resource is there to continue capital spend.

5.8.8 Sandy Mackie asked whether there would be warnings and new signage put up regarding the new pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Castlegreen Road that then joins the trunk road. Jonathan said that this design was reviewed by Road Safety Audit and no issues were highlighted. He felt once the lights are on the crossing would be more visible, but he would keep an eye on the situation.

5.9 BEAR Scotland / Transport Scotland

5.9.1 An update on BEAR's program of works was provided (**Appendix D**). Marco Bardelli also delivered a brief update to the Forum. Of note:

- This program underwent a significant review across the North West and therefore some projects in Caithness & Sutherland have moved to period Sept/Oct.

- Work has been completed at the Latheron Junction and a 40 mph speed limit is now in place.
- Marco attended a meeting with the Councillors regarding Latheronwheel and agreement has been given from Police Scotland for a 50 mph speed limit.
- Further pedestrian and Equalities Act access improvements are to be looked at in Thurso & Wick.
- Tidying up of speed limits are to take place in Thurso and various speed-related Traffic Orders are going to be put in place in the Thurso area.

5.9.2 Sandy Mackie raised the issue of the need for speed calming in the Scrabster area, which is in an unusual position given that the A9 passes through the port. He noted that the Trust had input to various discussions on 20mph limits. He cited the heavy pedestrian presence due to the ferry terminal and the challenges posed with regards to commercial traffic through the port. Marco noted that the use of 20mph limits was more on the agenda and that in the appropriate situation these could be looked at. Marco noted that there were various inputs into speed reduction initiatives but that he would support looking at that location. It was agreed that Marco would consult with Sandy on this and take forward within Transport Scotland.

CTF(2021)M003/A007 – *Marco Bardelli to consult with Sandy Mackie on 20mph speed limits at Scrabster and take forward with Transport Scotland*

5.9.3 Cllr Reiss noted his support for the 20mph restrictions in Thurso and that the Councillors were hopeful for more 20mph markings on the road to make these limits clearer to road users. With regards to Scrabster he noted his support for a 20mph restriction, noting the presence of licensed premises. He asked Marco whether Transport Scotland are putting more cats eyes on the A9 and urged Transport Scotland to get the crossing at Castlegreen Road working as soon as possible. He also noted the lifeline nature of the road and his concerns that there seem to be no plans for serious capital investment over the next 20 years.

5.9.4 Marco noted that he would take on board the points made by Matthew. Regarding the future capital programme, there is a review going on and investment in the road in future could not be ruled out. David Swanson noted that from the Forum's perspective, if there is a need for future capital investment it would be helpful to have a specific list of asks that the Forum can take to relevant Ministers and Scottish Government.

CTF(2021)M003/A008 – *Forum attendees to provide ideas for future investment on the A9 north of Inverness to David Swanson*

5.9.4 Cllr Willie Mackay welcomed the improvements at Latheron including two new bus shelters. He noted that Caithness is unusual in having two places where trunk road traffic has to give way. Marco acknowledged this and noted that the road safety team continually reviews the road junctions for any safety concerns and ensures they are signed and marked appropriately.

5.9.5 Maree Todd MSP acknowledged the work carried out with the speed limit at Latheronwheel and mentioned that the community was still keen for this to be dropped to a 40mph speed limit.

5.9.6 David noted previous discussions regarding drainage and geotechnical works at Scrabster and asked Marco whether there had been any progress on this. Marco agreed to follow this up with colleagues and report back.

CTF(2021)M003/A009 – *Marco Bardelli to follow up A9 Scrabster geotechnical works with colleagues in Transport Scotland*

5.9.7 Cllr Bremner asked by what measure Transport Scotland look at the requirements for reduction of speed limits, noting that a 50mph reduction is already in place in Thrumster. Marco noted that Police Scotland are very keen that speed limits are appropriate for the type and location of the road. He noted that factors include number of premises of any type fronting on to the road, number of accesses, turning movements, number of pedestrians, footways, lighting etc. Marco noted that a speed limit review was done of the trunk road network around 2011 and he believed there was a move in the coming year to start reviewing speed limits again, in line with Scottish Government priorities around areas like active travel.

5.9.8 Cllr Reiss asked if he could get details of the cat's eye and speed limit policies. Marco noted that with regards to previous discussions that Transport Scotland are actively working on cat's eyes and that this was included in the shared programme of works.

5.10 Stagecoach

5.10.1 William Mainus gave an update of behalf of Stagecoach. Of note:

- Passenger numbers are still showing signs of increase and are now at around 56% of 2019 levels
- Mileage across the Caithness network is at 86% of 2019 levels
- There are no plans for any service changes at present
- A trial is taking place in Caithness over the next 2-4 weeks, to assess a new 15m vehicle, with low floor for over half the length of the vehicle. This provides around 16-20 seats in a low-floor section of the bus with the rest more like standard coach seating. This vehicle will be used around Caithness but will not be used on the X99 service as there is no toilet.

5.10.2 Cllr Bremner queried the intentions of Stagecoach with regards to the style of coach being used on the X99 route. With regards to redesign works at Whitechapel Rd and the Riverside Car Park, Cllr Bremner noted this remains a focus and asked when coaches will return to using the area. He also noted that the Highland Council would be investing a fair amount in bus shelters and with regards to changing timetables, whether William had an update on replacement of timetables within the shelters and the cleanliness of shelters.

- 5.10.3 William said the vehicles on the X99 route were settling in very well and they would keep running these for the next few years as they are in excellent condition and seem to be reliable. With regards to the redesign in Wick, once all the roadworks are done and the junction complete Stagecoach will be happy to return to using the area.
- 5.10.4 With regards to bus shelters and timetables, Stagecoach will start printing timetables again within the next few months and that HITRANS are in the process of preparing for these to go into bus shelters. Jonathan noted that Highland Council should have a new framework contractor in place to deal with cleaning of the bus shelters and that improvement should be seen soon.
- 5.10.5 Cllr Donnie Mackay noted his concern with the age of the bus fleet in Caithness and his feeling that the area needs to see investment in new buses. He cited Orkney as an example of where investment in the fleet had been seen. William noted that Stagecoach had been bringing newer vehicles in for the coach fleet. He noted that Highland Council would be retendering in the next 12 months for bus contracts and that if the contract length is sufficient then that gives more confidence to be able to invest in the fleet in the area.
- 5.10.6 David Swanson noted that it would be good to understand Highland Council's thinking with regards to the tender process and to ensure that the Forum has an input into this.

5.11 Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.11.1 A written update was provided on behalf of HIAL (**Appendix E**).
- 5.11.2 David Swanson noted stated that PSO discussions have been progressing extremely positively at the local sub-committee and that the Highland Council team is hoping to go out to tender in the very near future. There is general agreement from the sub-committee that the details of this look right and there is hope that successful bids will be received.
- 5.11.3 Cllr Bremner noted that he was speaking as the Chair of the Wick John O'Groats Airport Consultative Committee. He thanked Maree Todd MSP for providing a response from Graeme Dey's office. He endorsed what David had to say with regards to the PSO and that efforts were continuing to secure additional funding for the PSO. He noted that there needs to be a positive message out there to ensure that footfall is secured once the PSO gets going and that it should be acknowledged that Scottish Government has given £4m towards the service.
- 5.11.4 Davie Alexander noted that he had written to Maree Todd MSP on behalf of the Dounreay Stakeholder Group and thanked her for her prompt response. He noted that once her response has been considered at the DSG Business Meeting they may have to respond to this and have further dialogue. He noted that it is heartening to see progress and that it is good to see some forward movement.

6. Press Communications

- 6.1 David Swanson agreed to draft some communication around roads, Scrabster Harbour Trust and other relevant good new stories and send to Forum members for approval before issuing to press.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Marco noted that Transport Scotland had put up signage for Gills Bay and asked if Highland Council could ensure continuity of signage. He also noted that Transport Scotland are putting forward an amendment to national regulations on signage and one is a sign to indicate campervan servicing locations.
- 7.2 Maree Todd thanked the Forum for her invitation and asked whether she could have permission for someone from her office to attend to keep the Forum updated.

8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 David Swanson noted that this would take place in early 2022.

9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

No ongoing actions

10. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2021)M003/A001 – Maree Todd MSP to take up issues with Road Equivalent Tariff / subsidies with Graeme Dey MSP

CTF(2021)M003/A002 – Forum and Maree Todd MSP to write to Graeme Dey MSP to express disappointment at response received to previous correspondence and raise issues again

CTF(2021)M003/A003 – Forum to issue positive PR on roads and Spaces for People project

CTF(2021)M003/A004 – David Swanson to pick up with David Cameron with regards to staffing issues

CTF(2021)M003/A005 – Derek Glasgow to provide relevant contact information to Cllr Reiss regarding station parking review

CTF(2021)M003/A006 – *Forum to write to Highland Council regarding future investment in roads network and recognising achievement of Roads team to date*

CTF(2021)M003/A007 – *Marco Bardelli to consult with Sandy Mackie on 20mph speed limits at Scrabster and take forward with Transport Scotland*

CTF(2021)M003/A008 – *Forum attendees to provide ideas for future investment on the A9 north of Inverness to David Swanson*

CTF(2021)M003/A009 – *Marco Bardelli to follow up A9 Scrabster geotechnical works with colleagues in Transport Scotland*

Appendix A – Scrabster Harbour



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 20th September 2021

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

The Trust has made a satisfactory start to financial year 2021-22 with overall revenues currently in line with budget projections.

The headlines regarding port activity for the four-month period to 31st July 2021 are as follows.

- Total Vessel arrivals 697 compared with 692 in the same period last year.
- Total vessel tonnage amounted to 3.066 million tonnes. This is an increase of 10% on last year. The increase reflects a full ferry summer sailing schedule in 2021. However overall tonnage still lags the position in pre-covid years.
- Ferry Passenger numbers totalled 46,852, a sixfold increase on last year but below pre-covid levels.

- Fish box landings amounted to 85,272, 7% down on last year. There has been strong landing activity since early August.
- Energy related vessel tonnage is 22% down on last year. Oil and gas activity has been limited but partly offset by marine renewable activity, particularly survey work.
- General cargo activity, although down on last year, is beginning to increase primarily due to the shipment of timber from the Limekiln windfarm site.
- Fish cargo volumes are 2% up on last year.
- Fuel delivery by tanker is 12% down on last year's volumes.

2. OLA PIER DEVELOPMENT

By the end of August, the contractor had been on site for 450 days. The project continues to progress well in terms of cost, time, and quality. A number of potential issues including availability of cement, the logistics of shipping the fenders and bollards from China and difficulties with the delivery of certain domestic materials have been overcome.



The current forecast completion date remains 8th October 2021. The final concrete pours and dredge surveys are scheduled for this week. The final construction activities include installation of cathodic protection, fenders, lighting masts, security fencing and toe rails.

The official opening of the pier is provisionally set for early November 2021.

3. OTHER MATTERS

- Domestic cruise activity received the green light to resume in Scotland in July. To date Scrabster has received seven calls, of which four were anchorage calls in the bay. Our season will complete on 19th September when Noble Caledonia's Island Sky calls.

The calls from the larger lines as expected have been very regulated. The lines have wished to preserve their cruise bubbles with only organised tours permitted. The smaller lines are more flexible in allowing independent tours and exploration of the locality.



- The Trust has obtained preliminary agreement that its facilities meet the standards required for a Border Control Post (BCP). Full approval is contingent on a satisfactory inspection visit.

On 14th September 2021 the UK Government announced that the check on SPS goods at Border Control Posts, due to be introduced on 1st January 2022, will now be introduced from 1st July 2022. However, the Trust will continue to try and obtain full approval at the earliest opportunity.

The Trust continues in dialogue regarding the updating of its customs approval. The timetable for the removal of current easements in relation to full customs controls and the introduction of customs checks remains unchanged from the planned date of 1st January 2022.

- The Trust will be holding its Annual General Meeting on Friday 24th September 2021.

15th September 2021

Appendix B – Wick Harbour



Wick Harbour

Business update - Caithness Transport Forum - September 21

Offshore wind

- Covid is still affecting the renewables industry and causing some issues with technician travel to and from the site, due to Covid restrictions limiting the number of passengers allowed to be taken aboard at one time. Beatrice windfarm have been operating up to 5 CTV's from Wick for the past few months, and the continuing good weather conditions has meant there have been very few days lost to weather.
- We look forward to the outcome of the recent Scotwind leasing applications for the next round of offshore wind installations. Discussions have taken place with several potential developers, with more to be held in the coming weeks. At the moment, all are keeping things fairly close to themselves but hopefully Caithness as a whole will benefit from any business which may be forthcoming when it is found out who the successful applications are when announced.

Survey ops

- Several vessels have been operating from Wick over the summer months engaged in various surveys. These included an Over-trawl Survey and ROV Ops of the Beatrice Windfarm, A vessel on charter to the MCA carrying out a large-scale Hydrographic survey, Also survey and construction work on the Shetland cable link coming ashore at Noss Head.

Cargoes

- Cargo's, as previously forecast, have been much reduced this year due to the temporary closure of the Subsea7 off-shore pipe construction yard and no on-shore windmill shipments being scheduled for this year. We have however been pricing for pipe cargoes for work being tendered by Subsea7 and hopefully this will come to fruition in the future, although this could be in to 2023. Windmill cargoes are due in 2022. Apart from that we have had our usual shipments of Fuel, lime, etc. There is a possibility of log shipments in the near future, but this is to be confirmed.

Fishing

- Fish & shellfish landings have improved the past few months. Shellfish, although still far from normal expected levels has slowly picked up recently and a small contingent of the Moray Firth fishing fleet, along with a few local trawlers have been targeting squid along the East Caithness Coast and making regular landings in to Wick.

Leisure

The marina has been open for much of the summer and has been reasonably busy, with a peak in late July and into August. Due to the pandemic, foreign visitors have been few and far between, but good numbers of UK yachts have been venturing North and up to Orkney & Shetland. It has been noted that many of the vessels were staying for quite a few days, taking the chance to explore the county and attractions which were open to visitors.

High Water Protection Gate

No further info at this time. Still with the various agencies concerned.

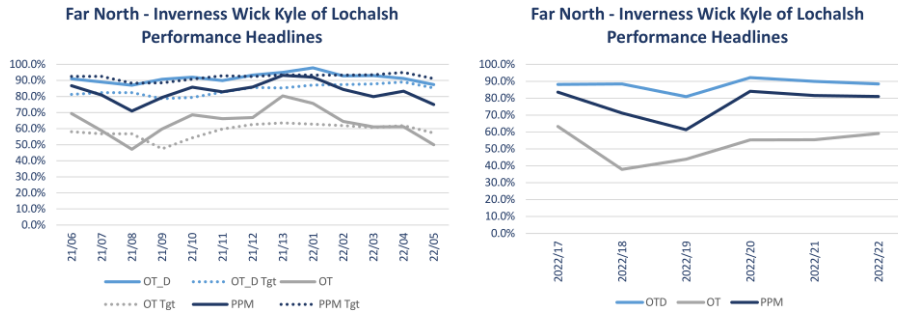
Retiral

We would like the Forum to be aware that our long serving Harbour Master, Malcom Bremner, has decided to retire as from 31st October. Malcolm has been Harbour Master for the last 29 years, in which time there have been many changes to the Harbour. I am sure that along with Wick Harbour Authority, the Forum will join us in wishing Malcolm and his Wife Angela all the best for the future and that he enjoys a long and happy retirement.

Ian Cormack, our current Deputy Harbour Master is to take over Malcolm's position and we are currently advertising for a Deputy to join the team.

Appendix C – ScotRail Alliance

Far North - Inverness Wick Kyle of Lochalsh Line of Route Performance Profile



Far North - Inverness Wick Kyle of Lochalsh

Top10 Incidents - Previous 6 Weeks

Inc Dt	Inc Loc	Memo	Inc Cse	Dsc	Bus Cd Nm	Ppm	Fail	Canc
30/07/21	STF KYL	STF KYL LANDSLIP	EARTHSLIP		NETWORK RAIL	10	0	
10/08/21	ROG	ROG TREE ON LINE	EXT OBJECT		NETWORK RAIL	7	0	
16/08/21	INVERNESS	INV RETB PANEL FLR	PNL/TDM/FL		NETWORK RAIL	6	2	
13/08/21	STC ACN	2H82 LOSS OF POWER STC ACN	BELOW SBAR		TOC ON SELF	5	0	
08/08/21	DKD PIT	DKD PIT 20MPH ESR S/L	TRACK FLT		NETWORK RAIL	5	0	
06/08/21	INV LAI	SH58 LOST INV LAI	NOCAUSE ID		NETWORK RAIL	5	0	
06/08/21	DKD BLA	DKD BLA 40/20MPH ESR	SEV FLOOD		NETWORK RAIL	4	0	
03/09/21	DIN INV	CHAPELTON LC FLR DIN INV	LEVEL KING		NETWORK RAIL	4	0	
27/07/21	INV DIN	BLANKET 40/20 ESR INV DIN	KRS/BLKT		NETWORK RAIL	4	0	
24/08/21	N/A	2H65 SET DEFECT TAI LRG	BELOW SBAR		TOC ON SELF	4	4	

Classified as INTERNAL

Far North - Inverness Wick Kyle of Lochalsh Line of Route Performance Profile

Top 10 Causes over the past 6 Weeks

	Inc	PPMf	Canc
NOCAUSE ID	54	40	0
BELOW SBAR	8	20	6
DRIVER	21	15	3
EARTHSLIP	15	10	0
TRACK FLT	5	8	0
EXT OBJECT	2	8	0
CAB SAFETY	4	7	1
KRS/BLKT	7	7	0
PHONE/SPT	4	6	0
SEV FLOOD	3	5	0

Key Location Headline Stats

Location	OT_D	OT	PPM
BEAULY	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
SCTSCALDR	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
CLUNES	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
FODDERTY	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
MUIROFORD	0.0%	5.6%	5.6%
ROGART	27.3%	4.6%	40.9%
FORSINARD	18.2%	43.0%	66.3%
GARVE	47.6%	57.1%	86.9%
ARDGAY	57.5%	31.1%	73.6%
WICK	99.3%	43.0%	61.3%
KYLEOFLOC	98.6%	42.7%	87.4%
THURSO	57.8%	57.1%	77.0%
HELMSDALE	27.0%	36.8%	66.4%
BRORA	29.6%	28.3%	62.5%
GEORGMASJ	55.0%	57.8%	73.3%
LAIRG	28.1%	33.0%	66.7%
ACHNASHEN	49.3%	62.1%	93.0%
STRCARRON	57.8%	68.1%	95.8%
INVERNESS	83.2%	63.1%	79.4%
TAIN	27.7%	39.1%	75.5%
FEARN	26.7%	35.9%	73.3%
INVERGRDN	32.2%	42.4%	75.0%
DINGWALL	50.3%	58.0%	82.2%

Classified as INTERNAL

Appendix D – BEAR Scotland

NW Trunk Road Unit Caithness and Sutherland		BEAR Scotland Works Programme 2021/22 (Sep21 update)				
Route	Scheme Name	Work Description	Start	Finish	Status	Value £
A9	A9 Brora	Footway Improvements	14/12/2020	04/06/2021	Completed	50,000
A9	A9 Cambusavie Drainage	Drainage Improvements	07/06/2021	24/06/2021	Completed	12,000
A9	A9 North Route Priority Roadmarking and Studding	Roadmarking and Studding	20/09/2021	01/10/2021	Not Started	256,000
A9	A9 South of Drummuie	Structural Resurfacing	27/09/2021	13/10/2021	Not Started	200,000
A9	A9 Thurso Bridgend Drainage	Drainage Improvements	27/09/2021	08/10/2021	Not Started	15,000
A9	A9 Latheron - Thurso Signing Improvements	Signing	27/09/2021	08/10/2021	Not Started	30,000
A9	A9 Dornoch to Latheron Sign Replacement	Signing	04/10/2021	01/11/2021	Not Started	30,000
A99	A99 Lybster Kiosk Footway	Footway Improvements	11/10/2021	22/10/2021	Not Started	30,000
A9	A9 Culmaily	Structural Resurfacing	14/10/2021	22/10/2021	Not Started	200,000
A9	A9 Golspie South	Structural Resurfacing	18/10/2021	22/10/2021	Not Started	100,000
A9	A9 South of Berriedale Snow Gate	Patching	01/11/2021	02/11/2021	Not Started	50,000
A99	A99 Lybster Resurfacing	Structural Resurfacing	03/11/2021	10/11/2021	Not Started	160,000
A9	A9 North of Ramsdraigs	Structural Resurfacing	11/11/2021	17/11/2021	Not Started	100,000
A9	A9 Spittal Windfarm	Structural Resurfacing	18/11/2021	29/11/2021	Not Started	200,000
A99	A99 Whiterow to Wick - Filter Drains	Drainage Improvements	29/11/2021	27/12/2021	Not Started	50,000
A9	A9 South of Latheronwheel	Structural Resurfacing	30/11/2021	02/12/2021	Not Started	60,000
A9	A9 Dunrobin Retaining Wall	Repairs to Retaining Wall	17/01/2022	07/02/2022	Not Started	10,000
A9	A9 Inver	Structural Resurfacing	23/02/2022	01/03/2022	Not Started	100,000
A9	A9 North of Caithness Boundary	Resurfacing	02/03/2022	08/03/2022	Not Started	100,000
A9	A9 Ousdale Farm	Patching	09/03/2022	09/03/2022	Not Started	50,000
A9	A9 South of Dunbeath Resurfacing	Structural Resurfacing	10/03/2022	18/03/2022	Not Started	100,000
A9	A9 South of Brora	Patching	21/03/2022	22/03/2022	Not Started	50,000
Delayed until next financial year						
A99	A99 Route Priority Signing Improvements	Signing	01/04/2022			20,000
A9	A9 Knockinnon	Resurfacing	01/04/2022			
A9	A9 Helmsdale North	Resurfacing	01/04/2022			100,000

Appendix E – HIAL



Caithness transport forum update September 2021.

PSO

HIAL forms part of the PSO subcommittee and continues to engage with the stakeholders and partners. The Highland Council has formed a procurement team who anticipate to be able to go out to tender in the very near future.

COVID-19 Operations

HIAL continues to follow Scottish Government guidance, all of our airports have carried out risk assessments with regarding relaxation of social distancing measures.

HIAL continues to have some staff working from home, and will continue to utilise 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.

HIAL has purchased an Electrostatic 'fogging machine' which further enhances the cleaning regime.

In addition to the Scottish Government guidance on area levels HIAL continues to publish 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

Since the last forum the aviation industry has continued to see a gradual increase in passenger numbers and aircraft movements.

HIAL Group stats below:

Passengers

There were 63,704 (164.6%) additional passengers this July due to there being less Covid 19 pandemic restrictions in place compared to the previous July.

However there were 70,888 (40.9%) fewer passengers compared to July 2019.

Aircraft Movements

For the month of July there were 3,455 (53.2%) additional movements than the previous year.

Statistics for Wick JOG:

Passengers

July saw a reduction in passengers of 66% on last year.

Aircraft Movements

July saw 193 aircraft movements, a 13% reduction on 2020 numbers.

With no scheduled passenger flights at this time the passenger numbers can show huge fluctuation based on very few flights. The amount of aircraft movements is much more reflective of how busy the airport is.

Projects update

As detailed in the last update HIAL continues to carry out capital projects. Planned for this financial year.

- Continued improvements to the surface water drainage, UHI Thurso College, Environmental Research Institute (ERI) have been to site twice now and sample points have been identified to assess runoff from the hardstanding.
- A full survey with recommendations for the replacement of the oil fuelled heating and hot water boilers has been completed by our contractors and HIAL will now progress to procurement.
- Upgrades to runway drain covers will be carried out later this month.
- Terminal building refurbishment is also scheduled for September start.
- A refurbishment of the terminal building staff car park has been approved and will be completed before the end this year.

Staffing levels

Security is at full complement with staff on furlough and a minimum amount of staff at the airport for day to day tasks and competency training.

ATC staffing is now at 5 with our trainee ATCO successfully completing his CAA validation at the start of August.

The Airport Fire Service is operating with reduced numbers due to long term sick leave and a staff resignation.

The successful candidate from our recent recruitment will commence their firefighter training in October.

Opening hours

The airfield is now operating increased hours although not yet at pre-COVID levels and continues to hold regular meetings with the Oil and Gas sector, FNA and BOWL.

The 24/7 cover for emergency flights remains unchanged.

Reduction in Rescue and Firefighting Services (RFFS)

HAL have put this application to the CAA to reduce the RFFS category from 4 to 3 on hold and have utilised a temporary dispensation.

The airport has seen an increase in larger aircraft requesting our services over the past few months and these have all been accommodated by the staff despite the current manning issues.

Once the PSO start date has been finalised the airport will look recruit staff to the appropriate levels.

Brexit/HMRC

Following a final round of correspondence with HMRC a submission was filed by the airport (in conjunction with Far North Aviation) for certification which will allow the continued operation of ferry flights to and from Wick JOG.

The implementation of the changed rules has been postponed until January 2022.