



# Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

**Date:** 21/06/2022

**Time:** 10:30

**Location:** Naver Business Centre, Naver Road, Thurso / Microsoft Teams

## Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Emma Gordon	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (minutes)
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Dougie Cook	HIAL
CLlr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Mackenzie Sutherland	Highland Council (Teams)
Martin Thomsen	Highlands & Islands Enterprise (Teams)
Helen Inkster	Pentland Ferries (Teams)
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Robert Gillespie	Stagecoach
John Deighan	Thurso & Wick TUC
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland

## 1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all present for attending.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Carole Whittaker	Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Victoria Ross	Dounreay
Bill Mowat	Gills Harbour
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
David Summers	Highland Council
Frank Roach	HITRANS
Maree Todd MSP	Scottish Parliament
Ian Cormack	Wick Harbour

## 2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 22.03.2022

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

## 3. Review of actions from last meeting

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

Marco Bardelli provided an update on this as follows:

Marco met with Sandy Mackie at the Scrabster Harbour office on 3rd May to discuss the 20mph limit and the approach to Scrabster Harbour in general.

Various issues were noted with regards to equality of access, crossing points and general pedestrian arrangements not to current best practice. Whilst the physical constraints are not ideal in this regard it is clear improvements can be made. He has instructed BEAR Scotland to look into ways of improving the user experience for pedestrians (which will include a 20mph limit) and they have added it to their list of projects.

Transport Scotland's working group who are looking at setting national criteria for gauging the suitability of sections of road for introducing 20mph limits are progressing well. The outcome is expected to be finalised by the end of the year or early next year, but this is not a committed position.

Cllr Willie Mackay noted that the 20mph speed restrictions across the county had not been well received initially but that position had changed and is now working.

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

The Chair noted that no suggestions had been submitted by Forum members and there were no obvious areas other than the Cambusavie bends south, with less scope north. The Chair proposed to close the action.

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

Marco Bardelli provided the following update from his colleague Tanja Wasser:

Following two landslides in 2017 that resulted in temporary closure of the A9, Transport Scotland commissioned an assessment of the stability of the coastal slopes along an 895m long section of the A9 at Scrabster in 2019. The aim of the study was to provide an assessment of the stability of the coastal slopes, assess the risk that any identified instabilities pose to the A9 carriageway below, and to recommend potential mitigation options which will reduce the risk to the A9 from landslide events. On completion of the field mapping, a database of historical landslides and their volumes was compiled. The data were used in a semi-quantitative risk assessment (SQRA) along with other data pertaining to the physical characteristics of the slope and surrounding area to rank the various parts of the slope in order of relative risk to the A9.

With regards to potential mitigation options, control of field drains discharging onto the slope face and interception of surface water at the crest of the slope is likely to provide the greatest impact with respect to reducing the risk of landslide events across much of the slope. To address these primary concerns, a drainage survey to investigate the drainage system at the crest of the slope was initiated in 2021. The field survey has been completed and a report with recommendation is currently in the process of being prepared. Based on this information drainage improvements will be designed in 2022.

**CTF(2022)M001/A001** – *Dougie Cook to send information on airport café and WWII trail to Caithness Chamber of Commerce for circulation* **ONGOING**

- The Café concession invitation to quote is awaiting sign-off within HIAL and will be issued shortly. It will be advertised on social media for 2 weeks in addition to the John O’Groat Journal.
- The WWII Trail committee is liaising directly with Dougie Cook and will provide any updates when applicable.

**CTF(2022)M001/A002** – *Ross Thomson to seek update for Forum on ScotRail transfer into public ownership* **COMPLETE**

Ross Thomson sent the following update:

- The transition to public ownership represents an exciting new chapter in the long history of Scotland’s Railway. While ScotRail has always had a strong relationship with the Scottish

Government, there is now a clearer line of accountability. The Scottish Government provided great and very welcome support for ScotRail during the height of the pandemic, so we think that the strong pre-existing relationship bodes well for the future.

- The move from the traditional franchise model to the new public body will provide a real opportunity for ScotRail to evolve along with our customers and allows us to make decisions for the longer-term. Our aim for the initial phase of public ownership is to deliver a smooth transition for staff and customers. Following this initial phase, we will be working hard over the coming months on our longer-term plan for Scotland's Railway and look forward to sharing this.
- The pandemic has posed great financial challenges for the railway and passenger numbers remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels, reflecting the ways in which the world has changed. By working closely with the Scottish Government, the public, and all our stakeholders, we can deliver the aim we all share - a modern and sustainable railway that meets Scotland's needs. As a key part of this we remain committed to fully decarbonising rail services in Scotland by 2035 and will work constructively with all stakeholders to help us achieve that goal.

**CTF(2022)M001/A003 – Ross Thomson to seek update from Network Rail on safety plans following RAIB derailment report **COMPLETE****

- The RAIB report into the tragic Carmont derailment makes clear that there are fundamental lessons to be learnt by Network Rail and the wider industry.
- Since the accident, Network Rail has inspected similar locations and drainage systems across the length and breadth of the country and the added insight the RAIB has provided will help our efforts.
- Following the accident, Network Rail also commissioned two independent taskforces led by world class experts to help them better understand extreme rainfall events and how to better manage cuttings, embankments and their drainage systems. Network Rail are delivering at pace against these plans to make real, tangible changes.
- Following the publication of the RAIB's final report in March, Network Rail's National Recommendations Review Panel (NRRP) met to review action plans developed to deliver on the recommendations that were directed to Network Rail. A large amount of complex work was done in a compressed timescale to develop action plans for the recommendations, reflecting the significance of the RAIB's report.
- There were 15 recommendations in the report directed to Network Rail by the ORR. Work has already started on most of the recommendations, and activities yet to start will commence as soon as possible.

**CTF(2022)M001/A004 – Ross Thomson to report back on Far North Line enhancement works **COMPLETE****

- Muir of Ord, Kildonan and Wick new radio sites successfully added to radio control rack at Inverness Signalling Centre 9th April 2022.
- Meeting arranged with Dunrobin Castle Estate Trustees to agree revised Request to Stop Plans w/c 2nd May, planning application prepared for submission to Highland Council on receipt of Trustee approval.
- Clachnaharry swing bridge access agreement with Scottish Canals, discussions ongoing.
- Delmore Loop next stage will confirm requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment.

**CTF(2022)M001/A005** – *Jonathan Gunn to look at expediting requested tourist signage* **COMPLETE**

The Chair had subsequently made contact with Highland Council and received various correspondence from Colin Howell on this matter. Some wider concerns have been raised about shortcomings in the process around tourist signage and Colin has indicated he is looking to progress solutions to these.

**CTF(2022)M001/A006** – *Trudy Morris to highlight areas of inadequate road repairs and Jonathan Gunn to arrange inspection of these* **ONGOING**

David Swanson had provided some details to Jonathan and the Chamber is awaiting feedback.

**CTF(2022)M001/A007** – *Cllr Raymond Bremner to take up lack of response to Forum letter on roads with Highland Council Chief Executive* **COMPLETE**

Cllr Raymond Bremner is in contact with the Chief Executive regarding this but no further update available at this time. However, the Chair proposes to close this action.

**CTF(2022)M001/A008** – *Jonathan Gunn to ensure Roads Officer aware of deterioration of road raised by Carole Whittaker* **ONGOING**

There was no roads representation at the meeting. The Chair will follow up with Jonathan Gunn.

**CTF(2022)M001/A009** – *David Swanson to take up issue with timetable / service information with Stagecoach* **ONGOING**

David Swanson contacted Jamie Reid to ask about this and what processes etc. are in place for temporary changes in service provision. Robert Gillespie noted that they use Travelink to communicate changes but would seek a fuller response.

## 4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 The Chair updated Forum members on the meeting with the Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth MSP which took place via Teams on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2022. Due to time constraints the meeting was focused on some key questions which were provided to the Minister in advance. A summary of the key points of the meeting are appended to the Minutes in **Appendix A**.

## 5. Transport Updates

### 5.1 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

- 5.1.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix B**).
- 5.1.2 Dougie Cook reported the aviation industry has been struggling after Covid but more so now due to staffing shortages. Eastern Airways are experiencing issues due to the knock-on effect from other handling agents in Aberdeen.
- 5.1.3 The inaugural PSO flight took place on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> April. The take-up has been good, approx. 30% of seats filled, 30-35% was expected. The previous week was at 53% which was pleasantly surprising.
- 5.1.4 Business demand is not there yet. The forecast for June is 1000 passengers which is 2015-2016 levels. It hasn’t bounced back but is better than expected.
- 5.1.5 They are still experiencing issues with Air Traffic Control staffing. Due to a medical condition and a relocation, 2 are required. As there are no ATCOs applying, they are going to take on 2 trainees, staggering their start dates by 6 months. It does take longer but they’ll be better placed a year from now.
- 5.1.6 Dougie noted that the German side of Wiking Helicopters have gone into administration. Wiking Helicopters operate the flights to the Beatrice Offshore Wind Farm, these have now been grounded. HIAL are aware but contact has not been possible with the company.
- 5.1.7 The Chair noted that the connections were not right for business travel on the PSO flight. Some of the Nuclear Industry are still travelling via Inverness. The other challenge is that previous cancellations are putting people off. The Chair also noted that those who have used the flight for business are praising the service. At the PSO subgroup meeting there were comments that the uptake on the early flights is low on a Wednesday.
- 5.1.8 David Swanson noted that the response to the PSO flight had been largely positive. The passenger survey was getting good comments and what needed to happen now was onward travel needed to be tracked. David also noted that a lot of people are asking about an Edinburgh flight.
- 5.1.9 Cllr Willie Mackay asked Dougie if the appropriate people are out there for all these staff shortages. Dougie noted that, for Wick, there was. They had recruited 4 extra security roles with no problem and had just taken on 3 new fire fighters. Dougie also noted that the ATCO positions are a national problem and foreign controllers are being brought in to plug the gaps. Apart from Orkney, HIAL’s other airports are struggling.

## 5.2 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.2.1 A written update was provided (**Appendix C**).
- 5.2.2 Sandy Mackie noted that vessel tonnage was up. They had a strong fishing year – the 2<sup>nd</sup> best year in over a decade. Their biggest challenge this year would be inflation and fishing may experience a few casualties.
- 5.2.3 Ferry numbers were not as busy as expected, however, there has been a range of energy related activity related to offshore wind at the harbour.
- 5.2.4 Sandy noted that cruises had been quieter but had not had time to build up. They have had one liner in already this year and have 6 scheduled from the end of July to September this year. 2023 is looking busier with 11 scheduled, some of these are larger vessels. They have been working hard to bring this back.
- 5.2.5 Regarding the border control post, it has been pushed into 2023. Scrabster had an existing building it can use which makes life easier. The Trust has suspended the designation application pending clarity on what the required checks will be.
- 5.2.6 Sandy Mackie noted increased costs and business rates being challenges down the line.
- 5.2.7 The Chair commented that it was good to hear of the increases across the various activities and that the challenges they faced are recognised. The cruise ship and activity around the harbour lately was great to see.

## 5.4 Wick Harbour

- 5.4.1 There was no representative for Wick Harbour at the meeting.
- 5.4.2 A written report was provided (**Appendix D**).

## 5.3 Pentland Ferries

- 5.3.1 Helen Inkster reported that the MV Pentalina is berthed and still for sale. They have a few interested parties, but nothing booked in at the moment as there's still some restrictions in place within Europe and with the war in Ukraine, so nothing is formalised at the moment.
- 5.3.2 Post Covid, they are managing staff levels fairly well, and starting to increase their staffing on all sites. They are struggling to recruit for customer facing roles, they are currently recruiting customer service and check-in staff at Gills Bay.
- 5.3.3 Passenger figures are back up to pre-covid levels. They are up approximately 11% last quarter, compared to 2019. Helen reported they had expected the first year of the MV Alfred to be about 15-20% so they are pleased, considering the last couple of years.

- 5.3.4 They are experiencing internet issues at Gills Bay and they are keen to speak to other businesses in the area or to receive recommendations for reliable providers.
- 5.3.5 The Chair offered the assistance of CCoC in advertising the positions through Recruit North Highlands.
- 5.3.6 Mike Lunan asked if there was a good reason why the Pentalina was not attractive to CalMac, even as a temporary measure. Helen noted that sea trials were carried out at the beginning of 2021, but the deal did not go ahead. There is currently no contact, but CalMac are aware that the Pentalina is available. Mike asked why the deal didn't go ahead, it looked to him like it was political. Helen reported that the vessel wasn't ideal on some of CalMac's routes, although it did fit on most of their berths. The accommodation is different to their own vessels too and they were concerned of potential crewing issues because of that. Pentland Ferries are still very open to negotiations if CalMac are interested in using the vessel.

## 5.4 Northlink

- 5.4.1 There was no representative for Northlink Ferries at the meeting
- 5.4.2 The Chair asked Sandy Mackie about the dry docking of the Hamnavoe as no replacement vessel had been available last time and it always posed a problem.

Sandy Mackie noted the Hamnavoe dry docking would be around Jan/Feb 2023 and is usually a week long and there were no dates as yet.

The Chair suggested writing to Transport Scotland's Ferries Department to ask about the dry docking and enquire whether the Pentalina (subject to it being available) can be used in the absence of any other replacement vessel.

**CTF(2022)M002/A001** – *The Chair to write to Transport Scotland's Ferries Department re the Hamnavoe dry docking and use of the Pentalina as a replacement vessel.*

## 5.5 BEAR Scotland / Transport Scotland

- 5.5.1 A programme of works for 2022/23 was provided (**Appendix E**)
- 5.5.2 Marco Bardelli reported the new contracts had been awarded – BEAR Scotland have won the north west contract again and Amey the north east - both will start on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Marco noted it is good to get the continuity, although work will slow down over the change of contract in order to tie up the old contract financials.
- 5.5.3 Marco noted that the staffing arrangements for public service contracts are not known until the last minute and they are waiting to see how many staff they retain. Hopefully the new contracts



will stabilise the situation. There isn't a huge number of unemployed engineers and technicians which has been an issue this last year.

- 5.5.4 Marco reported of budget pressures and material costs rising. They previously reported of supply issues with bitumen but it has stabilised now although the costs are higher.
- 5.5.5 Cllr Willie Mackay commented to Marco the excellent condition of the A9 & A99. Marco thanked Cllr Mackay and noted that there had been a big investment in the white lining and although it is costing more it will be good value for money.

## 5.6 Highland Council Public Transport

- 5.6.1 There was no representative for the Highland Council Public Transport at the meeting.
- 5.6.2 David Swanson read a report from David Summers. The bus and school transport contracts were due to be returned on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Links to Wick John O'Groats Airport have been included in timetables where possible

## 5.7 Stagecoach

- 5.7.1 Robert Gillespie reported they have had a further upturn in passengers since the last meeting and have recently restarted the hourly 82 link service between Thurso and Wick. They are still not back to pre-covid levels but not far away.
- 5.7.2 Robert noted they are also experiencing staffing issues but are getting there. They can now train their own new drivers in Inverness or Orkney and from start to finish it takes 3 weeks. Robert also reported that the DVLA is causing delays and it can take 6 - 8 weeks for their license to come through after passing medicals.
- 5.7.3 Robert reported they have added a 2<sup>nd</sup> X99 on Saturdays which ties in with the Scrabster ferry. They have a 3<sup>rd</sup> X99 running south to help with Scotrail's reduced timetable. They have seen a big increase in bookings for the X99 and are running their highest capacity vehicles on the route.
- 5.7.4 The Chair noted there was a big issue with the DVSA and a letter should be written to the UK Transport Minister. The wait for driving tests is an issue and it's not always possible to use public transport. Dougie Cook commented they had 2 members of staff travelling to Inverness that day for HGV theory tests.  
**CTF(2022)M002/A002** – *The Chair to write to the UK Transport Minister & Jamie Stone MSP re DVSA delays.*
- 5.7.5 John Deighan asked Robert about Stagecoach accepting rail tickets as he had heard there were problems. Robert noted that Stagecoach do get a notification from ScotRail but their own passengers come first.

- 5.7.6 Cllr Willie Mackay queried whether there was any opportunity to reinstate the Bus Users Group which was previously successful and very well attended. The Chair noted that previously this was funded by Stagecoach and it was thought that it was best run through the Association of Community Councils. Cllr Mackay asked Robert Gillespie to look at the possibility of reinstating the Bus Users Group. The Chair suggested that Cllr Willie Mackay have a conversation with David Beaton. Marco Bardelli commented he is happy to receive feedback on issues or problems on the A9 from Stagecoach drivers.
- CTF(2022)M002/A003** - *Robert Gillespie to put Cllr Mackay in touch with David Beaton to discuss the possibility of reinstating the Bus Users Group.*

## 6. Press Communications

- 6.1 The Chair asked Forum members whether they wished to issue press communications around the meeting with the Jenny Gilruth MSP as it was very short. Mike Lunan noted that the meeting should be mentioned along with the promise from the Minister to come up.
- 6.2 The Chair noted that delays within the DVSA is also a big issue and that this should also be mentioned.

## 7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 There was no other business

## 8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 This was agreed to take place on 15 November 2022 at 10:30.
- 8.2 The Chair noted the next meeting was in winter and proposed to keep the meetings hybrid in-person / online events for those who were not able to travel.

## 9. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

**CTF(2022)M001/A001** – *Dougie Cook to send information on airport café and WWII trail to Caithness Chamber of Commerce for circulation* **ONGOING**

**CTF(2022)M001/A006** – *Trudy Morris to highlight areas of inadequate road repairs and Jonathan Gunn to arrange inspection of these* **ONGOING**

**CTF(2022)M001/A008** – *Jonathan Gunn to ensure Roads Officer aware of deterioration of road raised by Carole Whittaker* **ONGOING**

**CTF(2022)M001/A009** – *David Swanson to take up issue with timetable / service information with Stagecoach. Rob Gillespie to seek further information.* **ONGOING**

## 10. Actions arising from this meeting

**CTF(2022)M002/A001** – **CTF(2022)M002/A001** – *The Chair to write to Transport Scotland's Ferries Department re the Hamnavoe dry docking in 2023 and use of the Pentalina as a replacement vessel.*

**CTF(2022)M002/A002** – *The Chair to write to the UK Transport Minister & Jamie Stone MSP re DVSA delays.*

**CTF(2022)M002/A003** - *Robert Gillespie to put Cllr Mackay in touch with David Beaton to discuss the possibility of reinstating the Bus Users Group.*

## Appendix A – Notes of Meeting with the Transport Minister

- The Chair asked the question about how PSOs can be supported in light of continuing price rises e.g. in fuel and if there was any mitigation from the Scottish Government in light of it:

The Minister responded that she does recognise the ongoing challenge with fuel rise increases across the transport sector. It is a real challenge to move transport forward sustainably and affordably. It is hitting the lowest earners the hardest and people need to be able to use services. The Minister also commented that she was keen to come up and experience the Wick-Aberdeen flight herself.

The Minister is undertaking piece of work for Scottish Government looking at cost of living crisis. Looked at spending review and funding but won't pretend have lots of money to spend. Keen to come up and experience Wick-Aberdeen flight – are making contribution up to £1m per year towards cost of service. Specification of service is a matter for the Highland Council. Meeting full cost at WJOG airport ~£2m / year. Does recognise ongoing challenge with regards to fuel rise increases across the transport sector. Real challenge to how move transport forward sustainably and affordably. Hitting lowest earners the hardest and need people to be able to use services.

- Peter Faccenda (CNSRP) asked about local transport funding and strategic investment in remote and rural areas:

The Minister responded that it was a really important point. Represent a relatively rural community. STPR2 high-level document but does apply to H&I – really keen for local authorities to drive some of this work. Do give block grant distributed to local authorities on basis of need, as well as on population dispersion and rurality. Is for LAs to make decision. Wouldn't be against idea of bundling projects together – opportunity to do that and have strategic oversight working with local authority partners and see how can best be delivered at local level.

Peter Faccenda noted that engagement through STPR2 process hadn't been good and didn't feel there was any mechanism to do what was described. Felt caught between stones. The Minister was sorry to hear that – sometimes a bit of consultation fatigue in transport. Asked same questions and feel views not listened to. Local communities should have a voice in shaping what those priorities look like. STPR2 not end of road, consultation results being pulled together – she will take up with officials on the call.

- Cllr Matthew Reiss asked if there were any improvements planned North of Tain for A9/A99 in next 20 years. Feel about £2m / km would pay to widen road by about 18 inches each side, straighten out corners. Cost of doing 20-30km would be drop in ocean compared to dualling. Landslip south Helmsdale – if been bigger A9 completely closed. Diversion not suitable for HGVs. Is any other backup plan as no other road South?:

The Minister responded in relation to A9 and A99, recommendation 30 looks at trunk road and motorway improvement and 31. Looking to develop and enhance improvements. Have environmental programmes and landslide strategy. Transport Scotland undertaking review

which looks to enhance resilience – is also about how construction is managed and undertaken. Note investment in Berriedale Braes, will look at how can invest but financial challenges facing – cost of living, industrial relations, fund pay increases etc.

- Katherine Scollie asked the question about RET:

The Minister responded that current subsidy control rules don't offer any viable options to introduce RET. In light of specific legal challenges in recent years and cost to taxpayer when things go wrong. Don't want to experience legal challenge. Do need to undertake holistic review of ferry fares – consultation and engagement will be key to that. Well-cited on some of the challenges facing with regards to the CalMac fleet. Does feed into how future fares policy meets needs of island residents. Asked officials to move again in terms of legal challenge and where can come up with workaround – not going to pretend there is an easy and obvious workaround.

The Chair reminded the Minister that not just islanders, people from North of Scotland travelling to islands. Does impact on mainland communities as well.

- Mike Lunan asked the question regarding Far North Line review team:

The Minister responded that ScotRail facing a bit of a challenge although Aslef put out recommendation to accept pay deal. Number of challenges facing FNL and Mr Ewing's time in office some years ago. FNL Review Team would be subject to affordability. She is sympathetic to ask and will ask rail officials to prepare brief on this for review as before time – number of action points will arise and happy to share more details on this.

- David Swanson asked a question relating to bus services:

The Minister responded that review giving more flexibility and accountability around national policies. On buses, rolling out community bus fund which is £1m nationally, is case to be made around how local authorities can be empowered to run own bus services. Also meet some of the needs of constituents who have lost out on local bus services in recent months. Bus operators facing challenges despite level of support.

## Appendix B – Highlands & Islands Airport Ltd



Caithness transport forum update June 2022.

### PSO

The inaugural flight of the Wick / Aberdeen Public Service Obligation (PSO) took place on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> April, the flight marked a much-welcomed return of scheduled services to Caithness and was positively publicised in social media, local press and on Scottish television.

### COVID-19 Operations

The Scottish Government has issued an update to the 'Covid Sense' campaign, to highlight the Covid 19 safety measures and HIAL continues to follow this guidance.

In line with the Scottish Government guidance, we continue to encourage and facilitate hybrid and flexible working in line with operational requirements.

Unnecessary work-related travel is being avoided, and therefore staff are being asked to always consider remote meeting options when deciding whether to travel.

For those who cannot work from home social distancing in the workplace, PPE and enhanced cleaning regimes remain in place.

Wick JOG Airport is currently COVID State 0 – no staffing issues, however all our airports are still experiencing cases of COVID which are affecting our operations.

### Aviation Statistics

The aviation industry nationally has seen a rapid increase in demand this summer and is experiencing staffing shortages across all sectors.

HIAL has not experienced staff shortages in its core operation but has been impacted by airline staffing issues causing flight cancellations.

As forecast business travel remains far below pre-Covid levels and onward connectivity options from the region are still much reduced.

### HIAL Group stats for March 2022:

#### Passengers

There were 93,984 passengers across our 11 airports during March, an increase of 221% against the previous year.

#### Aircraft Movements

For the month of March there were 7179 aircraft movements which is 36% up on March 2021.

#### Statistics for Wick JOG:

##### Passengers

March 2022 saw a reduction in passengers of 94% on the previous year.

These figures are pre PSO start-up and during the first rolling month April 11<sup>th</sup> – May 11<sup>th</sup> 884 passengers used the WIC/ABZ service.

Passenger figures for the whole of May were 857 and June is on course for over 1000 passengers using the service.

This is a very encouraging trend at a time when the industry is still in recovery.

#### Aircraft Movements

March saw 180 aircraft movements in Wick which is 2% less than last March, mainly due to weather disruption.

These stats will see a sharp upturn from April due to the scheduled 12 flights per week to/from Aberdeen.

The airport continues to be very busy with ferry flights, windfarm helicopter operations, and an increase of RAF/MoD flights.

#### Projects update

HIAL continues to invest in the airport and to carry out capital projects.

- Continued improvements to the surface water drainage system will see CCTV surveys of the entire system before the end of the summer period. We are continuing our partnership with UHI Thurso College, Environmental Research Institute (ERI) to identify any contaminants in the runway water runoff.
- The airport heating system upgrades are now complete with £250k spent on the system in the last financial year.
- Terminal building refurbishment has started with the new Security office/training room now in use.
- The refurbishment of the main airport and terminal staff car parks were completed in March.

#### Staffing levels

Security has recently employed 1 new member of staff due to a promotion.

ATC staffing is currently reduced to 4 with a member of staff awaiting the outcome of a medical. We are in the process of recruiting trainee air traffic controllers with an advertisement going out within the next couple of weeks.

The Airport Fire Service has recently recruited 3 firefighters to bring the staffing compliment back to pre-Covid levels. Firefighter training is ongoing, and we will hopefully have the candidates 'on the run' by the end of July.

### Opening hours

The airfield is now operating pre-Covid hours which has been welcomed by all our stakeholders.

The 24/7 cover for emergency flights remains unchanged.



# Appendix C – Scrabster Harbour



## CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 21<sup>st</sup> JUNE 2022

### SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

Scraber Harbour is managed by Scraber 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's financial year ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The activity headlines for the financial period were:

- Total vessels arrivals 2,122, an increase of 2.8% on 2020-21.
- Total vessel tonnage 8.135 million tonnes, an increase of 2.4% on the previous period. The

main change affecting both arrivals and tonnage was the return to a full peak season sailing schedule following Covid offset by there being no ferry sailings during the annual drydocking to allow essential maintenance on the ferry linkspan.

- The ferry passenger numbers for the year amounted to 115,859, a huge improvement on 2020-21

but not back to pre-covid levels.

- Strong fishing activity with 324,573 boxes landed, an increase of 21% on previous year.
  - General cargo 42,000 tonnes comprising mainly timber.
  - Fish Cargo from Faroes amounted to 18,000 tonnes.
  - Coastal tankers brought 41,000 tonnes of fuel.
  - Cruise had limited season in 2021 with eight calls bringing 3,400 passengers to the area.
  - There were thirty-nine yacht arrivals.
  - Energy related traffic had a poor year with only sixty-two arrivals.

We are over two months into the new financial period. In common with the rest of the economy, the port and its users are grappling with cost inflationary, particularly fuel and utilities.

Despite this, port activity for April and May has been encouraging with arrivals and vessel tonnage up 19% compared to the same period last year. The ferry is busy which will hopefully be sustained throughout the year. We have seen a range of energy related activity over the past two months from

survey vessels in connection with offshore wind through to seismic survey vessels engaged on an oil and gas campaign.

## **2. CRUISE**

The 2022 cruise season began with the arrival of the German vessel Hamburg on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Our arrivals this year are modest with currently only a further six arrivals scheduled. There are already eleven bookings for 2023 and the Trust is working hard to attract further bookings. Recent promotional activities have included attendance at the Global Seatrade event in Miami and the Cruise Europe conference in Edinburgh.

## **3. OTHER MATTERS**

**Border Control Post** - At previous forum meetings the Trust has advised that it was seeking designation as a Border Control Post. The process had reached the final stages when the UK Government announced that the proposed import controls and checks would not be required until late 2023. A new system of checks is proposed using digital technology. This would appear to suggest electronic documentary checks, rather than physical checks conducted at the border. The Trust has suspended the designation application pending clarity on what the required checks will be.

**Ola Redevelopment Project** - It is now seven months since the pier was handed over to the Trust. The development was aimed at delivering a multipurpose/multiuser quay. This is proving to be the case with cruise, oil & gas, renewables, fish farm and fishing vessels having used the pier in recent weeks. It has added welcome extra capacity to the port.

**Business Rates** - The next revaluation of rates is just around the corner with a valuation date of 1 April 2022 with the new rateable values coming into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. The process and timescales for appeals or alternative value proposals is changing. Local Valuation Committees will transfer to the Scottish Tribunals system on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023.

On 31<sup>st</sup> May the Scottish Government set out its medium-term financial strategy (MTFS). The small print of the strategy suggests a sharp rise in business rates is likely to offset shortfalls elsewhere in the Scottish Government's tax base. This could mean further cost pressures for businesses.

**17<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

## Appendix D – Wick Harbour



# Wick Harbour

## Update for Caithness Transport Forum -21<sup>st</sup> June 2022

- **Leisure.** Yacht numbers look like increasing markedly this year, with many advance bookings being taken. It is noticeable that we are getting quite a few enquiries and confirmed bookings for people to leave their yacht on the marina for up to a month at a time as well as weekly stays.
- **Cargo ship** numbers are poor this year. Main cause of this is Subsea7 having no projects at the moment, meaning there is no pipes or towhead's cargo's due. Also, no land-based windmill shipments are due for the North of Scotland this year. That along with timber being taken from the east side of the county mainly by lorry, means that commercial cargoes have been limited to Fuel and Lime shipments.
- **Offshore Wind business.** Presently 5 CTV's working on a daily basis. 4 for Beatrice and 1 for Moray East, with a further 2 vessels expected soon to boost Beatrice's Summer campaign.

Looking ahead to the recently awarded Scotwind leases, constructive talks have been held which gives us optimism for further offshore wind business in the future, although this is likely to take some time to come to fruition.

- **Fishing.** Remains about par with last year and has recently been given a boost with visiting scallop vessels landing in Wick. Local crab/lobster fishers report tough fishing conditions at present, with a general scarcity of stocks on the grounds.
- **Shetland HV line:** Vessels now in port to commence the next stage of installation of this important project.

Ian Cormack  
Harbour Master  
Wick Harbour

## Appendix E – BEAR / Transport Scotland

NW Trunk Road Unit Caithness and Sutherland		BEAR Scotland Works Programme 2022/23 (Jun22 update)				
Route	Scheme Name	Work Description	Start	Finish	Status	Value £
A99	A99 Lybster Footway Improvements	Footway Improvements	08/11/2021	20/04/2022	Complete	30,000
A9	A9 Dornoch to Latheron Sign Replacement	Signing Improvements	17/01/2022	17/06/2022	Ongoing	18,000
A9	A9 Dunrobin Castle to Cairn Liath Filter Drain	Filter Drain Refurbishment	07/03/2022	12/05/2022	Complete	30,000
A9	Navidale to Scrabster Roadmarkings	Road markings Refreshment	04/04/2022	01/07/2022	Ongoing	482,615
A9	Filter Drains	Filter Drain Replacement	04/04/2022	28/10/2022	Ongoing	55,658
A9	A9 Golspie Cat 2 Footway scheme	Footway Improvements	13/06/2022	01/07/2022	Not started	16,000
A9	A9 North of Poles	Carriageway Patching	13/06/2022	13/06/2022	Complete	23,000
A9	A9 South of Poles	Carriageway Patching	14/06/2022	14/06/2022	Complete	28,000
A9	A9 South of Helmsdale	Carriageway Patching	15/06/2022	20/06/2022	Ongoing	95,000
A9	A9 North End of Helmsdale	Carriageway Resurfacing	21/06/2022	27/06/2022	Not started	105,000
A9	A9 Dunrobin Retaining Wall	Retaining Wall Repairs	27/06/2022	15/07/2022	Not started	10,000
A9	A9 South of Brora	Carriageway Patching	28/06/2022	28/06/2022	Not started	28,000
A9	A9 North/South of Mound Junction	Carriageway Resurfacing	04/07/2022	07/07/2022	Not started	150,000
A99	A99 Lybster	Carriageway Resurfacing	10/07/2022	19/07/2022	Not started	160,000
A99	A99 Route Priority Signing Improvements	Signing Improvements	11/07/2022	15/08/2022	Not started	107,446
A9	A9 North Portgower	Carriageway Resurfacing	20/07/2022	26/07/2022	Not started	50,000
A9	A9 South of Scrabster	Carriageway Patching	28/07/2022	29/07/2022	Not started	50,000
A9	A9 Thurso Bridgend	Drainage Improvements	05/09/2022	16/09/2022	Not started	10,000

A99	A99 Whiterow to Wick - Filter Drains	Filter Drain Refurbishment	05/09/2022	14/10/2022	Not started	50,000
A9	A9 Helmsdale Footway	Footway Improvements	Design Only	Design Only	Not started	30,000