



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 11.06.14

Time: 1:30pm

Location: Norseman Hotel, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Derrick Milnes	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
David Flear	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Ken Nicol	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Kyle Palmer	Direct Rail Services
Beverley Stothart	Direct Rail Services
Jeff Marshall	Direct Rail Services
Tony Bush	Direct Rail Services
John Green	Caithness Partnership
Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Gail Ross	Highland Council
William Sutherland	Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
Mark Norton	North Line Action Group

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:

Peter Body	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Eann Sinclair	CNSRP
Ivor Souter	Highland Council
Neil Young	Highland Council
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
James Linklater	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Stan Towers	Stagecoach
Steve Walker	Stagecoach
Gordon Doull	Wick Harbour Authority

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 14.12.12

- 2.1 David Flear noted that his apologies had not been recorded for the previous meeting
- 2.2 Subject to this amendment, the minutes were unanimously approved

3. Direct Rail Services presentation

The meeting was opened with a presentation from Direct Rail Services (DRS) – (document **CTF(2014)M002/D001**).

Willie Mackay noted that the gantry crane at the Georgemas Railhead is fixed permanently and asked why it was not floating. Tony Bush stated that a fixed crane is a requirement for nuclear shipments, but noted that a concrete pad had been constructed to allow other cargo to be easily moved.

Mark Norton asked if this was likely to change if the railhead becomes used for more commercial freight – Tony indicated that they would be more likely to use a reach stacker for cargo handling.

David Flear noted that a problem with the Georgemas site is that it has a blind access road near a humpback bridge, leading to road safety concerns, and asked what impact this would have on commercial traffic. Tony noted that road safety is a prime concern and stated that traffic calming measures would be needed if large quantities of commercial freight were to be shipped from the railhead.

There was some discussion of the limited space on site and David Flear noted that a shipment of 15-20 containers would be too much for the site. Tony explained that no shipment of this size would be possible – due to the infrastructure of the Far North Line, 10-12 containers is the largest possible shipment. He further noted that, if using a reach stacker, containers could be triple-stacked, and that the primary mode of operation at the terminal would be direct transfer from rail to road, thus obviating the need for large quantities of storage space.

Tony explained that the site is bigger than the usual nuclear railhead, featuring a super-reinforced concrete pad (with a capacity 10% greater than that of the crane operating capacity), office space, IT resources and security. The site has enough room to turn an articulated lorry and the platform is designed to suit both nuclear and commercial freight. He reiterated that the main limit on the terminal is the connecting rail infrastructure.

Beverley Stothart explained that there are a number of commercial opportunities for the site, each of which bring their own challenges. She emphasised that DRS is not subsidised and that its activities must be commercially viable. She noted that they are trying to consolidate some of these opportunities to get things moving.

Trudy Morris said that when Tom Curry (previous DRS representative) was last in contact he had suggested that they were close to an announcement on commercial opportunities. She noted that little appears to have changed since then. Beverley noted that they had an opportunity lined up, but that it fell to one side.

There was some discussion of increasing the loop length on the line. Mark Norton noted this is a chicken and egg situation – increasing the loop length costs money and is unlikely to happen unless there is a clear demand for it.

Some discussion was had regarding possible commercial opportunities, including the National Nuclear Archive, new schools in the county and the possibility of transporting commercial freight bound for Orkney. David Flear wondered whether the council could specify a preference for rail transport on its own projects.

Trudy noted again that the Forum has been through these discussions with DRS before and it feels as though there has been no progress. There was general agreement to this.

Beverley noted that she can only speak to developments since she joined DRS, but emphasised that the work Tom did has not been lost. She reiterated that DRS need to avoid the perception of cross-subsidisation. She further noted that the problem with shipping e.g. Tesco products by rail is that they have lower volume than the service would require to be economically viable.

There was some further discussion of this matter and it was noted that DRS do not have some of the disadvantages of other operators (e.g. startup costs).

Trudy noted that the Transport Forum can help with some of the issues raised, but that they need to know which companies have been talked to, what has been discussed, etc. It was agreed that DRS would liaise with the Chamber on this

CTF(2014)M002/A001 – *DRS to feed back to Chamber with list of companies talked to, discussions had and issues raised*

There was some discussion of the possibility of ameliorating scheduling difficulties by combining multiple small shipments. Tony noted that DRS have discussed this previously and can do multi-modal shipments, but that the issue remains demand and volume. This would also require investment in a sorting facility. It was also noted that end customers of these smaller shipments expect express delivery and to-door delivery.

Trudy asked whether there was an opportunity to partner with a local business on this. Jeff noted that when consolidating loads in this fashion, it is common to work with local logistics companies.

William Sutherland enquired whether DRS would ship whisky and aviation fuel. It was explained that shipping aviation fuel raises insurance issues – it is classed as dangerous and can't be shipped with other products. Tony noted that they do ship some products for Diageo.

Ken Nicol noted that he had previously had discussions with DRS about shipments of dangerous cargo e.g. aviation fuel & gas and wondered whether there had been any progress. Tony noted that there had been some technological developments in this area, but that there remains some issues when putting road tankers on to rail.

It was again emphasised that DRS need to feed back to the Forum on what is needed to make commercial shipments viable.

4. Review of actions from last meeting

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – *David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts. Complete.* David circulated information on FirstGroup's consultation on their bid for the franchise and compiled a response based on this. Mark Norton responded to MTR's consultation on their bid. The FirstGroup response was modified to remove any references to that company and sent to the remaining three bidders (Arriva, Abellio and National Express).

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – *Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road. Complete.* The options appraisal has been completed and is currently with the Highland Council's Development and Infrastructure Committee. It is hoped that a decision on the road will be made shortly.

CTF(2014)M001/A001 – *David Swanson to feed back again to ScotRail regarding Club 55 and Edinburgh-Berwick services. Complete.* David fed back to ScotRail again and received similar information. It was agreed that David should put Gordon Doull in touch with ScotRail, as he was the one trying to make the booking.

CTF(2014)M004/A002 – *David Swanson to put Gordon Doull in touch with ScotRail*

CTF(2014)M001/A002 – *Iain Moncrieff to check with Harbours Authority whether the Thurso slipway is Council-owned. Complete.* Iain confirmed that the slipway is council-owned.

There was some discussion of this – it was felt that more needs to be done to prevent flooding in future. Roger Saxon noted that Iain Moncrieff is currently drawing up a flood defence scheme looking at around 20 locations in the Highlands.

David Flear noted that Richard Guest had drawn up a similar scheme in the past. Trudy Morris enquired as to the cost of defences as projected at that point. Roger said he thought it was around £50K.

It was agreed that more information was needed on this matter.

CTF(2014)M002/A003 – Chamber to find out more about flood defences in the Highlands

CTF(2014)M001/A003 – Chamber to write to Keith Brown and Serco NorthLink seeking assurances that a suitable vessel will be found for planned outages in 2016. **Complete.** The Chamber has written to Keith Brown regarding this matter and has also taken it up with Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

CTF(2014)M002/A004 – David Swanson to circulate letters from CTF to Keith Brown

CTF(2014)M001/A004 – Chamber to circulate information on GNS consultations to Forum. **Complete.**

CTF(2014)M001/A005 – Chamber to write to ScotRail to find out when wi-fi will be available on the Inverness – Wick / Thurso trains. **Complete.** John Yellowlees from ScotRail has confirmed that wi-fi will be available on the Inverness – Wick / Thurso line by late September 2014. In addition, plans are in progress to bring free wi-fi to Wick station.

CTF(2014)M001/A006 – Chamber to liaise with Dounreay Stakeholder Group on arranging a meeting with DRS. **Complete.** DRS and Dounreay Stakeholder Group members were in attendance.

CTF(2014)M001/A007 – David Swanson to circulate Safer Routes to Schools information to Forum. **Complete**

5. Transport Updates

Gail Ross met with Keith Brown last week and he confirmed that the Berriedale Braes upgrade is high on his list of priorities. She noted that he wants to see the upgrade completed by the end of his time as Transport Minister (end of 2016).

Gail noted that the ground investigation works had found rock which may make works more difficult.

Willie Mackay asked if there was any information about the rising projected costs of the work – it was confirmed that there is none at this time and that the final cost won't be known until studies are completed.

Roger Saxon asked what affects the priority of works – Gail noted that there are a number of factors including importance to area, traffic volume, etc. but that Keith Brown is personally pushing to see this project completed.

David Flear noted that the main focus has to be socio-economic benefits, not accident rates – Gail confirmed that Keith Brown has taken this on board.

John Green raised that barriers are still up following an accident on the north hairpin some time ago – Trudy confirmed that this is on the Chamber's radar and they will be working on this.

CTF(2014)M002/A005 – Chamber to contact BEAR Scotland regarding repairs following accident on Berriedale Braes

5.1 Roads – Highland Council

Gail Ross noted that there is an ongoing issue with speeding at Milton. An advisory limit of 30mph has been placed on the bridge on the Wick side of Milton and this extends to the end of the village.

5.2 Bus – Stagecoach

No representatives from Stagecoach were in attendance.

5.3 Sea – Scrabster Harbour

No representative from Scrabster was present – a written update was submitted and will be distributed to the Forum.

5.4 Sea – Wick Harbour

No representative from Wick Harbour was present – a written update was submitted and distributed to attendees along with the minutes.

5.5 Sea – Serco NorthLink Ferries

No Serco NorthLink representative was present and no written report was delivered.

CTF(2014)M002/A006 – *David Swanson to feed back to Serco regarding continued non-attendance at meetings*

David Swanson noted that Serco have recently been awarded the contract for the Caledonian Sleeper rail franchise.

5.6 Air – HIAL

William Sutherland delivered an update on behalf of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and Wick John O’Groats Airport. Of note:

- Chevron are back at the airport on a short-term contract, but it is hoped that this can be extended into the long-term
- Work is proceeding on a new hangar – this is a joint venture between NHV Helicopters / Chevron and HIAL
- Consultations on the GNS system went ahead – this is out to tender and with the Civil Aviation Authority for approval
- Recruitment continues – two air traffic controllers are currently in training and two new firefighters have been recruited
- He has met with SSE and things look promising
- The managing director of HIAL came up to discuss the ongoing issue with the dilapidated hangar and there has been some progress. William noted that they have now lost some parking space on the main apron due to the danger of debris from this building

William asked Gail Ross to feed back to the Highland Council regarding the approach road to the airport, which needs tidied up again.

CTF(2014)M002/A007 – *Gail Ross to feed back to Highland Council regarding airport access road*

William noted that passenger numbers are back to normal and that he hopes to see a rise.

David Flear asked if there has been any update on the Highland Council hangar. Trudy noted that HIE have engaged a consultant and work is in progress.

CTF(2014)M002/A008 – *David Swanson to feed back to Eann Sinclair regarding progress on the Highland Council hangar at Wick JOG Airport*

5.7 Rail – First ScotRail

Trudy noted that the Chamber have taken up ScotRail's lack of engagement with the Forum with Scottish Chambers.

Mark Norton asked whether they engage more with other areas in the Highlands – Trudy confirmed that they do not and that most of their efforts are confined to the Central Belt.

Trudy noted that the importance of engagement with local communities is one of the key points highlighted to bidders for the franchise.

Mark Norton wondered if there was any update on arranging a meeting with the Association of Community Rail Partnerships. David Swanson noted that James Wilkins is currently focused on the West Highland Line but that he plans to attend the next CTF meeting.

6. Any Other Business

No other business was raised.

Trudy Morris thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12th September in Wick, venue and time TBC.

8. Actions on-going from previous meetings

CTF(2013)M004/A001 – *David Swanson to contact ScotRail franchise bidders regarding consultation efforts. Ongoing.* A list of contacts was received from Transport Scotland. Mark Norton is currently working on a response to a letter of consultation received from one of the bidders (MTR) and once this is finished David will redraft the response to FirstGroup's consultation and submit it to all bidders.

CTF(2013)M004/A002 – *Eann Sinclair to feed back to Iain Moncrieff regarding B876 and Keiss road. Ongoing.* Highland Council are completing an options study on the road, to be followed by discussions on funding options. Further updates to be given as the situation progresses.

9. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2014)M002/A001 – *DRS to feed back to Chamber with list of companies talked to, discussions had and issues raised*

CTF(2014)M004/A002 – *David Swanson to put Gordon Doull in touch with ScotRail*

CTF(2014)M002/A003 – *Chamber to find out more about flood defences in the Highlands*

CTF(2014)M002/A004 – *David Swanson to circulate letters from CTF to Keith Brown*

CTF(2014)M002/A005 – *Chamber to contact BEAR Scotland regarding repairs following accident on Berriedale Braes*

CTF(2014)M002/A006 – *David Swanson to feed back to Serco regarding continued non-attendance at meetings*

CTF(2014)M002/A007 – *Gail Ross to feed back to Highland Council regarding airport access road*

CTF(2014)M002/A008 – *David Swanson to feed back to Eann Sinclair regarding progress on the Highland Council hangar at Wick JOG Airport*

Appendix A – Scrabster Harbour report for CTF 6th March 2014

Overall activity continues to be strong at Scrabster following the new quay becoming operational last year.

- Fishing - Landings through the port are 10% higher than last year with vessels now making maximum use of the chilling facilities in the fish market giving much greater flexibility to their landing times.
- Oil/Gas - activity has been strong since the beginning of 2014. Perceptions regarding the A9 continue to hamper marketing efforts.
- Cruise - Scrabster will again be exhibiting at Seatrade Miami later this month. Eight cruise arrivals are expected in 2014. The Trust is again grateful to Highland Council for the continued provision of courtesy buses.
- Renewables - It is encouraging to see Scotrenewables again using Scrabster for maintenance. AWS continue to store their device at the port.
- Infrastructure Plans - the planning application for the enterprise area at Scrabster farm was submitted on 31st January 2014.
- General Cargo - Timber exports continued to take place on a regular basis with 33,000 tonnes being exported in 2013. Indications are that this level of activity will continue for the next couple of years. Other general cargoes - fertilisers and Rock Salt remained in line with previous years. Fish cargo on the twice weekly cargo service from the Faroe Islands has remained steady.

Appendix B – Wick Harbour report for CTF 6th March 2014

Fishing: Activity continues as normal, mostly shellfish, with all landings consigned south by road.

Cargoes: Imported cargoes of coal, lime, road salt, steel pipe, and fertiliser, are expected to continue as normal. Export of large tonnages of timber is expected this year from site clearances for local windfarms.

Onshore Wind Turbines: Imports are planned this summer for Burn of Whilk and Stroupster. For Stroupster, nPower are having some issues with the Highland Council designated road routing from Wick Harbour, which is concerning us for our viability for future developments in the north east of the county.

Oil Related: Recent activity at Subsea7 is reflected in increased imports of steel pipe and towheads, and shipping movements. Confirmed contracts through 2014/15 should continue this activity.

Marina: Three longer berthing fingers are now in place as per last report and the old ones slotted in elsewhere bringing the total berths up to 80. Last season's visitor total was 298, coming mainly from all over the UK, France, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Infrastructure: Work has begun on constructing the new Heavy Lift Areas on Commercial Quay 1, with the contract awarded to Gunns, Lybster, Ltd. Completion is expected mid-May.

Henderson's have also started on repairs to the nearby concrete deck and wave wall and extending the wall to reduce overtopping on to the Martha Terrace and the quay during stormy weather.

Henderson's will also replace the damaged concrete roadway at Shaltigoe.

Hendersons contracts have been enabled by Scottish Government funding for Storm Damage from December 2012.

£250k has also been awarded from the NDA for dredging to the River Basin and approaches, and a Dredging Plan is currently being prepared.

Potential Business: The two major offshore windfarms currently planned in the Moray Firth near Wick are still awaiting construction consent from Marine Scotland, and the latest expectation is for a favourable announcement this month.

Future Plans: The business case for potential breakwater options, deep water berths and laydown areas, to expand the Harbour into Wick Bay, is currently being examined by our Business Consultants. This would be a major investment, and would cater for renewables construction, larger cargo vessels, oil and gas servicing, and offshore decommissioning. Renewables O&M can be done from our current facilities, but this would open up opportunities for larger construction and service vessels.

Gordon Doull, Vice Chairman, WHA.

March 2014

Appendix C – First ScotRail report for CTF 6th March 2014

A new national railcard – Two Together – has been launched, offering people of working age 30% off train journeys if they travel together.

Very sadly, Alastair McPherson who was the first managing director of the privatised ScotRail between 1997 and 2001 passed away on 28 February aged just 62. He abolished the £3 cycle charge, presided over the Far North Line's 125th anniversary celebrations in July 1999 and will be mainly remembered in Caithness for the introduction of the Class 158 trains and the Line's first-ever all-year Sunday service.