



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 15/06/2017

Time: 11:30am

Location: Wick John O'Groats Airport, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Thomas Meikle	Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Nicola Sinclair	Highland Council
Joanne Sutherland	Highland Council
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail Alliance
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Howard Little	Stagecoach North Scotland
Alisdair Goodall	Stagecoach North Scotland
Paul Linhart-MacAskill	Transport Scotland
William Sutherland	Wick John O'Groats Airport / HIAL

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:

Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Kathryn Scollie	Pentland Ferries
Mark Whitelocks	Stagecoach North Scotland
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 23.03.2017

2.1 There being no changes or amendments, the minutes were adopted as a true record of the meeting

3. Review of actions from last meeting

3.1 **CTF(2016)M001/A012** – *Iain Moncrieff & Gillian Coghill to review winter maintenance route priorities once new bus routes confirmed.* **COMPLETE**

It was noted that neither Iain Moncrieff nor Cllr Coghill are still in post in the area – Joanne Sutherland agreed to take this up with Graham Mackenzie

CTF(2017)M002/A001 – *Joanne Sutherland to discuss winter maintenance route priorities with Graham Mackenzie*

3.2 **CTF(2016)M002/A004** – *Chamber to follow up with Transport Scotland on custom livery to promote Far North Line.* **ONGOING**

Trudy noted that this matter continued to be covered under the Far North Line Review Team

3.3 **CTF(2016)M003/A002** – *Graham Mackenzie to provide an update on completion of parking enforcement works.* **COMPLETE**

No update was provided but it is understood that parking enforcement now in place

- 3.4 **CTF(2017)M001/A001** – Alex Macmanus to take up progression of Hoy Crossing works with Highland Council. **COMPLETE**

It was noted that these works have now been completed.

- 3.5 **CTF(2017)M001/A002** – Roger Saxon to take up active areas for parking enforcement with Shane Manning at Highland Council. **COMPLETE**

There was some discussion of this and it was noted that this related to areas with e.g. faded markings or unclear signage. Nicola Sinclair noted that the last update she had was that repainting was in progress as were studies to determine the level of contravention in the area.

It was agreed that Alex Macmanus would take this action forward.

CTF(2017)M002/A002 – Alex Macmanus to take up active areas for parking enforcement with Shane Manning at Highland Council.

- 3.6 **CTF(2017)M001/A003** – Chamber to circulate certain papers from Far North Line Review Team. **COMPLETE**

Trudy Morris confirmed that this had been done.

- 3.7 **CTF(2017)M001/A004** – Marco Bardelli to provide table of BEAR Scotland planned works. **COMPLETE**

Marco Bardelli provided this as part of his written update (**CTF(2017)M001/DOC001**)

- 3.8 **CTF(2017)M001/A005** – Marco Bardelli to take up issue with South Road traffic lights with BEAR Scotland. **COMPLETE**

Marco provided an update on this, noting that he had raised this with BEAR Scotland and that either BEAR or the Council would install the barriers.

Alex Macmanus agreed to follow this up with Tommy Deans at BEAR Scotland.

CTF(2017)M002/A003 – Alex Macmanus to follow up on South Road barriers with BEAR Scotland

- 3.9 **CTF(2017)M001/A006** – Marco Bardelli to update Forum once design approved for Scrabster. **COMPLETE**

Marco Bardelli provided this as part of his written update (**CTF(2017)M001/DOC001**)

- 3.10 **CTF(2017)M001/A007** – Stagecoach to put out press communication on timetable changes from 24 April. **COMPLETE**

This was done – Alisdair Goodall and Howard Little to provide an update on further timetable changes from 12 Jun as part of Stagecoach update

- 3.11 **CTF(2017)M001/A008** – *Alisdair Goodall to take up issues with parking in Pennyland Drive with Highland Council.* **COMPLETE**

Alisdair noted that the Pennyland Drive service had been reinstated and kept on past the initial planned trial period – based on feedback at the last Caithness Bus Users Group meeting it was clear that this service is important to users.

He further noted that a revised timetable for this service has been introduced with more relaxed timings, to allow drivers more time to negotiate these roads.

Alisdair noted that there is an ongoing problem with drivers disregards for parking on junctions, particularly around Pennyland Primary School. It was agreed that Alisdair would write a letter to the head teacher of the school regarding this.

CTF(2017)M002/A004 – *Alisdair Goodall to write to head teacher of Pennyland Primary School regarding parking issues*

There was some further discussion of this issue – Eann Sinclair noted that parking issues have been compounded with the introduction of a charge for off road parking.

Alex Macmanus noted that if drivers are parking dangerously, this is a police matter. Alisdair noted that Stagecoach do not want to damage relationships with the community, but that these parking issues are resulting in damage to vehicles. It was agreed that Alisdair would write to Police Scotland regarding this.

CTF(2017)M002/A005 – *Alisdair Goodall to write to Police Scotland regarding dangerous parking in Pennyland Drive*

- 3.12 **CTF(2017)M001/A009** – *Derek Glasgow to ask ScotRail about providing funding for the Forum.* **ONGOING**

Derek noted that he had secured funding for the Forum and would be in touch shortly regarding this matter.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Trudy Morris noted that Anna MacConnell from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority had raised road safety concerns regarding the growth in traffic from North Coast 500. It was generally felt that North Coast 500 was beneficial to the area, and should be celebrated, but that there had been some other concerns about road safety.
- 4.2 Trudy noted that there is a working group looking at this issue, and that the Chamber would write to them to get an update.

CTF(2017)M002/A006 – *Chamber to get update from NC500 working group on road safety*

5. Transport Updates

5.1 The ScotRail Alliance

5.1.1 Derek Glasgow gave an update on behalf of The ScotRail Alliance. Of note:

- They have a new Managing Director – Alex Hynes
- Performance has been better over the last while – there has been a recent dip due to Network Rail issues
- Refurbishments and improvements to the rolling stock have had beneficial impacts e.g. there is no longer an issue with radiators during hot weather

5.1.2 Trudy Morris raised an issue with the lack of catering on the 06:50 Thurso-Inverness service – Derek noted that this is due to organisational changes and that no staff are currently available to provide this service. There was some further discussion of this matter and it was agreed that the Forum would write a letter of complaint.

CTF(2017)M002/A007 – Chamber to draft letter of complaint from Forum regarding lack of catering on 06:50 Thurso-Inverness train

5.1.3 Trudy Morris provided an update on the Far North Line Review Team. Of note:

- Work is ongoing on linespeed improvements, and some of these have already been implemented
- ScotRail have put forward a new proposal to use Helmsdale as a hub, running 6 trains direct from Helmsdale to Inverness and 2 direct from Thurso-Inverness, with 4 running Thurso-Helmsdale
- Other improvements to the line are proposed with regards to e.g. level crossings, loops, etc.

5.1.4 Trudy emphasised the need to ensure that the area is not disadvantaged as a result of any change to rail services. It was agreed that the Chamber would circulate appropriate papers from the meeting to Forum members

CTF(2017)M002/A008 – Chamber to circulate appropriate Far North Line Review Team papers to Forum members

5.1.5 Derek Glasgow noted that he had done some work with NHS Highland to look at train times and appointments, but that this had been unsuccessful as NHS Highland were not willing to change their appointment system. Trudy noted that she had flagged this issue up separately with NHS Highland

5.1.6 Trudy gave an update on HITRANS' proposed sleeper service from Caithness to the Central Belt, noting that this is in the early scoping stages but that the current proposal would be to link with the Scrabster ferry and to leave Thurso at around 7.30pm.

- 5.1.7 Trudy further noted that there was a possibility for the service to carry freight, and that upgrades would be required to Thurso rail station if the service were to be put in place. She felt that any improvements to connectivity were to be applauded, but noted that there is a need to emphasise that existing services should not be impacted.

5.2 Direct Rail Services

- 5.2.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided. Trudy noted that she was not aware of any change from the update presented at the last meeting

5.3 Berriedale Braes

- 5.3.1 Trudy noted that this was covered in Marco Bardelli's written update (**CTF(2017)M001/DOC001**)
- 5.3.2 It was agreed that the Chamber would write to Transport Scotland to clarify whether the proposed 2018 start date indicated year 2017/18 or year 2018/19.

CTF(2017)M002/A009 – Chamber to clarify proposed start date for Berriedale Braes works

5.4 Highland Council

- 5.4.1 Joanne Sutherland provided an update on behalf of Highland Council. Of note:
- Works on the Killimster Moss are scheduled to start on 28 August and will last for three weeks – during this time the road will be closed entirely
 - Funding has been secured from the Strategic Timber Transport Fund to upgrade the Broubster to Brawlbin stretch of road
- 5.4.2 Eann Sinclair enquired as to details of the planned work on Killimster – Joanne noted that this would be planed back to the plinth and reinforced, but still allow for some movement. Underpinning of the road was trialled, but the existing foundations are in good condition and the Council does not want to disturb these.
- 5.4.3 Trudy enquired whether businesses had been advised about the road closure and whether there would be diversions in place. Joanne noted that businesses would be advised once the road orders were published, and that diversions would be put in place.
- 5.4.4 Serious concerns were raised over the impact of diversions on bus routes around the affected area. It was noted that this would lead to severe disruption and that many of the potential diversionary routes were not suitable for buses.

- 5.4.5 Alisdair Goodall noted that there would be potential for significant delays to both southbound and northbound X99 services, as well as the impact on local services in the area. This could have significant impacts with regards to connecting ferry services.
- 5.4.6 Trudy noted that there were potential far-reaching consequences from this closure. Howard Little noted that it would have impacts across the entire Stagecoach network in the region.
- 5.4.7 Alisdair Goodall further noted that this is a strategic route for the area and that they can't leave people without a bus service for three weeks – even using side roads as a diversionary route would leave significant areas with no service.
- 5.4.8 Trudy noted that the Council needs to look at this as a matter of urgency, and to ensure that service providers and the travelling public are notified well in advance.
- 5.4.9 It was agreed that Alisdair Goodall and Joanne Sutherland would discuss this as a matter of urgency and report back to the Forum as soon as possible.

CTF(2017)M002/A010 – *Alisdair Goodall and Joanne Sutherland to discuss impacts of Killimster Moss works and report back to Forum*

5.5 BEAR Scotland

- 5.5.1 A written update on planned works, Berriedale Braes and works at Scrabster was submitted by Marco Bardelli (**CTF(2017)M001/DOC001**).
- 5.5.2 Trudy asked attendees to read over the update and feed any issues back to the Chamber to be sent on to Marco.

5.6 Stagecoach North Scotland

- 5.6.1 Alisdair Goodall provided an update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland. Of note:
 - They are unhappy to have had to make a third service change in six months – this has caused a number of problems and they were aiming for a period of stability following changes on 24 April
 - These changes have come about as a result of changes to the school day, which has been planned for over a year, but the changes to Council contracts came at short notice
 - Stagecoach have tried to keep service changes to a minimum but there have been some impacts – they don't want to make any further changes until winter to keep the network stable
 - There have been some wider issues – e.g. with school pupils travelling to North Highland College – and arrangements have been made to get these pupils home
 - Stagecoach have retained the DSRL contract, which should further assist with stability
 - Evening services on the X99 are being used, and issues with connecting to the Scrabster ferry have been sorted

- X99 traffic from Caithness is down, but traffic from Sutherland is up
 - Newer vehicles may be coming in for use on the X99 route, but this is not yet confirmed
 - Issues raised with toilets on X99 services are being addressed – Alisdair is in direct communication with some customers on this and is addressing issues as they are raised
- 5.6.2 With regards to changes in the X99 traffic, Trudy enquired as to whether this was impacting on any service in particular – Alisdair noted that the mid-morning service is a concern. He further noted that they were not aware of any reason for this change, but that now services are stabilised in the area they can look at marketing efforts and e.g. offer cheaper fares on less used services
- 5.6.3 Both William Sutherland and Derek Glasgow noted that the downturn in the oil and gas market has had an impact on their passenger numbers and that this may be similar for Stagecoach.
- 5.6.4 Kris Bevan noted that with regards to the X99, NorthLink Ferries have had constructive meetings with Stagecoach and are happy to see what they can do help if there are any issues with passenger decline from ferries.
- 5.6.5 Eann Sinclair noted that the level of uncertainty with regards to services is the key issue – there was general agreement with this and it was agreed that Nicola Sinclair should take these issues back to the Council.

CTF(2017)M002/A011 – *Cllr Nicola Sinclair to take back issues with contract changes and uncertainty to Highland Council*

5.7 Scrabster Harbour

- 5.7.1 A written update was provided – see **CTF(2017)M002/DOC002**

5.8 Wick Harbour Authority

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

5.9 Serco NorthLink Ferries

- 5.9.1 Kris Bevan delivered an update on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries. Of note:
- Passenger numbers year-to-date are up 8%
 - Non-commercial vehicles year-to-date are up 12% - anecdotally, there appears to be an increase in motorhomes, caravans, etc. which may be linked to NC500
 - Freight is down 1%
 - There are no specific operational issues to note at this time
 - They are doing lots of social media around Caithness and attractions to visit in the area, etc.

- The new peak season timetable introduces 9 additional sailings
- Access improvements have been introduced at Scrabster
- There have been a number of successful applications to the sponsorship scheme from organisations based in Caithness
- They have been recruiting locally for apprenticeships and have recruited 6 new deckhands

5.9.2 Trudy delivered an update on a ferry services procurement event she attended on Orkney:

- Scottish Government is consulting on options for the next round of ferry services procurement, including whether these contracts could be delivered by an in-house operator
- The general feeling amongst attendees was that these should remain as tendered services – this offers better opportunities for engagement
- The service remains a lifeline and should not see any reductions

5.9.3 Trudy asked Kris Bevan if he had any update on this – Kris noted that his role is operational and that Paul Linhart-MacAskill could update on policy issues.

5.9.4 Paul delivered an update on behalf of Transport Scotland. Of note:

- The procurement policy review is ongoing, with various options remaining to be investigated, and is scheduled to end in Summer or Autumn 2017
- The Serco NorthLink contract is to be extended – discussions are ongoing with regards to this, but there will be no change in operations
- In 2015 the Scottish Government introduced a review appraising the Northern Isles Ferry Services with regards to e.g. vehicle specifications, timetabling, etc. This is running concurrently with the procurement review and is scheduled to conclude in Autumn 2017

5.9.5 Trudy noted that the Orkney community felt that tendered services had more scope for community input than those delivered by an in-house public sector operator.

5.9.6 Eann Sinclair asked for more details on the appraisal – Paul noted that they are looking at all options and that nothing has been discounted from the STAG appraisal. He noted that the appraisal started from a point of looking at how services could work, rather than starting with the service as it currently stands. Paul noted that they do have to be mindful of e.g. the vessel tonnage available on the open market as part of the appraisal.

5.9.7 Paul noted that a freight fares review is also ongoing, looking in a holistic fashion at overall freight costs across lifeline ferry services.

5.9.8 Trudy asked that Paul come back and update the Forum once the various reviews have been completed.

5.9.9 Trudy noted that the general feeling from the Forum is that the Northern Isles contract has improved under Serco – there is significantly greater engagement with communities on the mainland, as well as with those on the isles.

5.10 Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL

5.10.1 William Sutherland delivered an update on behalf of Wick John O’Groats Airport / HIAL. Of note:

- Oil and gas traffic continues to drop
- There has been a drop in flight numbers – this is related to Eastern’s cuts on the Wick-Aberdeen service and a drop in helicopter refuelling flights
- HIAL are looking at a remote air traffic management system
- Loganair are no longer operating a franchise agreement with Flybe – Eastern Airways have signed up to a similar agreement
- With regards to the airfield, a VOR Navaid is being replaced and RNAV approaches are in place. William noted that the approach road to the airport needs attention and that signage to the airport has disappeared
- SSE, HIAL and NHV met to discuss potential work around the BOWL project – this has had a positive outcome
- HIAL are looking to update how they communicate with external stakeholders e.g. through greater use of social media

5.10.2 With regards to the remote ATM system, Trudy asked if this was definitely going ahead. William noted that no Board decision has been made, but that if the decision is made to go ahead the Forum should push to have this based in Wick rather than Inverness.

5.10.3 Trudy noted concerns around centralisation and job losses in the area, and that Caithness would offer a good location for a remote ATM facility to be based. There was some discussion around this and it was noted that basing the facility in Caithness would lead to an increase in jobs. It was agreed that the Forum should write to the HIAL Board on this matter.

CTF(2017)M002/A012 – Chamber to draft letter from Forum to HIAL Board on remote ATM facility

5.10.4 With regards to the Eastern / Loganair / Flybe situation, it was noted that Eastern are now competing with Loganair in certain markets and suggested that Loganair should be approached about operating a service on the Wick-Aberdeen route.

5.10.5 There was some discussion of this and Trudy noted that Eastern are introducing timing changes to their service on the route. It was agreed that the Chamber would contact Loganair regarding the Aberdeen route.

CTF(2017)M002/A013 – Chamber to contact Loganair regarding Wick-Aberdeen route

5.10.6 With regards to issues on the airport approach road and signage, it was agreed that Alex Macmanus would take these up

CTF(2017)M002/A014 – Alex Macmanus to take up issues with airport approach road and signage

- 5.10.7 With regards to the SSE / HIAL / NHV meeting, Eann Sinclair noted that HIE have some ongoing work on the potential for Caithness to deliver services to the West of Shetland oil fields, and that there are some promising findings from this.
- 5.10.8 Alisdair Goodall queried whether there has been increased demand to the airport, noting that there had been discussions previously around delivering a bus service on this route – William noted that this was not the case at the moment, but that NC500 is having a positive impact on passenger numbers.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Nicola Sinclair asked if there was anything that attendees wanted her to take away as an action from the meeting – Derek Glasgow asked if she could take up issues with Network Rail.

CTF(2017)M002/A014 – *Nicola Sinclair to take up issues with Network Rail*

- 7.2 Eann Sinclair noted that HITRANS had published their draft Regional Transport Strategy and that the Chamber was in the process of organizing a separate meeting with HITRANS to discuss this. David Swanson confirmed this and noted that he would circulate details of the meeting when available.

CTF(2017)M002/A015 – *David Swanson to circulate details of meeting with HITRANS*

8. Press Communications

- 8.1 It was agreed that press communications should focus on the upcoming period of stability and clarity with regards to local transport services, and on the benefits of bringing together operators for the benefit of the travelling public.

9. Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting will be 14th September 2017, to be held in Thurso.

10. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

CTF(2016)M002/A004 – *Chamber to follow up with Transport Scotland on custom livery to promote Far North Line.*

11. Actions arising from this meeting

Appendix A – Direct Rail Services

DRS Georgemas Railhead update

March 2017

DRS continue to support the NDA with their mission to deliver 'safe and sustainable solutions to the challenge of nuclear clean-up and waste management of the UK's nuclear legacy'.

Operations in relation to the Dounreay Programme continue and DRS are also supporting the MoD with operations in relation to fuel movements from Vulcan to Sellafield.

Discussions are ongoing between Restore, Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd and DRS in relation to the transport of archive materials from various nuclear facilities to Wick.

DRS has also been working with Network Rail and stakeholders creating a paper for the Scottish Government outlining the investment choices for the funders and the Far North line is featured in this.

As an open access terminal, DRS would welcome approaches from any operator with commercial opportunities which do not conflict with the terminal's prime purpose. Since our last update we have not been approached by any other operator however we have once again highlighted the availability of the terminal at the latest Rail Freight Group meeting in Scotland.

Kind Regards,

Rachael Storey

Communications & Marketing Manager