



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 14/09/2017

Time: 11:30am

Location: Wick Town Hall, Wick

Present

Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Chair)
David Swanson	Caithness Chamber of Commerce (Minute Secretary)
Billy Manson	Association of Caithness Community Councils
June Love	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Victoria Ross	Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd
Roger Saxon	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
Thomas Meikle	Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council
Mike Lunan	Friends of the Far North Line
Alex Macmanus	Highland Council
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Cllr Nicola Sinclair	Highland Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Highland Council
Cllr Willie Mackay	Highland Council
Ross Thomson	ScotRail Alliance
John Strathearn	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Kris Bevan	Serco NorthLink Ferries
Alisdair Goodall	Stagecoach North Scotland
Wayne Malcolm	Stagecoach North 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:

Eann Sinclair	Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Rachael Storey	Direct Rail Services
Cllr Matthew Reiss	Highland Council
Julie McGee	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Anna MacConnell	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
Derek Glasgow	ScotRail Alliance
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour
Marco Bardelli	Transport Scotland

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 14.06.2017

2.1 Kris Bevan noted some minor amendments to points **5.9.1** and **5.9.3** – subject to these amendments being made, the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Review of actions from last meeting

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

Graham confirmed via email that currently there are no changes to the winter route priority list from last year.

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

Alex confirmed that he has spoken with Council Officers in Inverness who advise that the staff shortages have now been addressed and they would hope to have wardens visit Wick and Thurso more than once a month. He has asked that because of the scale of the problem in both towns that to make a difference visits would need to be more regular than once a month

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

Barriers are now in place on the path leading from Seaforth Avenue onto the A99 at South Road.

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

Alisdair Goodall updated on this action – they have been working with the local community and Pentland Housing Association to try and find a solution to this problem. There has been some degree of success but they may have to revisit as there are still some problems.

Alisdair noted that they are still trying to source a vehicle of appropriate size for this route, which may address some of the issues.

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

As **A004** above.

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

An email was sent to Tracey Urry at Highland Council, update received and circulated and Forum members invited to give feedback to working group – David Swanson confirmed that some members had provided feedback and that this has been fed in to the working group.

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

A letter was drafted and sent and a response received – following this response a number of additional letters had been drafted and sent to ScotRail, Humza Yousaf MSP, and Bill Reeve (Director of Rail, Transport Scotland / Chair, Far North Line Review Team)

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

These were circulated

- 3.9 **CTF(2017)M002/A009** – Chamber to clarify proposed start date for Berriedale Braes works. **COMPLETE**

David Swanson noted that the contract for these works is now out to tender – assuming all goes to plan, works should start Q2 2018 and be complete by Q2 2019.

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

Works have now started and a temporary replacement timetable is in place.

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

Nicola Sinclair updated on this – she discussed this with William Gilfillan, who acknowledged that there had been issues but felt that lessons had been learned and commitments made to communicate better in future.

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

A letter was drafted and a response received from HIAL. Trudy Morris noted that William Sutherland had provided a paper to the Wick John O’Groats Airport Consultative Committee on this – William confirmed he was happy for this to be circulated to Forum members. **See CTF(2017)M003/DOC001**

Trudy asked whether any of the options would involve centralisation – there was some discussion of this and it was noted that all options would involve centralisation and that controlled airspace will be brought in.

Roger Saxon raised his concerns over resilience with a centralised control centre – William noted that resilience would be built in.

Trudy noted that the HIAL Board were due to hold a meeting in Caithness in November. It was agreed that the Forum should write to them to request a meeting at this time to discuss ATM services.

CTF(2017)M003/A001 – Chamber to write to HIAL Board to request meeting in November

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

Trudy noted that there had been significant changes to Loganair’s provision in the area, including timetable changes from 1 September. She further noted that this would be discussed at the Airport Consultative Committee and that any relevant information would be fed back to the Forum.

CTF(2017)M003/A002 – Chamber to feed back discussions at WJACC to CTF members

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

Alex noted that the signage has been erected. He has asked again for the left hand verge as you head up to the airport to be cut.

- 3.15 **CTF(2017)M002/A015** – Cllr Nicola Sinclair to take up issues with Network Rail. **ONGOING**

Nicola noted that she is working on this and is in touch with Derek Glasgow at the ScotRail Alliance

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 Trudy Morris made a general comment that there seems to have been a significant deterioration in air, bus and rail services since the last meeting.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 The ScotRail Alliance

- 5.1.1 Ross Thomson gave an update on fleet performance figures over the past 13 periods:

- There has been improvement over the last 6 weeks and they are currently showing their best performance ever on the route
- Of the top ten incidents in the last 6 weeks, the majority of these have been as a result of track infrastructure issues

- 5.1.2 Nicola Sinclair noted that she would be interested in seeing these figures with regards to action **CTF(2017)M002/A015** – Ross & Nicola agreed to work together on this.

CTF(2017)M003/A003 – Nicola Sinclair to contact Ross Thomson with regards to infrastructure issues on Far North Line

- 5.1.3 Mike Lunan noted an issue with a cancellation in Wick and queried whether there was still a fitter based in Wick and whether parts are warehoused in the area. He also raised an issue with a recent cancellation due to crew shortages – he asked what ScotRail are doing to ensure this is not an issue.

- 5.1.4 Ross noted that ScotRail have two fitters in Wick but are unable to warehouse an exhaustive store of parts. He explained that many minor repairs can be addressed but that this particular incident, which was due to striking ballast on the track with subsequent damage to a hydrostatic pipe, required parts

not usually held in Wick and access to the underside of the train and work had to be carried out at the depot.

- 5.1.5 With regards to the staffing issue, Ross noted that he was unable to comment but that he would take this back and get an update from the appropriate person.

CTF(2017)M003/A004 – *Ross Thomson to get update from ScotRail on staffing issues on Far North Line*

- 5.1.6 Alisdair Goodall noted his feeling that the comment regarding staffing was unfair to ScotRail and that many businesses have staff shortages from time to time.

- 5.1.7 With regards to the incidents caused by track infrastructure issues, Cllr Raymond Bremner queried why there was no Network Rail representative present. It was explained that ScotRail and Network Rail operate a “deep alliance”, and that ScotRail representatives are present on behalf of this alliance. Raymond felt it would be better to have an individual representative from Network Rail present – it was agreed that the Chamber would discuss this with Derek Glasgow.

CTF(2017)M003/A005 – *Chamber to discuss possibility of Network Rail attendance with Derek Glasgow*

5.2 Direct Rail Services

- 5.2.1 A written update was provided to attendees – see **CTF(2017)M003/DOC002**

- 5.2.2 Trudy noted that a question regarding Direct Rail Services had been raised at a recent Dounreay Stakeholder Group and noted that the update would be passed on to June Love with regards to this.

CTF(2017)M003/A006 – *Chamber to pass on DRS update to June Love*

- 5.2.3 Roger Saxon noted that concerns had been raised regarding the operational capacity of the crane and its suitability for use for other freight – it was agreed that this would be clarified with DRS.

CTF(2017)M003/A007 – *Chamber to clarify operational capacity of Georgemas crane with DRS*

- 5.2.4 June Love noted that if commercial freight cannot be brought through the terminal, the crane will end up unused once the nuclear traffic has stopped.

- 5.2.5 Trudy noted that there is hope to run freight as part of HITRANS’ proposed sleeper service – Mike noted that this is the case but that this service is still in the early phases.

5.3 Berriedale Braes

- 5.3.1 Trudy noted that this was covered under the update on **CTF(2017)M002/A009**.

5.4 Highland Council

- 5.4.1 Alex Macmanus noted that the main update for Highland Council was the progression of the Killimster Moss works.
- 5.4.2 Cllr Willie Mackay noted that the work done is being delivered in-house and that it will be a 15-20 year fix rather than a permanent solution, but that it is welcome to see this progressing.
- 5.4.3 Mike Lunan asked for clarification on the end date of the works – Willie noted that this would be 29 September.

5.5 BEAR Scotland

- 5.5.1 Trudy noted that a written update was provided – see **CTF(2017)M003/DOC003** – and that attendees should feed back any comments they have on this.

5.6 Stagecoach North Scotland

- 5.6.1 Alisdair Goodall provided an update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland. Of note:
- Following a period of significant network changes, their primary aim is to allow the current network to stabilise
 - The 82 service has shown significant passenger reduction and they are looking at options to reverse this, including possibly serving Wick Retail Park
 - The winter timetable for the X99 comes in on 2 October
 - The current evening service on the X99 is not working well and may not come on next year
 - Following the demise of Andrew's Coaches, Stagecoach have picked up temporary contracts to 2 October, but these may be extended to early 2018 to allow retendering work to be carried out
- 5.6.2 Trudy Morris noted that she had raised issues with reliability on the 82, which had been running consistently very late, but did not get an answer as to why. Alisdair felt that this would best be addressed by Mark Whitelocks at the Caithness Bus Users Group meeting on 15 September.
- 5.6.3 Trudy asked if there was any update on new vehicles – Alisdair noted his understanding that ten vehicles would be cascaded to the area.
- 5.6.4 Cllr Raymond Bremner queried whether any of these would be low floor – Alisdair noted that they would not be as their contract with Dounreay requires the use of coaches. There was some further discussion around this and that Stagecoach may be able to look at bringing in more low floor buses dependent on the outcome of retendering of certain school contracts.
- 5.6.5 Raymond asked for a timetable for cascading of the vehicles – Alisdair noted that Mark Whitelocks could update on this at the Caithness Bus Users Group.

- 5.6.6 Raymond queried whether the new buses would lead to a reduction in maintenance requirements, and whether the existing maintenance schedule was sufficient. Alisdair noted that their maintenance is audited by VOSA and that these checks are generally passed. He noted that due to the nature of his role with Stagecoach, he was not best placed to answer questions regarding the maintenance schedule.

It was agreed that Alisdair would get an update on Stagecoach's maintenance schedule and report this back to the Forum.

CTF(2017)M003/A008 – *Alisdair Goodall to feed back information on Stagecoach maintenance schedule*

- 5.6.7 Alisdair noted that if the Caithness Councillors would like to meet with Mark Whitelocks, he would be happy to arrange this. It was agreed that Alisdair should arrange a meeting.

CTF(2017)M003/A009 – *Alisdair Goodall to arrange meeting with Caithness Councillors and Mark Whitelocks*

- 5.6.8 Trudy noted that the issue is the loss of confidence within the community, and that Stagecoach needed some good news. Alisdair noted that due to limited Council budgets they have to go for the cheapest option when looking at services, but that this has effects on other parts of the network. Raymond noted that a loss of confidence in the service means loss of passengers, making services commercially unviable, and that Councils may have to look at a different model of service delivery.

- 5.6.9 Cllr Nicola Sinclair asked if there are any plans to service the East Caithness Community Facility. It was agreed that Alisdair and Nicola would discuss this further and that Alisdair would feed this back for consideration when Stagecoach are looking at future service changes.

CTF(2017)M003/A010 – *Alisdair Goodall and Cllr Nicola Sinclair to discuss service to East Caithness Community Facility*

- 5.6.10 Cllr Willie Mackay noted his congratulations to Stagecoach for stepping in to deal with school contracts following the demise of Andrew's Coaches. Mike Lunan queried what due diligence Highland Council had carried out around these contracts – it was agreed that Trudy Morris would raise this at the Caithness Bus Users Group and feed back to the Forum.

CTF(2017)M003/A011 – *Trudy Morris to raise due diligence around Andrew's Coaches with Highland Council*

- 5.6.11 Roger Saxon noted that he would take an action to ask why Doune require coaches on their contracted services.

CTF(2017)M003/A012 – *Roger Saxon to ask why Doune require use of coaches on contracted services*

5.7 Scrabster Harbour

5.7.1 No attendee was present and no written update provided.

5.8 Wick Harbour Authority

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

5.8.2 It was agreed that the Chamber would ask Wick Harbour to provide an update for the next meeting.

CTF(2017)M003/A013 – *Chamber to ask Wick Harbour to provide update for next meeting*

5.9 Serco NorthLink Ferries

5.9.1 Kris Bevan delivered an update on behalf of Serco NorthLink Ferries. Of note:

- Over the summer period there have been zero cancelled services and few delays
- Passenger and non-commercial vehicle numbers for June-August are up year-on-year
- Freight volumes are also up
- RET has been announced for the route but there is no further detail at the moment – it is hoped this will boost passenger numbers
- Scrabster Harbour now has a charging point for electric vehicles – it is hoped something similar can be installed at Stromness
- The scheduled dry-dock of the *MV Hamnavoe* is likely to take place in January 2018

5.9.2 Trudy enquired as to whether a replacement vessel had been found for the dry-dock – Kris noted that they were working with Transport Scotland on this but had no update at the moment. It was agreed that the Forum would write to Transport Scotland on this matter.

CTF(2017)M003/A014 – *Forum to send letter to Transport Scotland regarding Hamnavoe dry-dock*

5.9.3 Trudy noted that the Chamber had written to Humza Yousaf MSP regarding the delay in retendering the Northern Isles Ferry Services contract and raising concerns around the possibility of a public sector bid. She noted that the feeling both in Caithness and Orkney was that a private sector operator gives more accountability. It was agreed that this letter and the response to it would be circulated.

CTF(2017)M003/A015 – *Chamber to circulate letter to Humza Yousaf MSP and response*

5.9.4 Alisdair Goodall enquired as to whether the introduction of RET would have any impact on foot passengers, as opposed to those taking a vehicle. David Swanson noted that Transport Scotland had done some work assessing the introduction of RET on the Western Isles and that he would send this information to Alisdair.

CTF(2017)M003/A016 – *David Swanson to send information on RET impact to Alisdair Goodall*

- 5.9.5 Alisdair Goodall queried whether issues with bus connections at Scrabster had been resolved. Kris noted that they had and that the 09:20 service also added resilience to this.
- 5.9.6 Mike Lunan noted that he was familiar with franchise extensions in rail and that there should be no cause for worry over this. Kris Bevan noted that Serco NorthLink will continue to operate the route until this process is complete.

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. He noted that passenger traffic is down, and that there may be more to update on this following the Airport Consultative Committee meeting.
- 5.10.2 Trudy Morris noted that the competition between Eastern / Flybe and Loganair may be healthy in the short term for other locations, but there are concerns that it will have impacts on Wick. William Sutherland noted that there may be opportunities for Eastern / Flybe on the Wick-Aberdeen route, and that the drop in oil and gas traffic has hopefully bottomed out. Trudy noted the concerns around pricing on this route.
- 5.10.3 William noted that they have been in discussions with SSE regarding the Beatrice project – NHV Helicopters are renting one third of their office and hangar space at the airport to SSE.
- 5.10.4 Cllr Raymond Bremner noted that oil and gas traffic can be damaging in some ways with regards to pricing. Trudy noted that oil and gas commuters are now choosing to drive to Aberdeen rather than fly, in part due to pricing. Alisdair Goodall noted that the change in shift patterns has also had an effect on this traffic.
- 5.10.5 William noted that the nav aids are in place and working fine, and that there will be some helicopter traffic as a result of the major windfarm projects.
- 5.10.6 June Love noted that there was a comment at the Dounreay Stakeholder Group regarding nuclear flights and air traffic control.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 June Love noted that the Caithness Bus Action Group had held their first meeting recently – David Swanson noted that he had met with Cllr Struan Mackie, one of the organisers of this, and that there had been agreement to work together.

- 7.2 Alisdair Goodall noted that with regards to previous discussions on timetable displays at bus stops, Stagecoach, Highland Council, HITRANS and Aberdeen City Council had held a conference call to discuss this and that there should be swift improvement.

8. Press Communications

- 8.1 It was felt that the increase on the ferries was good news – Roger Saxon noted that Scrabster Harbour would be delivering a speech at a Nuclear Decommissioning Authority stakeholder event in Cumbria which should highlight some of the good news stories in the area.

9. Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 It was proposed that the next meeting would be held on 8th March 2018.

10. Actions ongoing from previous meetings

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

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

CTF(2017)M002/A015 – Cllr Nicola Sinclair to take up issues with Network Rail. **ONGOING**

11. Actions arising from this meeting

CTF(2017)M003/A001 – Chamber to write to HIAL Board to request meeting in November

CTF(2017)M003/A002 – Chamber to feed back discussions at WJACC to CTF members

CTF(2017)M003/A003 – Nicola Sinclair to contact Ross Thomson with regards to infrastructure issues on Far North Line

CTF(2017)M003/A004 – Ross Thomson to get update from ScotRail on staffing issues on Far North Line

CTF(2017)M003/A005 – Chamber to discuss possibility of Network Rail attendance with Derek Glasgow

CTF(2017)M003/A006 – Chamber to pass on DRS update to June Love

CTF(2017)M003/A007 – Chamber to clarify operational capacity of Georgemas crane with DRS

CTF(2017)M003/A008 – Alisdair Goodall to feed back information on Stagecoach maintenance schedule

CTF(2017)M003/A009 – Alisdair Goodall to arrange meeting with Caithness Councillors and Mark Whitelocks

CTF(2017)M003/A010 – Alisdair Goodall and Cllr Nicola Sinclair to discuss service to East Caithness Community Facility

CTF(2017)M003/A011 – Trudy Morris to raise due diligence around Andrew's Coaches with Highland Council

CTF(2017)M003/A012 – Roger Saxon to ask why Doune require use of coaches on contracted services

CTF(2017)M003/A013 – Chamber to ask Wick Harbour to provide update for next meeting

CTF(2017)M003/A014 – Forum to send letter to Transport Scotland regarding Hamnavoe dry-dock

CTF(2017)M003/A015 – Chamber to circulate letter to Humza Yousaf MSP and response

CTF(2017)M003/A016 – David Swanson to send information on RET impact to Alisdair Goodall