



## CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD IN WICK ASSEMBLY ROOMS ON FRIDAY 15th JANUARY 2010

**Present:**

John Green, (Chair)	
Rob Gibson MSP	
Angela Donaldson,	Highlands & Islands Airports Limited
Billy Manson	Halkirk Community Council
Cathel Macaskill	Transerv Scotland
Christine Dodd	Local Transport Officer
Coreen Campbell	Caithness Community Transport
Cllr Donnie Mackay	Highland Council
Eann Sinclair	CNSRP
George Devine	Stagecoach
Ian Moncrieff	Highland Council
Janet Aykroyd	Member of Public
Mark Norton	DORLAG
Cllr Robert Coghill	Highland Council
Rod Johnstone	Scrabster Harbour Trust
Trudy Morris	Caithness Chamber of Commerce
Veda Swanson	Stagecoach

**In Attendance:** Koreen MacDougall, David Shearer

**1. Apologies**

Louise Smith, Ranald Robertson, Anna MacConnell, Cllr David Flear, Gordon Doull, Randall Bargelt, William Mainus, Angus Macinnes, David Summers, Ken Nicol, Malcolm Bremner, Colin Johnston.

## **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting 02/10/2009 were approved as a true record of the meeting.

## **3. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes**

Eann Sinclair CNSRP provided the meeting with an update on progress after the meeting with Energy Minister Lord Hunt in Thurso. Eann reported that the most significant update is that the UK Government Department of Energy and Climate Change have now started planning their own Marine Action Plan. As a result of the meeting with Lord Hunt, several representatives of Caithness have been able to join the various steering groups for this Marine Action Plan. Eann further stated that he is a member of the infrastructure steering group and that a draft Marine Action Plan is expected to be produced in March 2010.

## **4. Transport/CNSRP Action Plan Update – Eann Sinclair**

Eann Sinclair explained that the CNSRP Action Plan which is republished on a quarterly basis has ten high priority areas which they are pursuing. Eann explained that one of these areas is transport which covers road, rail and air. The latest version of this plan has activities for

- Air – Wick Airport, high intensity lighting.
- Roads – Berriedale, Feasibility study funding
- Rail – Freight, FNL studies commissioned.

Mark Norton queried if HITRANS have come up with any conclusions on any studies commissioned. Eann reported that it is his understanding that HITRANS are due to commission a study in either January or February 2010.

The Chair thanked Eann for his update.

## **5. Parliament Public Petition Report – Koreen MacDougall**

Koreen MacDougall provided the forum with the following report;

- Following the meeting held on 2nd October Koreen wrote to Stewart Stevenson, Scottish Government's Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change asking him to raise the proposed Thurso Bypass and A9 improvements to Berriedale Braes for strategic consideration in Scottish Government, enclosing a copy of the Caithness Transport Vision for his consideration.
- The letter was passed on and CTF received a reply from the Trunk Road & Integration Policy team from Transport Scotland in November - the investment required to construct a Thurso Bypass would not represent sufficient value for money, or meet the 'strategic needs of the route' and it was suggested that this would more appropriately be considered at local level.
- With regard to the Berriedale Braes, Transport Scotland had instructed Transerv to examine the Caithness Transport Vision and report back with recommendations, (this was the same information as was in The Highland Council TECS briefing paper that Cllr Laing passed on to me for the last transport forum meeting in October).
- Koreen reported that when preparing for today's meeting she had realised that the letter said that the report had been received and immediately telephoned the Transport Scotland team and asked for a copy of the report. Unfortunately at this point the report is not publicly available as it has been returned to Scotland Transerv for more information. Koreen stated that when it is returned to Transport Scotland, they will contact all

interested parties (as per the document from Cllr Laing) and arrange meeting therefore there is no further progression until we learn what the document holds.

Moving on now to discuss Scottish Parliament and the Public Petitions Process.

### **Parliament**

- On 21<sup>st</sup> November Koreen attended a conference in Holyrood entitled “Understanding and Influencing Your Parliament”.
- The aim of the event was to help smaller groups campaign more effectively, and ensure that their voice is heard in Scottish Parliament.
- The day was excellent. There was a range of speakers in the morning, including MSPs and ordinary lay people that had taken a campaign forward and driven for change. The afternoon workshops focused on “How to raise your issue”, and looked at committees, public petitions, cross party groups and running a campaign. There was input from MSPs, radio news reporters, press and petitioners that had effectively brought about change.
- The two campaigns that had achieved a level of success had gone through the Public Petition Committee and both women speakers that fed back to the delegates were very positive about their experience. The Public Petitions Committee had visited the campaign group and listened to them, advising them about being concise about exactly what it was they wanted to achieve, and in both cases the petitions have brought about changes. Both campaigns had received strong backing from an MSP.
- Advice was given upon how to plan and submit a Public Petition: Initially go to one of your MSPs to seek help, and then write to all of your MSPs asking for support and assistance. Koreen stated that she had invited Rob Gibson MSP as Rob is very supportive of the need to improve the Caithness transport infrastructure, and that he is also a member of the Transport Committee in Scottish Parliament. Koreen stated that she was certain that Rob would add weight to any campaign that the Caithness Transport Forum chooses to run.
- It was explained that all public petitions that are admissible to the committee have equal importance and are considered upon the merit of the issue raised and that there should be a concise outcome desired.
- Koreen put it to the forum to consider running a campaign, and submitting a petition for re-alignment of the A9 Trunk Road to the east of Berriedale Cemetery.
- Koreen stated that there are specific reasons for this suggestion, and she wanted to make assurances that this does not lessen the importance of air, rail or sea transport links to Caithness. Koreen provided a summary of reasons for the proposal;:
  1. The Public Petitions Committee is visiting Thurso in May this year, which is the ideal time to present the petition publicly. It also gives us time to consider the requested report from Transport Scotland and plan an effective strategy for the campaign, rallying support and press coverage over the next few months. There are major industry events in the next 2 months, the Dounreay competition and the announcement of the Pentland Firth seabed lease and there is no doubt that the proposed Berriedale improvements will be welcomed by all sectors.
  2. The proposed re-alignment already has the backing of key individuals and agencies so it will be one strong, collective voice we will be campaigning with which will be truly representative of the needs of Caithness.
  3. Anna MacConnell NDA has passed on the information that HITRANS have confirmed £20k and The Highland Council has confirmed £10k towards a

feasibility study for the A9 re-alignment proposal. The remaining £10k required is being decided as we speak – Anna and Randall Bargelt have put in their apologies for this morning's meeting as they have a teleconference with colleagues in Cumbria to discuss the request, so fingers crossed that this is approved.

4. Scottish Government agency Transport Scotland is waiting for Transerv's recommendations with regard to the proposed improvements as outlined in the Caithness Transport Vision.
  5. It is a 'bite size' chunk of the Caithness Transport Vision, down scaled from previous proposals with a very specific outcome request therefore I consider this achievable.
- I have drafted a petition with the help of Eann Sinclair, titled "A9 Edinburgh-Thurso Trunk Road realignment to the east of Berriedale cemetery", urging the Scottish Government to commit to developing a diversionary realignment bypassing the hairpin bend on the A9 Edinburgh-Thurso trunk road, thus increasing safety, reducing public transport journey time and ensuring the trunk road infrastructure is capable of supporting the developing renewable energy industry in Caithness. I have not brought photocopies as at this stage, I believe that firstly the idea needs to be discussed and approved by the Caithness Transport Forum and taken forward as an action from this meeting. I am happy to go through the draft petition with you here or answer any other questions you may have.

Koreen MacDougall also asked the forum to consider a proposal put forward by Ken Nicol who was unable to attend. Koreen explained that he has requested that the issue of the Thurso Bypass is raised at the CTF meeting and if the forum would consider replying to the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change regarding the importance to support the Pentland Firth Developments. Koreen read to the forum the following email from Ken Nicol;

Transport infrastructure in Caithness:

Major work is being undertaken to develop the Pentland Firth for the production of tidal energy. As part of these developments, Scrabster Harbour is seen as being a key component. However, to allow Scrabster to play this important role, other improvements to local infrastructure is required. The main one being overlooked at present is the construction of a Thurso By-Pass. This bypass is outlined in the Caithness Local Plan.

Building a Thurso by pass and connecting to the A9 South of Thurso, the overall distance is about 5km and could cost in the region of £10-15M based on the cost of the Phase 2 work at the Ord of Caithness, completed in 2008 at a cost of approximately £5.5M for 2km of road. The Caithness Local Plan adopted 2002 states "A route for a western distributor road has been identified linking the A836 in the north and the B874 in the south. The distributor road will serve the western expansion area as shown in the Framework Plan. However, the road will be designed to be capable of extension and upgrading if necessary, in order to allow for the provision of a Thurso by-pass. Preliminary investigations suggest a by-pass route starting from the southern approach of the A9 and heading west across the river from opposite the entrance to Stainland Farm towards the south side of the Dunbar Hospital. Here it would meet the western distributor road and pass over the Moors on the town side of the golf course to the east side of the business park. Finally the by-pass will extend northwards from the A836 road to Scrabster." The proposed outline is shown in the diagram submitted. *Figure 1 Figure 2*

The benefits for the development of the Pentland Firth project include:

- Improved access to Scrabster Harbour (and the proposed industrial estate) for developers working in the Pentland Firth. This would reduce the need for materials to be transported through the congested and narrow streets of Thurso.
- Improved access from already established fabrication and testing facilities at Janetstown to Scrabster
- Allow materials to potentially be transported by rail to Caithness and then transported easily by road to Scrabster from a freight depot/terminal
- Allow the business and industrial parks around Thurso to develop to support the regeneration of the area.

The Chair asked the forum as to which of the two proposals they would wish to action at this stage. After discussion, the forum agreed for the petition on Berriedale Braes to be actioned as the debate on prioritising the issues highlighted in the Caithness Transport Vision document has continually identified Berriedale as the primary focus for transport concerns. The forum also agreed that the other issues highlighted in the Transport Vision Document still remain priorities of the forum. <sup>ACTION</sup>

## **6. Transport Updates**

### **Roads Update – Ian Moncrieff**

#### Winter Maintenance

All main and urban roads are now clear of snow. Some high level rural roads are passable with care.

#### Facts ‘n’ Figures

Across The Highland Council:

£5m spent annually on winter maintenance

120 gritters

58 footway tractors

50,000 t of salt used

67,000 km of roads

#### In Caithness:

£1.7m annual budget (CSER area, £900k Caithness)

10 gritters

6 footway tractors

5 contractors

5000t of salt spread in last 4 weeks

769 km of roads in Caithness

Treatment significantly exceeded policy requirements.

Exceptional effort by gritting crews.

Salt levels remained adequate to date.

Road network split into 4 priority classes:

Priority	Approx No of Routes	Description	Mon-Sat	Sun
P1	8	Main Routes	6am-9pm	7am-9pm
P2	8	Other strategic routes + bus routes	6am-6pm	7am-6pm
P3	>20	Main Urban & School bus routes	6am-6pm	Not Treated
P4		Remainder of network	6am-6pm or as resources permit	Not Treated

#### 2010 – 2011 Road Maintenance Programme

Next seasons work programmes are being prepared for both surface dressing and overlay.

#### B876 Culverts Replacements

The reconstruction of the culverts at Burn of Gravity, Hastigrow & Bower has been delayed due to poor weather and the manufacture of the pre-cast concrete culvert units. However BT has finished temporary diversions at Gravity & Hastigrow & expects to finish at Bower next week.

#### Houstry Culvert Replacement, Houstry Road, Dunbeath

Design started for the replacement of the flood damaged culvert.

The Chair thanked Ian Moncrieff for the update and asked regarding the status of the Wick Service Bridge stating that it had been on the agenda for upgrade or replacement for some time. Ian Moncrieff acknowledged that the service bridge is nearing the end of its life with an estimated forecast of possibly ten years and agreed that it will require replacing. Ian further explained that it was difficult to predict when this would take place due to public sector budget reductions.

The Chair raised the issue regarding the increased number of potholes on the county roads. Ian Moncrieff agreed explaining that the recent freezing weather was the main factor for the potholes currently experienced.

The Chair asked the forum if there were any questions for Ian Moncrieff.

Cllr Donnie Mackay raised the issue of sand on the roads after the recent weather regarding the status of drains and would these drains be worked on to ensure they are fit for purpose. Ian Moncrieff agreed that this was a good point raised and explained that THC tries to avoid mixing sand with salt in urban areas but stated that once the temperature falls below nine degrees the salt has little effect therefore it is necessary to

mix salt with sand for the purpose of traction. Ian further explained that this is the resulting tradeoff and is therefore something THC will be addressing by targeting the known problem areas on a priority basis. Cathel Macaskill also acknowledged that Scotland Transerv are also aware of this and will also be addressing this issue.

Cllr Robert Coghill reported regarding useful information for the community where a situation arose concerning an elderly couple who had to make a trip to hospital. Cllr Robert Coghill explained that their driveway which is situated on a road which is not adopted had been blocked with snow and ice. He stated that THC Tech Services will clear people's access if they qualify for assistance and contact social services, therefore it is important that this information is put out to the community.

Cllr Robert Coghill also reported that during the recent winter weather he had experienced an extremely icy section of road near Spittal and had reported the condition to the police. Cathel Macaskill explained to the forum that it is very important to report such conditions to enable resources to be directed where most essential.

Both Ian Moncrieff and Cathel Macaskill paid tribute to their gritting staff on the exceptional effort made to keep the roads clear during the recent weather. The Chair and the Forum agreed that a good job had been done and that most people appreciated this.

#### **Rail Update – Mark Norton**

Mark Norton provided the following update report.

##### **Tactical:**

We have made some progress on the train heating issue with First Scotrail.

- First Scotrail have replaced auxiliary heaters on the Class 158 carriages with a new improved design;
- The roof tank heater matrix will be modified to remove airlocks;
- They will instigate the provision of battery chargers to allow the auxiliary heater to run overnight at Wick. They also try and dedicate sets with proven good heating on the Far North and Kyle lines;
- They are also looking for low cost alternatives for providing hot drinks on the early morning trains, although not to the same level as trolley services on later trains.
- Carrbridge line has re-opened with a reduced service, and that a full rail service between Inverness and Edinburgh will re-open by the end of the week.

##### **Strategic**

Dorlag, with input and assistance from On-Route Logistics and Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership, have responded to the consultation from Transport Scotland about developing rail freight policy, with particular regard to road-rail transfer of freight. For information only, I attach the responses; we have made to the consultation, but the salient points from this are:

- Improvement in rail freight carriage on the Far North Line would greatly improve the case for making improvements to this Line, including the Dornoch Rail Link, and also greatly reduce congestion on the A9 road from less lorries as well as reduce carbon emissions;
- Interventions of benefit to improved rail freight carriage on our Line would greatly improve the economic development prospects of the area served by the line, including particularly Caithness;

- Such developments would help local rail freight development efforts. They would also lead to generation of substantial income from the Pentland Firth and related developments, greatly exceeding that currently coming from Dounreay;
- There is an opportunity to make the case for major rail based interventions outwith those specified in the Strategic Transport Projects Review through this consultation;
- The work done in this exercise paves the way for making a broader, more high powered response to the forthcoming consultation on strategic rail project funding determined by the High Level Output Statement for the 2014-2019 Control Period 5 for Scotland. This is the best opportunity for us to link the Dornoch Rail Link and other rail upgrades to the Pentland Firth development efforts. It is important that everyone works together on this.

Further progress is being made on the Georgemas rail freight facility development and rail traffic thereto, although this is closely linked in with progress on the biomass plant development and construction there and at Forss. Further progress will be reported as it develops.

Mark stated that he is aware that serious issues have arisen over contingency rail plans in the face of extreme weather conditions up here in early January. First Scotrail does have plans in place, but issues have occurred as highlighted during the recent CTF meeting. Mark stated that he would be happy to forward these to First Scotrail and Passenger Focus as appropriate, as he has been affected by such events in the past. There is a complaints procedure available for use in these situations.

Mark further stated that he raised these concerns with John Yellowlees and read the following response from John Yellowlees to the forum;

*“We continue to seek lower-cost options for provision of a catering service on these trains. We do have robust contingency plans in place, and the delay in obtaining alternative transport at Thurso on 2 January reflected road conditions at the time. This morning's cancellation (11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010) of the 0812 Wick-Inverness arose as a result of deer damage to a train”.*

Cllr Robert Coghill reported that on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2010 traveling North by rail from Cheltenham travellers had missed the North connection at Inverness due to the bus connection from Aviemore to Inverness being delayed. Cllr Robert Coghill praised the rail staff and stated that the travellers were then bused to Golspie. He explained that upon their arrival at Golspie they had a fifteen to twenty minute wait outside in minus eight degrees Celsius before the train arrived. Cllr Robert Coghill expressed his concern at having to wait outside in these conditions as some of the travellers were elderly and very young children and questioned whether warm shelter should have been made available to these travelers.

Mark Norton acknowledged the Counsellors concerns and agreed that it was unsuitable to be waiting in extremely cold conditions such as mentioned.

Christine Dodd also reported problems with rail travel on 4th January 2010. Upon traveling north, travellers had been decanted off the train at Aviemore and had not been given any information as to when the buses were expected to arrive. Christine explained that the buses arrived after ninety minutes but had noted that there seemed to be a significant lack of organisation in handling the situation with no apparent emergency plan. Christine stated that they had arrived in Inverness at seven o'clock and at nine o'clock staff had decided to provide taxis without checking to confirm that Berriedale

was even open. Christine stated that there was a noticeable lack of organisation as well as a lack of consultation with the travelers and thought that in circumstances such as this there should be some form of emergency plan for them to implement.

Mark Norton acknowledged that in circumstances such as this there does seem to be a lack of organisation. Mark stated that bad weather such as recently experienced will undoubtedly result in disruptions to services but agreed that any rail service provider must have robust contingency plans in place for such emergency events. Mark stated that he will raise the issue at the next scheduled Rail Users Group meeting. <sup>ACTION</sup>

The Chair suggested that Christine Dodd submit her observations in writing to Koreen MacDougall to take forward to Scotrail on behalf of the forum. <sup>ACTION</sup>

Janet Aykroyd agreed stating that as she has health issues, had she been involved in an incident such as this, would have resulted in her experiencing serious problems which may have resulted in requiring hospital treatment. She explained that this is one of the reasons many people with health issues avoid using the rail services.

Angela Donaldson explained that Wick Airport will be carrying out a review of how they had dealt with the recent bad weather and to therefore identify any problems this caused and how as an organisation were they handled. Angela explained that she was fairly certain that all the transport operators will be carrying out similar reviews therefore it is important that feedback from users is taken into account when they review their contingency plans.

#### **Sea Update – Rod Johnstone**

Rod Johnstone provided the forum with an update report on Scrabster Harbour Trust.

##### Ferry

2009 has been a good year with passenger numbers and traffic number increased from 2008.

Rod Johnstone reported that despite the impact of the Gills Ferry, Scrabster is ahead of where they had predicted for this time.

##### Fishing

2009 is also ahead of figures from 2008 with a rise in the value and tonnage of catch as well as an increase of fish being sold in the Scrabster market.

##### Renewable opportunity for Pentland Firth

Rod Johnstone reported that Scrabster is now at an important stage in developing its aspirations to improve the infrastructure to assist in the launch of some of these industry devices. Rod Johnstone stated that there is to be a two page spread in the next Executive Magazine showing the plans of what they are aiming to achieve. Rod Johnstone explained that they are pushing on with this as soon as they can secure funding with the aim of achieving by 2012 which is the expected time that these devices will be deployed.

The Chair thanked Rod Johnstone for his report and stated that it had been a very positive update from Scrabster Harbour Trust.

Eann Sinclair stated that consent had just been given for a wind turbine site in the Moray Firth near the Beatrice platform and is therefore a real opportunity for Wick Harbour to be involved with the operation and maintenance aspect of this development.

Angela Donaldson stated that there is a possibility of an issue with this development affecting the aircraft approach to Wick Airport. Angela explained that this will be established once details of the location and height of the turbines have been confirmed.

Rob Gibson explained that the actual size of the proposed development is 275 turbines one kilometer apart and will therefore be one of the biggest developments of this kind in the country. He agreed that this therefore is a fantastic opportunity for the entire county.

Koreen MacDougall stated that although Malcolm Bremner from Wick Harbour was unable to attend, he had explained to Koreen that Wick Harbour has been working in Partnership with both Scrabster and Orkney to ensure they capitalise on renewable energy development and is also in close contact with Anna MacConnell NDA and Eann Sinclair. Koreen stated that Malcolm also reported that there has been no sea freight since October 2009 due to the weather.

Rod Johnstone agreed that there is indeed a complimentary nature between Wick, and Scrabster to ensure that the county will benefit.

#### **Air Update – Angela Donaldson**

Angela Donaldson provided the forum with the following update report on Wick Airport. WACC Statistics were also circulated. <sup>i</sup> <sub>iii</sub>

- Tender documents have been issued for the Airfield Ground Lighting replacement Capital Project. Work will be undertaken over 2010/11 and 2011/12 financial years
- Some events happening this year which will create additional traffic for the Airport
  - i. Dounreay Industry Day 5<sup>th</sup> February
  - ii. John O' Groats to Lands End Cycle race (with possibly up to 650 participants) starting 12<sup>th</sup> June
  - iii. The national MOD in October
- Air Traffic Controller training is continuing and we should be back to full strength within a couple of months.
- Sunday schedule numbers are picking up and Loganair/Flybe have indicated that they will be continuing the Sunday flights through Summer 2010. Early indications are that they will not be restoring the Tuesday service for the Summer period.
- Stats show good months in November and December as compared to the same period last year.
- There was some disruption to traffic during the recent spell of bad weather. No schedules lost until 4<sup>th</sup> January and then further traffic lost later that week. Some additional traffic was gained due to helicopters diverting in when Aberdeen Airport was closed due to weather.

Angela also announced to the forum that after thirty two years of working for HIAL she has applied for early retirement and will be leaving in April 2010.

The Chair stated that he was sorry to hear that Angela was retiring and asked if anyone had anything to add.

Eann Sinclair stated that the announcement of the seabed leases event in March 2010 is expected to be held in Caithness and therefore would be likely to generate some additional traffic.

The Chair thanked Angela for her update report.

#### **Bus Update – George Devine**

George Devine stated that there were no major service developments to report and the changes to services implemented in May 2009 are now doing well. George stated that they have made a request for some new vehicles which if approved will come into service in April 2010. George also expressed his thanks to the roads department for their efforts over the recent bad weather.

The Chair thanked George Devine for the report and stated that a bus users group meeting is expected to be scheduled for some time in February.

#### **Trunk Road Update Report – Cathel Macaskill**

Cathel Macaskill reported that regarding the early work on Wick South Road has now been completed. Two blockages have been identified in the South Road drainage system and these will be repaired in the current financial year. Cathel Macaskill explained that the majority of the work scheduled for the following financial year is subject to the funding being made available.

Cathel further stated that in terms of the Berriedale Braes there is encouraging news as there is a commitment from Transport Scotland to evaluate the issues regarding the Berriedale Braes. Cathel explained that Transport Scotland Senior Manager Keith Murray is to meet with John Thurso MP to discuss the issues raised regarding Berriedale Braes.

Cathel explained that the scheduled work on Millbank road Thurso should have been started by this time however the proposed work will be starting on the third week of January 2010 and a mailing has been dispatched to the local residence informing them of the scheduled works.

Cathel paid tribute to the excellent work carried out by the winter maintenance teams of both the Highland Council and Scotland Transerv.

Cathel also reported that in 2011 the Kessock Bridge is to be resurfaced. Cathel explained that this will have a significant affect on Caithness as well as all the other surrounding areas. This scheduled works will require all of the communities support in assisting to reduce the number of vehicles at peak times to ensure the minimum of disruption is experienced. Cathel further stated that if a significant effort is not made to reduce the traffic numbers during this time, there will be unprecedented queuing causing major disruption to all the surrounding areas. Cathel mentioned some of the initiatives being investigated to assist with reducing vehicle numbers; car sharing, train services, park and ride and work at home.

Angela Donaldson enquired as to what the estimated timescale would be for carrying out the resurfacing of the Kessock Bridge. Cathel Macaskill stated that this is estimated to be six months.

The Chair enquired as to the number of vehicles using the bridge at peak times. Cathel Macaskill stated that this number is around 600 in the morning peak time and 500 in the evening peak time. Cathel Macaskill explained that if these numbers are not significantly reduced, vehicles will be queuing until the afternoon.

Cllr Donnie Mackay enquired as to why this work could not be carried out at night times to help reduce disruption as well as reduce the timescale involved. Cathel Macaskill explained that he is advised that technically this was not an option available to them due to the specific nature and engineering challenges working on a steel bridge presents.

The Chair thanked Cathel for his update report.

#### **7. AOCB**

Mark Norton announced that the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group Annual General Meeting takes place in the Pentland Hotel, Thurso on the 7th of May at 7:30pm.

Koreen MacDougall announced that the CTF has received a letter from the Highland Council regarding the report of the examination of the Sutherland Local Plan which can be viewed online at the Highland Council Website.

#### **8. DONM**

John Green thanked everyone for a productive meeting and that the next meeting will be scheduled for a suitable date in either March or April 2010.

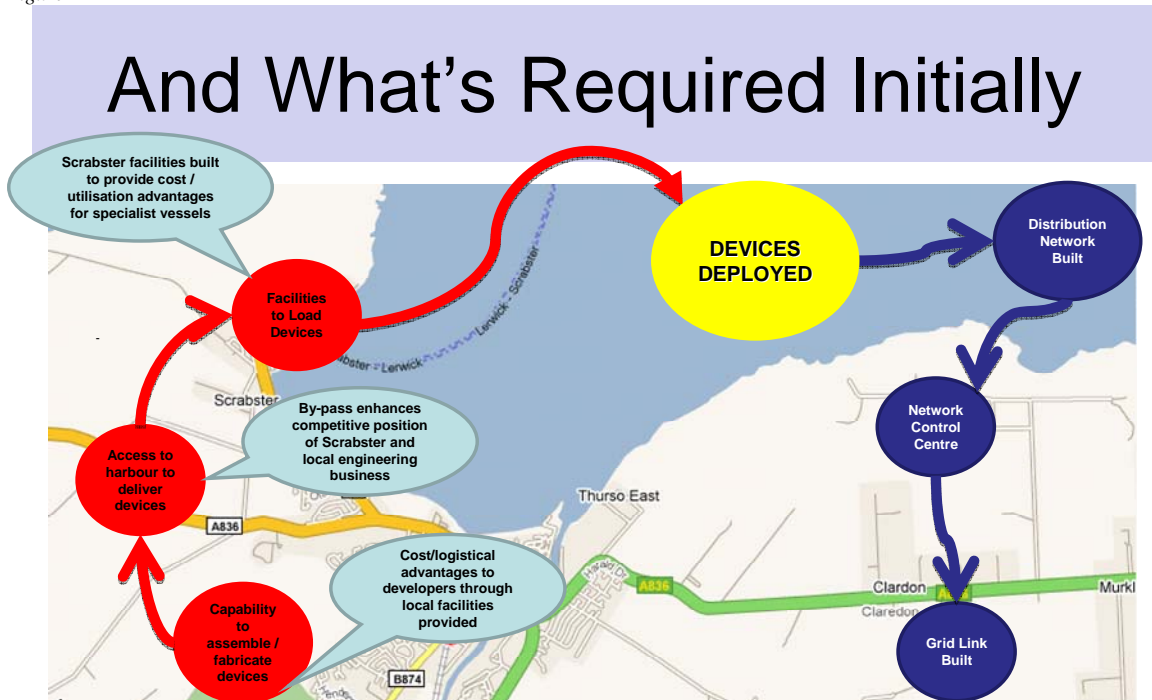
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**ACTION** Koreen MacDougall – Circulate the proposed A9 Edinburgh-Thurso Trunk Road Realignment to the East of Berriedale Cemetery public petition to all CTF members

**ACTION** Koreen MacDougall - To forward concerns raised to Mark Norton to raise at the scheduled Rail Users Group

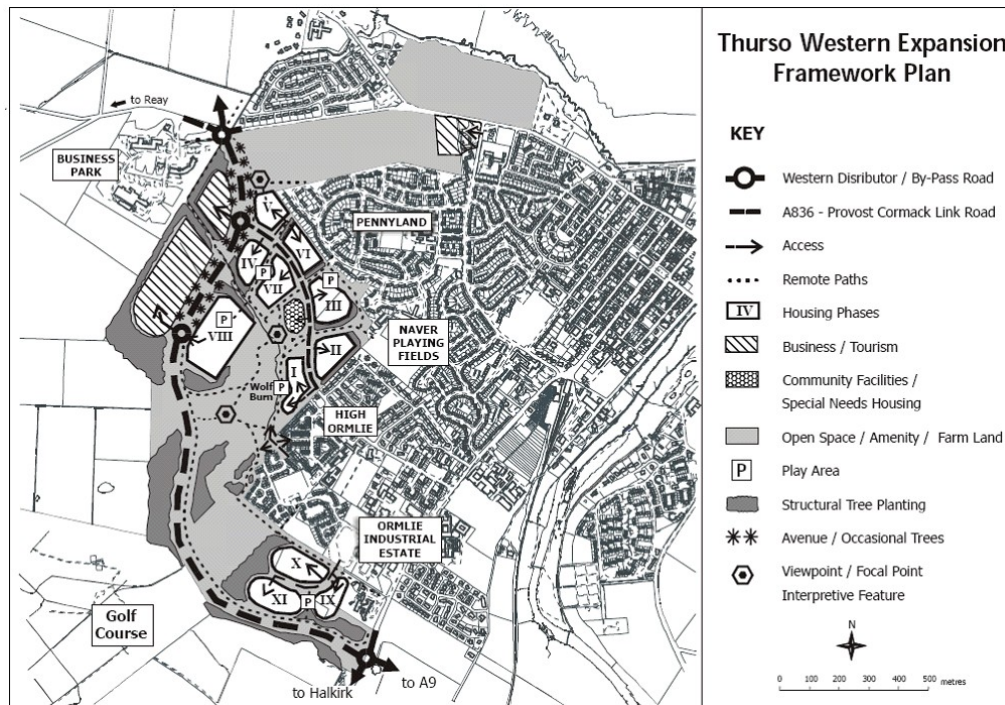
**ACTION** Koreen MacDougall - To submit a letter of concerns raised to First Scotrail on behalf of the Caithness Transport Forum

Figure 1



What will it take to bring work into Caithness?

Figure 2



j Dornoch Rail Link Action Group  
 Responses to 2009 consultation entitled “Developing Rail Freight Policy in Scotland”

**Question 1: Do you agree with the need for encouraging increased modal shift to rail for freight?**

Yes, with due regard to congestion, cost and environmental carbon emissions reduction. It should be noted that rail transport can cut carbon emissions to as low as one tenth of those arising from road freight transport. This helps the Scottish Government achieve its carbon emissions reduction target, particularly as the transport sector’s carbon emissions are rising significantly as shown in Section 3. It should also be noted that congestion from slow moving heavy lorries can restrict economic growth in areas served by busy roads. Lessening of congestion also helps improve road safety as less congestion reduces the chances of frustration and consequent erratic road behaviours leading to accidents.

It might also be noted that the cost of road fuel has a significantly greater pro-rata effect on the overall costs of road transport than it does for rail transport. In the light of potential major increases in the price of oil in the short to medium term as the economy picks up, with consequent increases in the prices of diesel road fuel, this alters the road/rail balance of freight transport cost in rail’s favour.

**Question 2: Have we accurately captured the benefits of freight movement by rail?**

Again, yes, although the economic benefits as well as the environmental benefits need to be taken into account, as outlined in Answer 1. It is advised that the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet point in Section 4, Page 7 is reworded to state: “Removing freight vehicles from roads **will** contribute to reducing congestion, journey times and noise;” In addition, the cost of road repair and maintenance, arising from excessive use of roads by heavy road traffic, needs to be better quantified in terms of cost of road maintenance and repairs, congestion and road safety. It is recognised that this is touched on in Section 4.

**Question 3: Have we identified all of the obstacles to the expansion of rail freight movement?**

In our opinion, no. In addition to the obstacles already identified in Section 5, one needs to examine the restrictions imposed by low route availability (principally axle loading capability) of track on which proposed extra freight train services run. This is as important as loading gauge and path availability restrictions. The higher the route availability, the less wagons are needed to carry the same payload, and the heavier and more powerful the locomotive needed to haul them.

An example of this is the Oykel Bridge next to Invershin station on the Far North Line. This currently has an axle loading restriction such that 2-axle oil tank wagons can only carry 60% of their capacity of heating oil for the Lairg terminal on the weekly shipment. Strengthening of that bridge could enable wagons to carry 100% of their capacity, reducing the number of wagons for the same payload, along with their leasing and maintenance costs.

Another example is the RA for the Far North Line north of Invergordon, which is currently quoted as 5, indicating a nominal 19-tonne axle loading capability. This in turn restricts the gross tonnage of freight wagons used on the Line, with knock-on effects on payload carriage and costs to operators and users.

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The issue of journey times, while not as important for freight as for passengers, needs also to be recognised as an obstacle to rail freight expansion. This has been touched on during the presentation by On-Route Logistics UK Ltd. during the AGM of the Dornoch Rail Link Action Group in May 2009. Signalling upgrades and level crossing improvements on the Far North Line would help improve rail freight's competitiveness on this line and other lines in this regard. The Dornoch Rail Link is professionally judged to have major benefits, not just in terms of journey time reduction but also of capacity and accessibility increase. All of these help ensure the most efficient and cost-effective deployment of locomotives, rolling stock and manpower, thus keeping costs to users at a minimum. The Georgemas Chord and level crossing/ passing loop improvements would greatly assist in these regards as well. In addition, the length of rail journey times for both freight and passenger trains on the Far North Line have been increasingly identified as a hindrance to the speed and scale of the developments necessary to fully exploit the following, to the advantage of Scotland and the U.K. as a whole:

- ▶ Pentland Firth potential;
- ▶ West of Shetland oil and gas potential;
- ▶ Proposed biomass/ timber facility and attached rail freight logistics terminal at Georgemas Junction

It is important that the outcomes of this consultation give due credence to these considerations.

**Question 4: Have we identified all of the obstacles to modal shift for rail?**

Please see answer to question 3. In addition, the co-ordination between road and rail operators for the smooth and simple transference of loads between these modes is of critical importance. The failure to ensure this is a major contributory factor behind the failure of the Kinbrace timber rail scheme in the early 2000's.

**Question 5: Which of the barriers, if overcome, would be conducive to rail freight expansion?**

The following are suggested for barrier removal:

- ▶ Capacity increase;
- ▶ Journey time reduction;
- ▶ Cost reduction and simplification of road-rail transfers;
- ▶ Reliability ensuring and increase;
- ▶ Clarification of conflict resolution procedures in event of competition for limited paths
- ▶ On given lines between rail freight firms or freight and passenger interests.

It needs to be recognised that overcoming these barriers would not only help increase road - rail freight shift on the Far North Line, but also help greatly expand the opportunities served by the line in this area. This will be discussed more fully in the response to Question 7.

**Question 6: Are there any types of traffic/ scenarios where the rules or processes of the Freight Mode-Shift Grant schemes operated by the Scottish Government Transport Directorate have proved to be an obstacle to securing traffic to rail?**

The main obstacle identified is the bureaucracy in securing the freight mode shift grant schemes, which takes excessive time to progress before the grant is awarded.

**Question 7: Do you consider that intervention is required, in addition to the current incentive schemes, to encourage modal shift? Please give examples of interventions that may contribute to the desired outcomes.**

In our opinion, yes. With due reference to the response to Question 3, we ask that the interventions outlined in that section are progressed in addition to those identified in the recent Strategic Transport Projects Review. More specifically, flexibility, reliability, capacity and speed increases are considered to help maximise and assist road-rail freight shift and also the area in which that shift takes place. The following need to be recognised:

- ▶ There is a serious restriction of transport capacity on rail, road and sea links to Caithness and Sutherland which hinders the Pentland Firth developments. This also applies to setting up of assembly and manufacturing capacity for renewable energy devices in the Far North.
- ▶ Increasing fuel costs, environmental disbenefits and congestion issues reduce the favourability of road as a means of freight transport. This favours rail as an alternative;
- ▶ It is conservatively and reliably estimated that the maintenance and operation of the Pentland Firth renewable energy schemes alone would generate up to £150 million per year income for the local economy, which such improvements would help bring about;
- ▶ Additional manufacturing and assembly operations for such activities, along with Atlantic oil fields exploration and drilling and rail freight logistical operations in Georgemas would increase this income to up to £200 million/ year. This would provide a badly needed additional source of income for the Highland Council and Scottish Government, and would amply repay the capital and operating costs of the improvements outlined above;
- ▶ The key period for progressing these improvements is in the Control Period 5 (2014-2019), which is the same key timeline when the Pentland Firth and related activities require to be developed;
- ▶ It is considered that the barriers identified in this consultation are of direct relevance to the schemes outlined in this section and Section 3. We ask that due credence is given to the outcomes of this consultation and the input into the HLOS for CP 5.

More specifically, we ask that improvements to the existing far North Line as suggested in Section 3 are undertaken in the short term (5-10 years), the construction of the Georgemas Chord in the medium term (10+ years) and the Dornoch Rail Link over a 10-15 year period.

**Question 8: Are our proposals for action suitably allocated to the appropriate sector or organisation?**

Yes, although the road industry needs to be brought in as much as possible. It is more profitable for lorries to run 10-15 short trips to a railhead per day that for the same lorries to run 2-3 long trips to destinations further, in terms of payload capacity utilisation. These facts need to be borne in mind when allocating proposals.

**Question 9: Are you, or your organisation, ready to play your part in achieving these desired outcomes?**

Absolutely yes. The Dornoch Rail Link Action Group is pleased to submit this in conjunction with the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership, On-Route Logistics UK Ltd and the Caithness Transport Forum, with the support of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. The co-operation of all competent organisations is needed and will be given to Transport Scotland to help realise rail freight development policy in the North of Scotland.

**Question 10: Do you consider anything further can be done to encourage a modal shift to rail for freight?**

With regard to the above, it is suggested that development and regeneration agencies are contacted and that their co-operation is sought to ensure that the economic benefits of such modal shifts are realised throughout all the areas served by the lines affected in this consultation, particularly the Inverness – Wick line. This would help realise Government policy of sustainable development and transport of freight.

ii <http://www.executive-magazine.co.uk/> (February 2010 edition)

iii WACC Statistics

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
ABERDEEN 2004	417	431	515	588	536	610	469	460	602	465	480	378
ABERDEEN 2005	449	498	736	728	768	1023	950	911	875	783	857	697
ABERDEEN 2006	792	824	1060	836	1165	1004	781	1059	1066	1066	1332	841
ABERDEEN 2007	867	1036	1357	1147	1312	1070	1060	1159	1198	1324	1370	964
ABERDEEN 2008	1188	1229	1416	1392	1230	1303	1261	1146	1506	1437	1299	1144
ABERDEEN 2009	968	990	1273	1128	1175	1107	1216	977	1331	1252	1340	1001
INVERNESS 2005	-	30	11	17	40	12	-	-	-	-	-	-
EDINBURGH 2004	411	563	550	557	501	407	502	441	457	560	473	424
EDINBURGH 2005	363	381	424	392	468	497	347	357	465	371	490	332
EDINBURGH 2006	398	392	477	420	463	377	378	402	449	475	513	357
EDINBURGH 2007	361	384	322	514	593	408	466	663	528	539	518	564
EDINBURGH 2008	447	444	564	574	657	673	647	691	570	702	550	573
EDINBURGH 2009	550	577	706	527	663	540	571	615	627	666	634	694
KIRKWALL 2004	104	194	186	200	138	93	200	164	127	190	-	-
SUMBURGH 2004	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	78	74
SUMBURGH 2005	50	76	128	145	76	101	180	145	114	165	106	106
CHARTERS ETC 2004	45	10	193	149	154	160	197	255	791	653	254	47
CHARTERS ETC 2005	-	2	27	283	223	212	73	348	287	156	89	87
CHARTERS ETC 2006	55	87	57	101	159	302	292	256	354	228	574	219
CHARTERS ETC 2007	46	83	85	217	360	401	135	90	213	225	2	132
CHARTERS ETC 2008	143	87	60	128	335	168	172	258	416	102	35	17
CHARTERS ETC 2009	-	24	-	39	133	24	70	153	9	176	37	41
TOTAL PAX 2004	977	1198	1444	1494	1329	1270	1368	1320	1977	1868	1285	923
TOTAL PAX 2005	862	987	1326	1565	1575	1845	1550	1761	1741	1475	1542	1222
TOTAL PAX 2006	1378	1462	1745	1514	1932	1747	1547	1846	2001	1873	2563	1529
TOTAL PAX 2007	1407	1625	1861	1878	2265	1879	1661	1912	1939	2088	1890	1660
TOTAL PAX 2008	1778	1760	2040	2094	2222	2144	2080	2095	2492	2241	1884	1734
TOTAL PAX 2009	1518	1597	1979	1694	1971	1671	1857	1745	1967	2094	2011	1736
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2004	311	438	481	469	542	704	585	501	500	496	437	292
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2005	419	350	538	461	613	758	678	815	821	579	582	441
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2006	498	447	477	494	906	817	511	676	457	551	537	475
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2007	559	426	577	574	664	652	439	604	570	527	377	464
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2008	418	400	549	614	928	785	708	614	791	572	535	513
TOTAL NO MOVEMENTS 2009	477	473	506	501	635	468	556	572	608	444	642	454
FREIGHT 2004	1945	741	827	454	443	433	469	396	432	354	465	354
FREIGHT 2005	403	365	594	342	392	318	302	375	555	438	745	520
FREIGHT 2006	369	503	609	326	500	509	264	506	364	3700	318	220
FREIGHT 2007	537	314	219	210	356	124	142	93	101	138	884	66
FREIGHT 2008	143	156	175	78	101	152	198	159	104	198	690	73
FREIGHT 2009	75	87	52	65	59	57	98	355	185	383	166	131

