



MINUTES OF THE THE CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM

Date: 21-05-2010

Time: 11am – 1pm

Location: Environmental Research Institute, Castle Street, Thurso.

Present

John Green (Chairperson)

Anna MacConnell NDA

William Manson Halkirk Community Council

Bob Young First ScotRail

Christine Dodd Local Transport Officer

Cllr David Flear THC

Cllr Robert Coghill Highland Council

Eann Sinclair CNSRP

Gordon Doull Wick Harbour Authority

Matthew Reiss Northern Constabulary

Mark Norton DORLAG

Robbie Mackintosh THC

Rod Johnstone Scrabster Harbour Trust

Trudy Morris Caithness Chamber of Commerce

Veda Swanson Stagecoach

In Attendance

Koreen MacDougall, CDO - Caithness Partnership

David Shearer, Assistant Administrator - Caithness Partnership

1. Welcome and Apologies

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

1.2 Apologies were received from;
Alan Shaw, Cathel Macaskill, Coreen Campbell, David Sutherland, Eric Larnach, Gordon Mackenzie, Gordon Sinclair, Ian MacDonald, Janet Aykroyd, Ranald Robertson, William Calder. William Mainus.

2. Minutes of last CTF Meeting 15-01-2010

2.1 The minutes of the CTF meeting 15-01-2010 were approved as a true record of the proceeding.

3. Matters Arising

- 3.1 Koreen MacDougall reported that the Parliament Public Petition has been postponed until the results of the Berriedale feasibility study have been established.

4. Transport Scotland Update Report.

- 4.1 Koreen MacDougall explained that she had invited Gordon Sinclair from Transport Scotland to the CTF but was unable to attend due to annual leave. Koreen requested an update on behalf of the forum from Gordon regarding Berriedale Brae, South Road and Thurso Bypass. The e mail reply from Gordon was distributed at the meeting.
- 4.2 Cllr Flear read out a letter from Transport Scotland 20/4/2010 confirming that Transport Scotland will not be carrying out a review of Berriedale Braes in response to the recent Coach accident as they do not consider that road conditions were a contributing factor. They also confirmed that funding was unlikely to take forward any improvements to Berriedale Braes. Cllr Flear noted that there was no mention of the feasibility study or the 40K available to carry out such a study.
- 4.3 Cllr Flear reported that they contacted Jamie Stone MSP with pictures of the Berriedale Brae crash site road conditions. Jamie Stone MSP brought this issue up in Parliament, the result of which is the Transport Minister has agreed to visit the crash site. An article from the Press and Journal was read to the forum which states that the Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson stated that it is understood from the police report that road conditions were not likely to be a contributing factor. Cllr Flear also stated that they contacted Gordon Sinclair, Transport Scotland regarding the safety condition of the crash site and that barriers were now being put in place.
- 4.4 Matthew Reiss, Area Commander, Northern Constabulary stated that they also have pictures of the crash at the hairpin bend at Berriedale taken when the vehicle was still in position hanging over the cliff edge. Mr Reiss explained that the pictures demonstrated that if the bus had been travelling any faster, it may have gone over the edge. Mr Reiss also stated that Northern Constabulary would write a letter of support. Mr Reiss pointed out that although Transport Scotland states road conditions were not a factor, it is important to note, whilst indeed the roads were not icy, road conditions that were contributing factors were the hairpin bend and steep gradient.
- 4.5 Mr Reiss also stated that only yesterday a lorry had broken down on the hairpin bend at Berriedale because it could not handle the gradient. The road was then blocked for over an hour which caused traffic to build up which could also have other implications on for example the transport of livestock. Mr Reiss further stated that any breakdown on Berriedale Braes causes significant safety issues due to the steep gradients and bends which have to be negotiated by tourists and other road users. Mr Green stated that the forum could write to the Transport Minister with these points and appealed to everyone to forward any supporting information to Mrs Koreen MacDougall. ¹

- 4.6 It was suggested that road sign improvements could be made to alert the awareness of steep gradients to road users earlier, with signs situated further back than at present.
- 4.7 It was queried if the crash barriers in place at the Berriedale Brae hairpin bend were the maximum specified strength. Mr Reiss explained that he was unsure of the specification of the current barriers involved in the recent accident but the Scotland Transerv Foreman had stated to Mr Reiss that the new replacement barrier specification is to be of a higher grade than the previous.

5. Transport Updates

5.1 Sea – Rod Johnstone, Scrabster Harbour Trust

- Commercial sector continues to perform well. Fishing continues to perform well although there is concern regarding future quotas and days at sea. The ferry is also performing well and was recently commandeered for a few days by the government to repatriate stranded British Citizens as a result of the volcanic ash situation. Oil and Gas sector is beginning to pick up as a result of development drilling in west of Shetland and negotiations are continuing to try to secure Scrabster as a supply base.
- 5.1.1 Development sector sees Scrabster having difficulties securing funding due to the recent election. Draft budgets were not approved prior to the election and as a result, scheduled meetings of funding committees have now been postponed creating a significant delay.
- 5.1.2 Three contractors have now been short-listed for undertaking the development work and it is expected that the preferred contractor will be identified in October 2010. The development is estimated to be a 15–18 month programme and is expected to start in January 2011 providing finance is secured.
- 5.1.3 Marketing sector; Mr. Johnstone reported that they have recently attended the All Energy Conference in Aberdeen, generating a lot of interest and links for Scrabster Harbour. It was speculated that Shell may decide to withdraw from the Gulf of Mexico and may possibly in 4 – 5 years concentrate development in the North Sea, providing an opportunity for Scrabster to exploit.
- 5.1.4 A discussion took place on the implications for road traffic resulting from the Scrabster Harbour development. Mr Johnstone explained that the majority of materials is expected be brought in by sea although it was acknowledged that there will also be a significant increase in road haulage. It was also noted that there will be an increase in road traffic from the local supply chain of contractors and engineering firms. The discussion also noted that materials brought north by rail would still need to be taken through the town centre of Thurso to reach its destination at Scrabster. It was stated that it was very disappointing that the Thurso By-pass proposal was still not on any long-term plans. It was also stated that this increase in road traffic further demonstrates the need for Berriedale Brae improvements.

5.2 **Sea – Gordon Doull, Wick Harbour Authority**

Mr Doull reported that in December 2009-February 2010 the east coast experienced a prolonged spell of easterly gales, having a devastating affect on shipping and fishing income. This has resulted in the redundancy of three employees. Mr Doull further reported that shipping and fishing is now back to full performance and they have recently handled their largest supply tanker recorded.

5.2.1 Mr Doull stated that the Beatrice Wind Farm development has resulted in a survey vessel based indefinitely at Wick Harbour. Mr Doull further stated that they have rented office accommodation to a firm and with the ongoing survey activities, further enquiries for office space are increasing.

5.2.2 The Wick Harbour Authority is currently preparing a feasibility study into improving facilities at the River Harbour to enable the supporting and servicing of marine renewable devices, and potential Wick Bay developments.

5.2.3 The Wick Harbour Authority has recently moved into their new harbour offices located at J S Duncan's former premises which have been completely refurbished providing a modern environment for the authority's offices.

5.2.4. Mr Doull stated that they have linked their Wick Marina with Inverness, Orkney and Shetland marina's to form a group called 'Sail North Scotland' which has its own website www.sailnorthscotland.co.uk/ . Mr Doull further stated that they recently attended the Gothenburg International Boat Show, generating significant interest in the North of Scotland area and now expects to see an increase in visitors from this area. Mr Doull reported that the marina has 40 out of the 70 berths fully committed from local boat owners this season and last year they accommodated 210 visiting boats.

5.3 **Rail – Bob Young, ScotRail**

Mr Young announced that a catering service will now be available on the early morning winter service from December to May.

5.3.1 Mr Young explained that they are experiencing some difficulties with the contractor for fitting the new heating matrix and bleeding matrix to the system. Mr Young further explained that they are now going to use a new contractor and will provide an update on this issue once completed.

5.3.2 Mr Young explained that they have trialled battery chargers to retain some of the heat overnight with excellent results. Mr Young further explained that the problem with implementing this in Wick is the staffing and timing issues, making this very difficult to put into operation. Mr Young stated that they are looking at a solution and will be able to provide future updates on this issue.

5.3.3 Mr Young announced that by end of July 2010 the new digital radio system will be in place in Wick. Mr Young explained that this type of system is installed in only one other place in Britain making Wick station quite unique.

- 5.3.4 Mr Young acknowledged that service wise, improvements are needed and apologised for the inconvenienced this has caused. Mr Young explained that they are experiencing some technical difficulties with the high pressure oil system incorporated in the units causing leakage resulting in the failsafe activating and shutting down the engine. Mr Young stated that they are looking at solutions to resolve this issue.
- 5.3.5 Mr Young reported that commercially, usage statistics are holding up well and that the 12:55 service is becoming extremely popular.
- 5.3.6 A short question and answer session took place with Mr Young regarding service issues. Mr Young stated that they have now requested to their taxi providers to wait with their passengers until the train arrival to address the issue of passengers being left outside with no shelter in extreme weather conditions. The issue of toilets being unsuitable for use was raised and it was suggested that a guard could check in advance if toilets are suitable and advise passengers. Mr Young stated that the guard should be doing this already. Mr Young stated that the Thurso station lighting issue has been an ongoing maintenance problem which has been repaired on numerous occasions. Mr Young stated that the solution is most likely a full replacement of the lighting system. Parking space at Wick and Thurso stations was raised and Mr Young explained that Wick station parking area is shared with the Northern Constabulary and limited space is available for use. Thurso station is a space issue and they do not have the ground available to expand. It was suggested that an opportunity to share parking space with Tesco would be available as Tesco is in a planning stage of their development and urged ScotRail to liaise with Tesco at this stage.
- 5.4 **Air – Alan Shaw, HIAL**
Alan Shaw, Director of Safety and Operations who was unable to attend, provided a brief written report which was distributed at the meeting along with statistics on passenger numbers and flights. A summary of the report was read by Mrs Koreen MacDougall.
- 5.4.1 The report acknowledged the recent farewells of John Banister and Angela Donaldson. John was Chairman of the Consultative Committee providing many years of service both as a member and Chair and Mr Shaw pays tribute to his valued contribution. Mr. Shaw's report also announces that Trudy Morris has been elected as the new chairperson for the Airport Consultative Committee. The report also pays tribute to the long standing service of 32 ½ years Angela has contributed to HIAL and in particular to Wick Airport as Airport Manager.
- 5.4.2 The report also stated that they are currently evaluating the impact of the present European Aviation Security Directive and the Department for Transport Single Consolidated Direction to Airport Managers which became law on 29 April 2010.
- 5.4.3 The report also states that it has been noted that the standard of customer service provided to passengers at Wick Airport is consistently high.

- 5.4.4 The report also provides a brief update regarding the Airfield Ground Lighting stating that project tenders have been returned and are currently being evaluated. The project is planned to take place over two budget years. A schematic showing the proposed layout of lights was also distributed at the meeting.
- 5.4.5 The report stated that HIAL is undertaking a review of its winter operating procedures and stated that much was learned during a fact finding mission to Norway in terms of methodology although their equipment was found to be fit for purpose.
- 5.4.6 HIA is in the process of recruiting a Regional Manager who will be based in Kirkwall but will also be responsible for Wick and in the meantime Wick is being supported by the deployment of an Inverness Manager two days per week. HIA now have a part time controller checked out at Wick who is shared with Kirkwall and the full time controller under training should achieve check out in early July.
- 5.4.7 The report stated that Grenville Johnstone has been appointed as Chairman of HIA for a period of 3 years.
- 5.4.8 A brief discussion took place on Air issues. It was stated that passengers at Wick airport have experienced what is interpreted as excessive security checks compared to other larger airports. Ms Trudy Morris stated that this has already been acknowledged and that the reason for this is not a fault of the airport but simply the result of the regulations imposed that Wick airport has to comply with. Ms Morris further explained that smaller airports do not have the latest security technology but still have to meet the security standards that they are regulated by. Ms Morris also stated that airports are regularly subjected to spot checks to ensure that they are meeting the required security standards. It was suggested that to reduce passenger resistance, signs explaining the need for the security checks could be displayed at the airport. Ms Morris also asked for any issues to be passed on to her so that they could be raised at their committee meetings. It was queried on the issue of the wider plans for the airport regarding HIE development plan and what progress or stage this is currently at. Ms Morris stated that she was unsure at what stage HIE are at regarding this and suggested the forum seek an update from HIE. Mrs MacDougall stated that she will write to Carol Gunn, HIE requesting an update on HIE development plans supporting Wick Airport.ⁱⁱ
- 5.4.9 Mr. Eann Sinclair stated that the Executive Board meeting of the CNSRP is hoping to have the newly appointed regional manager of HIAL as a speaker at their meeting in June and asked for any issues to be passed on so that they could be raised.

6. Trunk Road Update Report – Scotland Transerv

A brief update was provided by Scotland Transerv and read to the meeting by Mrs Koreen MacDougall.

- 6.1 No change to the major scheme at South Road in Wick. Machine patching is scheduled for some time this year.
- 6.2 The work undertaken at Millbank Road in Thurso is now completed.
- 6.3 The scheduled resurfacing works for the Kessock Bridge has now been delayed until 2012.
- 6.4 Road surfacing schemes are planned this year for A9 Bullicmore, A9 Thurso North, and A9 Golspie. Consultation will be carried out in advance of all these proposed works.
- 6.5 A short discussion took place on trunk road issues. It was stated that road works have been carried out at Carsgoe and it was queried if and when the half mile before and after the completed works would be carried out. Mrs Koreen MacDougall agreed to write to Cathel Macaskill for an update on Carsgoe. ⁱⁱⁱ
- 6.5.1 It was also stated that the issue of grass cutting and landscaping North of Brora is in need of review to improve opportunities for safe over-taking and that this issue has been brought to the attention of Scotland Transerv before. Mrs MacDougall agreed to write to Cathel Macaskill regarding this issue. ^{iv}
- 7. A.O.B.**
It was proposed that the forum should include an update from the bus sector in their transport updates. This was agreed and Veda Swanson, Stagecoach, provided the forum with a brief update on Bus issues. ^v
- 7.1 Mrs Swanson announced that the new timetable comes into operation on the 31st of May and two more vehicles are expected to come into service in Caithness.
- 7.2 Mr. Norton asked if any salient points from the recent HITRANS meeting were relevant to the CTF. Eann Sinclair stated that HITRANS is about to conduct a consultation on lorry parking which is relevant to the CTF as Thurso is identified as a designated Lorry Park area for the Highlands and Islands. This raised potential issues such as lighting and suitability for Thurso as a lorry park. It was suggested that the forum request HITRANS for an update for each forum meeting. Mrs MacDougall agreed to write to HITRANS and request updates for future CTF meetings. ^{vi}
- 8. D.O.N.M**
Mr. Green thanked all for attending, the next meeting of the CTF is 3rd of September 2010. Time and location TBC.

Actions

ⁱ Mrs MacDougall to write to Stewart Stevenson, Transport Minister with points of issue regarding Berriedale Braes.

ⁱⁱ Mrs MacDougall to write to Carol Gunn requesting an update regarding HIE development plans supporting Wick Airport

ⁱⁱⁱ Mrs MacDougall to write to Cathel Macaskill Scotland Transerv regarding work at Carsgoe.

^{iv} Mrs MacDougall to write to Cathel Macaskill Scotland Transerv regarding grass cutting and landscaping issues.

^v Mr Shearer to include Bus update in future CTF Agendas.

^{vi} Mrs MacDougall to write to HITRANS to request updates for future CTF meetings.