



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM

31 March 2006, North Highland College, Thurso

Present: Cllr John Green (Chairman)
Mrs Coreen Campbell, Caithness Community Transport
Cllr David Flear
Mr Mike Lunan, Friends of the Far North Line
Mr Brian Leonard, Scrabster Harbour Trust
Mr John Crowden, Association of Caithness Community Councils
Miss Angela Donaldson, H & I Airports Limited
Miss Carol Gunn, CASE
Mr Richard Guest, The Highland Council
Mr Bert Macleod, Highlands & Islands Federation of Small Businesses
Ms Anna MacConnell, Caithness Partnership
Mr Bob Edwards, Highland Council

Apologies Mr George Bruce, OBE, Caithness Partnership
Cllr Graeme Smith
Mr John Banister, Wick Airport Consultative Committee
Mrs Carroll Buxton, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise
Mr John Innes, Arcade Travel
Mr Sandy McWhirter, UKAEA
Mrs Veda Swanson, Highland Country Buses
Mrs Elizabeth Marshall

1 Minutes
Minutes of the previous meeting (02.02.06) were agreed. Proposed Mike Lunan, seconded Coreen Campbell.

2 Matters arising
Membership of the Forum Cllr Billy Mowat and Loiose Smith have requested membership but neither were available to attend this meeting. Their input would be welcomed.

HITRANS Cllr Charlie King and Howard Brindley of HITRANS had met with some Caithness Councillors, HC staff and CASE staff recently to discuss

Caithness transport issues and gather information to feed into the strategy document HITRANS is currently preparing. They had visited the airport at Wick and were impressed by the service and the recently completed gateway work. It was felt that Caithness Transport Forum needs further input into the draft H&I Transport strategy. John Green and Billy Mowat had attended a similar meeting in Inverness.

HIE railway assessment – Donald McNeil is preparing an assessment of the railways in Highland for HIE. Carol Gunn agreed to request that the study be provided to the Caithness Transport Forum¹.

Network Rail meeting – Mike Lunan enquired whether or not Network Rail had held a meeting in Thurso recently. It was unclear whether or not the meeting had gone ahead. John Crowden to ask Thurso Community Council.

Caithness Community Plan - clarification was sought regarding the Transport section of the Caithness Plan. It was noted that there are areas of disrepair at the approaches to various stations. The Forum agreed to endorse a letter to Network Rail asking for improvement to be made to the approach road at Georgemas Junction. The Forum was asked to note the potential for freight at Wick due to proposed new developments.

Concessionary fares –The Forum welcomed the recent announcement by Scottish Executive of the introduction of the Air Discount Scheme. The scheme, which will be open to residents of Caithness and North and North West Sutherland, will go live on May 15th and will allow concessions of up to 40% on air fares from designated airports in the Highlands to Inverness, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Initially the scheme will be administered by Highlands & Islands Airports Limited (HIAL).

Friends of the Far North Line is pushing rail passengers to get similar concessions as bus passengers. It was felt that this would not be difficult to do on regional or basis. The Forum should press HITRANS to support this stance.

3 Aims and standing orders

A simple document had been prepared by Caithness Partnership, based on a sample from West Yorkshire Transport Partnership, and had been circulated by email for comment in advance of the current meeting. The aims and standing orders were accepted by the Forum. Mention would be made on meeting agenda papers that members must declare an interest where appropriate².

4 Caithness Transport Vision

Having a professional looking strategy or visionary document, similar to Borders Vision, which lays out aspirations for Caithness transport provision will help with funding applications and provide strong Caithness input to strategy development at a regional level. Dounreay decommissioning and the Caithness/Orkney links are not currently mentioned in the HITRANS strategy document. The Forum will argue strongly for infrastructure for all forms of transport. There is a need to make a strong case for Caithness provision which will help dilute the perennial

¹ ACTION : C GUNN

² ACTION: A. MacCONNELL

problem of Inverness area being prioritized over the North. A Caithness Transport Vision document to be produced to professional standard/image. Text for the document to be provided by a Forum sub committee of Mike Lunan, Richard Guest, Carol Gunn, Angela Donaldson and a representative from Scrabster or Wick Harbour Trusts³. Sub committee will meet at 10am 2nd May 2006, venue to be confirmed. Anna to get quotes for design and printing of the document⁴. It was suggested that the Vision could be recorded on DVD for use as a lobbying and marketing tool. To illustrate the potential for DVD marketing David Flear will provide a DVD produced by John Banister for demonstration at the sub committee meeting⁵.

5 Highland Council Bus Contracts Consultation

Mr Bob Edwards, Rural & Community Transport Officer, Highland Council, explained that the local authority is consulting regarding the renewal of supported bus service contracts to run from 1 Jan 07 to 31 Dec 2011. The HC will look at all the suggestions put forward by the public and include changes where possible. The consultation programme will be completed by August 06. Mr Edwards emphasized that the HC is taking a responsive approach to supported bus services and aims to improve quality and be innovative where necessary in order to provide services that fit the community's requirement. Correspondence had been received by the Caithness Transport Forum regarding additional bus services to Lybster/Dunbeath areas. The South East Caithness Initiative at the Edge area is a priority area for all the public agencies and it was recommended that HC take these requests on board when making changes to supported bus services. Copies of letters from the Caithness Youth Forum and South East Caithness Development Group were passed to Mr Edwards for inclusion in the consultation.

6 Rural Transport Initiative Funding

Mr Edwards explained that the Rural Transport Initiative Fund is administered by Highland Council and is available for a variety of different projects and schemes relating to rural transport in Highland. Applicants must be able to show that their project is sustainable and funding will be granted at the discretion of the HC up to a limit of 75%. A part-time transport development worker's post had been funded in Ullapool. Bob will provide a sample application to the Caithness Transport Forum⁶.

7 Orkney/Caithness meeting

Alison Muir, Orkney Islands Council, who is closely involved with the Orkney Transport Forum, had been contacted and was happy to meet members of the Caithness Forum. She felt that it would be useful to meet before the start of the tourist season. Orkney is currently putting together a Transport Strategy which includes a strategy for freight. They are also engaged in work to improve their

³ ACTION: M.LUNAN, R.GUEST, A. DONALDSON, B. LEONARD, C. GUNN

⁴ ACTION; A. MACCONNELL

⁵ ACTION: D. FLEAR

⁶ ACTION: B EDWARDS

gateways (ports and airports). It was agreed that a meeting will be a positive step and discussion should include the following :

- Sharing of information to determine where joint issues lie
- Air service to Orkney from Wick
- Economic benefits to Caithness and Orkney of improvement to A9
- Mutually beneficial rail link improvements
- Provision of bus services to ferry

A meeting will be arranged as soon as possible⁷.

Contact had also been made with Anne Cogle of Shetland Transport Forum who was interested in talking to Caithness and will contact Anna when she has spoken to her group. It was felt that Shetland/Caithness contact is less of a priority than links with Orkney, but a positive step.

8 Updates

Air

Concessionary fares for Caithness residents are a major achievement and had been discussed earlier.

Rail

Mike Lunan will provide copies of a response from Friends of the Far North Line to the Public Transport Users Committee consultation and a discussion paper regarding rolling stock for circulation to the Forum⁸.

Road

Richard Guest reported that the trunk roads maintenance contract had been awarded to Transerve and that a positive relationship is already in evidence between HC and this company. Transerve telephone number is **08000322520**.

Sea

Brian Leonard reported that Wick and Scrabster Harbour Boards have been working together well in recent months looking at common issues. Scrabster had been represented on a marketing trip to Miami aimed at attracting cruise ship business and will attend a similar event in Amsterdam in May. There is a lead in time of at least 4 years in this market and therefore results from marketing will not be visible for some time. Mr Leonard reported that the Hebridean Princess will visit Scrabster 3 or 4 times this summer and there will be visits from a further 4 ships during the year.

8 AOCB

There was no further business.

9 DONM

1 June 06 in the Assembly Rooms, Wick at 7pm.

⁷ ACTION: A MACCONNELL

⁸ ACTION: M LUNAN/A MACCONNELL