



## CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM

### MINUTES OF MEETING IN THE PENTLAND HOTEL THURSO ON FRIDAY 2 November 2007

**Present:** John Green, Association of Caithness Community Councils  
Cllr Robert Coghill  
Cllr Donald Mackay  
Mike Lunan, Friends of the Far North Line  
Coreen Campbell, Caithness Community Transport  
Anna MacConnell, Caithness Partnership  
Ian Moncrief, Highland Council  
Sandra McCaughey, HIE Caithness & Sutherland  
Gordon Mackenzie, Scrabster Harbour Trust  
Billy Manson, Halkirk Community Council  
Eric Larnach, SE Caithness Development Group/latE  
David Sutherland, Highland Council

**1 APOLOGIES:** Sandy Mackie, Scrabster Harbour Authority  
Veda Swanson, Highland Country Buses  
Sandy Mackie, Scrabster Harbour Trust  
John McFadzean, Transerv Scotland  
Bert MacLeod, Federation of Small Businesses  
Campbell Stewart, Highland Council  
Inspector Ian Arnott, Northern Constabulary  
John Banister, WACC  
Angela Donaldson, HIAL  
George Bruce OBE, Caithness Partnership

**2 MINUTES** of the last meeting were adopted as a true record – proposed by Cllr Robert Coghill, seconded Mike Lunan

**3 MATTERS ARISING NOT ON THE AGENDA:**

**Bus Routes Development Grant Scheme:** David Sutherland reported that Warren Mitchell is keen to meet with the Caithness Transport Forum and Councillors to discuss Rapson's plans to improve the bus fleet. David to arrange meeting.<sup>1</sup>

**Highland Local Transport Strategy:** This had not yet been received by David Sutherland but he will forward to Anna to circulate to CTF when available.<sup>2</sup>

**Bus timetables:** concern was raised that but timetables in some locations were not regularly updated, in Castletown for example, the timetable had not been renewed since 2005. Anna to pass this concern to David Summers at Highland Council.<sup>3</sup>

**4 LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES TRANSPORT SURVEY:** a meeting had taken place between David Summers, Highland Council, John Green, Cllr Coghill, Cllr Bremer, Cllr D Mackay and Anna MacConnell to discuss issues with the local bus services. This had been a very positive meeting and issues relating to disabled access, timetabling and individual bus services had been raised. Mr Summers had agreed to deal with a number of these where he could. It had been agreed that some survey work be instigated by Caithness Partnership in the Dunnet & Canisbay area initially to generate evidence of need for changes to the services, as although there have been a number of complaints, there are currently few hard facts available. Any changes to the service will need to be based on clear evidence. The survey work will be funded jointly by Highland Council and Caithness Partnership through the Carnegie UK Trust contract. CTF members suggested that this could be extended to Bower and Castletown in the next phase of the survey as there had been a number of complaints and issues raised from that area regarding bus services in that area.

## **5 STEWART STEVENSON, SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MINISTER'S VISIT TO CAITHNESS**

Stewart Stevenson had confirmed that he would definitely be visiting Caithness later in the month and Anna had arranged a full programme of visits and a lunch had been arranged for that. The timetable was agreed by CTF members and they felt that press coverage would be vital although Sandra McCaughey cautioned that it would make sense to confirm the press plan with the Minister's staff in advance. A briefing was being prepared for the Minister that would be short, to the point and quickly read and would provide information on all the visits and main issues in the county.

## **8 UPDATES:**

**AIR:** The Wick Airport Consultative Committee had recently met with HIAL officials to discuss potential improved landing aids at the Airport. The meeting had resulted in an offer from HIAL to try and get a study done to determine the most appropriate improved landing aid for Wick in terms of the geography of the area.

## **ROADS:**

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<sup>1</sup> ACTION: D Sutherland

<sup>2</sup> ACTION: D. Sutherland, A MacConnell

<sup>3</sup> ACTION: A. MacConnell

**RAIL:** Mike Lunan reported that there are two impending announcements about transport. The Scottish Government's budget would be revealed on 14 November although the detail of that in terms of transport is unlikely to be revealed until December. Network Rail's plans are due to be published soon revealing their priorities. At a recent transport conference in Glasgow appeared that the HIE view of transport needs of the Highlands may be slightly at odds with those CTF. It was suggested that Dave Duthie, Chief Executive of HITRANS be invited to the next CTF meeting.<sup>4</sup>

**Halkirk Station proposal:** Billy Manson, chair of Halkirk Community Council, reported that there is a local objective to have the Halkirk Station reopened. The original station was closed in 1963 as part of the Beeching cuts. Since then the number of houses and the local population in Halkirk has grown in a phenomenal manner, increasing in the last 10 years alone by 40%. Halkirk is now comparable in size with Beaulieu, a town which is to get its station reopened at a cost of £250,000. This is felt to be cheap in railway terms. Land at the old Halkirk station site was sold privately but would probably be available for purchase. Georgemas Station has never properly served the community being too far away from the centre of population and more suited to freight use than a passenger service. A new chord is also mooted which will take a direct route from Halkirk towards Thurso, cutting out Georgemas, leaving that station available to freight and through trains to Wick. The argument for reopening Halkirk Station is very strong and will be strengthened when the new sports centre is completed. Mr Manson was commended by the chairman for his efforts to reinstate the station for the community and CTF support would be available whenever required.

**SEA:** Gordon Mackenzie of Scrabster Harbour Trust reported that the Faroese company Smyrill Line intend to repeat the Norrona landings at Scrabster in 2008 although this will be once weekly instead of twice. The schedule will run from Scrabster to Iceland, Faroe and Bergen. Feedback from the Faroes on the 2007 service to Scrabster had been very positive and Mr Mackie was optimistic that the Faroese passenger numbers would grow.

Mr Mackie had been speaking to Orkney Harbours and Highland Council regarding the proposed container hub in Scapa Flow, with Scrabster as a potential feeder port for the UK. This would have implications for both rail and road transport locally. Oil related activities at the port were also increasing and good feedback had been received from oil companies as it was found to be cheaper to put some cargoes by sea from Shetland to Scrabster then by road from Scrabster to Aberdeen rather than ship from Shetland to Aberdeen.

John Green reported that Jim Foubister, chair of the Orkney Transport Forum, had been in touch with Anna to arrange a meeting in Orkney about the planned new catamaran service to Gills. It was agreed that two of the Caithness Landward Councillors, David Bremner and Robert Coghill also should be invited to attend as

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<sup>4</sup> ACTION: A MacConnell

should Eann Sinclair from HIE Caithness & Sutherland and Louise Smith representing HITRANS and CTF and representatives of Wick Harbour. The terminal at Gills required some considerable development.

**9 AOCB:**

There is still a timing problem with the traffic lights at Thurso. Anna to get in touch with John McFadzean to report.<sup>5</sup>

**10 DONM: Friday 1 February 2008 in Wick Town Hall at 10.30am**

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<sup>5</sup> ACTION: A MacConnell