



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD IN DERC, JANETSTOWN, ON 16 MAY 2008

Present: John Green, (Chair) Association of Caithness Community Councils
Cllr Robert Coghill
Cllr David Bremner
Coreen Campbell, Caithness Community Transport
Angela Donaldson, HIAL
David Sutherland, Highland council
Mark Norton, Dorlag
Mike Lunan, Friends of the Far North Line
George Bruce, OBE, Caithness Partnership
Eann Sinclair, Caithness & North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership
Ron Peddie, DSRL
Sandy Mackie, Scrabster Harbour Trust
Ian Moncrief, Highland Council
Cllr Donnie Mackay
Billy Manson, Halkirk Community Council
Anna MacConnell, Caithness Partnership
Eric Larnach, South East Caithness Dev.Group/Initiative At The Edge
John Banister, Wick Airport Consultative Committee

In Attendance

Cllr John Rosie, Cllr Bill Fernie, Billy Mowat, Colin Mackenzie – Highland Council and Anson McAuslan - Langwell Estates

1. APOLOGIES

None

2. MINUTES

Minutes of the last meeting were approved, proposed by Coreen Campbell and seconded by Angela Donaldson.

3. MATTERS ARISING NOT ON THE AGENDA

None

**4. BERRIEDALE BRAES – An overview of options
Presentation from Colin Mackenzie**

During his presentation Mr Mackenzie presented several different options for improving the road at Berriedale and the potential cost for these, recommending that consideration be given to agreeing and supporting a single option.

Mr McAuslan said that the Wellbeck Estates had not commissioned Colin to come up with an option that eliminated the major flyover but, knowing that would be unlikely to happen for many years, they undertook a study to determine if other options would be more quickly and easily delivered. There are problems at Borgue that need dealt with too.

It was noted that both the Caithness Transport Vision and the MVA Study had fed into the Strategic Transport Projects Review process and the result of this would not be known until the autumn. We would know then where the viaduct project stands. Dave Duthie from HITRANS had stated that 10% of the Scottish Government Transport budget was for smaller projects. Until now the Forum has been prioritizing the bigger projects.

The proposals in the Wellbeck study would secure journey times rather than save time, that is important to note.

Angela Donaldson felt that Wellbeck Estates should be commended for having the study carried out as the possibility of having some improvements made was better than many years wait.

Cllr Coghill said that the issue for modern lorries is not the gradient but the hairpin bend.

Cllr Bremner felt that it was important not to put another submission to SRTP as this would be counter productive – we would be seen to be arguing amongst ourselves. The draft strategy for the NDA asks for transformational projects which a major improvement at Berriedale would be. We should, for the moment at least, stick with what has already been put forward by Highland Council and the Caithness Transport Forum.

George Bruce felt that we need to wait until the SRTP report is published and if Berriedale flyover is far down the list of priorities then we push for a more minor improvement. It must be remembered that if there is a major blockage on Berriedale the alternative is a 150 miles round trip – Berriedale is a lifeline route for the county.

Mike Lunan felt that we should ask Colin to prioritise the various low cost options so that if the STRP comes back negative we can immediately press for action on the best alternative.

Billy Mowat quoted from a letter from the NDA that said the NDA would consider many scheme put forward.

Sandy Mackie felt it was realistic to assume that the viaduct would be well down on the STRP priorities list and we need to agree a fallback position to get the best we can for the county under the circumstances.

Anson McAuslan agreed that the Wellbeck Estate study would not be put forward to the SRDP.

5. **TIMBER TRANSPORT ROUTES**

Colin Mackenzie presented information on timber transportation from the north. A siding at Altnabreac has been mooted as a potential development that would enable timber from the Peatlands to be harvested away either south or the local ports.

Mike Lunan noted that a recent workshop on freight recognized that there will be increasing demand for rail transportation of freight. Colin's presentation to be emailed to Caithness Transport Forum members.

6. **BUS SERVICES IN CAITHNESS**

Cllr D Mackay, Cllr Coghill, John Green, David Sutherland and Anna MacConnell had had a positive meeting with Rapson's staff in Inverness re the local bus services. Rapsons had given a guarantee that services in Caithness would be reviewed over the summer and were keen to work with Caithness Transport Forum/Caithness Partnership to do this.

The survey work carried out in Dunnet and Canisbay is currently being collated and will be sent out to Rapsons when complete.

7. **UPDATES**

Road: Ian Moncrief reported that tender invitations are going out today for repair work at Brough and Dunnet and the same will be going out soon for Warse Road at Canisbay.

Questions were raised about grass cutting of verges during the winter. Ian Moncrief to raise with colleagues

Nothing has been resolved with Transerv Scotland re the Thurso lights.

Rail: Introduction of the 4th train north has been announced. The service starts in December. DORLAG is currently trying to make a business case for the

Dornoch rail link. All options are being considered including a light railway could be installed on the new route, retaining the Lairg loop for heavier freight traffic. Mark Norton is discussing this with HIE.

Sea: The cruise season starts soon. Smyrill Line starts landings from 18 June for 11 weeks. An estimated 10,000 passengers and 2,000 crew will be coming into the county. There are concerns about escalating fuel prices. Increased activity is expected from August in connection with West of Shetland developments. Scrabster Harbour Trust has commissioned an economic impact assessment looking at how the harbour contributes to local socio-economics.

David Sutherland noted that HC has produced Caithness Explorer and agreed to pay for buses to the cruise ships to bring passengers into Thurso for shopping etc.

Air: A report into improved landing aids at Wick has been presented to Wick Airport Consultative Committee. Further costings of approach lighting is required. HIE is carrying out a major study into infrastructure and this is included in that.

Wick Airport is busy at the moment, particularly noticeable rise in use by young families with children. To get cheaper flights you have to book in advance. HIAL is seeking ways to make the ADS easier to use. Roy Kirk, HIE, sees the airport as a major gateway to the county and is considering a package of improvements.

8. A.O.C.B.

It was noted there were no representatives from Orkney at the freight improvement workshop in Inverness.

DORLAG's AGM is on 29 May in the Park Hotel.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on **Friday 22 August 2008 at 10.30am in the Mowat Room, Assembly Rooms, Wick.**

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