



Minutes of the Caithness Transport Forum

Date: 18 June 2024

Time: 10:00 – 11:30

Location: Pentland Hotel, Thurso / Microsoft Teams

Present:

Trudy Morris (Chair)	Caithness Chamber of Commerce	In-person
Laura O'Kane	Caithness Chamber of Commerce	In-person
Alison Middlemas	Caithness Chamber of Commerce	In-person
Ian Budd	Friends of the Far North Line	Virtual
Magnus Davidson	NRS Dounreay	In-person
John Deighan	Thurso and Wick Trades Union Council	In-person
Peter Faccenda	Focus North	Virtual
Alex Flanagan	Stagecoach	In-person
Robert Gillespie	Stagecoach	In-person
Cllr Ron Gunn	The Highland Council	In-person
Nicole Herd	ACCC	In-person
Simon Heron	BEAR Scotland	Virtual
Cllr Willie MacKay	The Highland Council	In-person
Bert Macleod	Thurso Community Council	In-person
Cllr Jan McEwan	The Highland Council	In-person
Kevin McKechnie	BEAR Scotland	Virtual
Hazel Moore	BEAR Scotland	Virtual
David Swanson	The Highland Council	In-person
Nick Warwick	BEAR Scotland	Virtual

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all present for attending. Introductions were given from all who attended.

1.2. Apologies were received from:

David Beaton	Stagecoach
Cllr Raymond Bremner	The Highland Council
Fiona Campbell	Scotrail
Laura Carpenter	The Highland Council
Dougie Cook	Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd
Helen Inkster	Pentland Ferries
Audrey John	Jamie Stone MP Office
Zoe Mackenzie	Marie Todd MSP Office
Sandy Mackie	Scrabster Harbour Trust
Struan Mackie	Dounreay Stakeholder Group
William Mainus	Stagecoach
Wayne Malcolm	Stagecoach
Graeme Paget	Transport Scotland
Cllr Matthew Reiss	The Highland Council
Fiona Richardson	The Highland Council
Ranald Robertson	HITRANS
Ryan Savage	Scotrail
Kim Shaw	Stagecoach
Jamie Stone MP	Jamie Stone MP
David Summers	Highland Council
Marie Todd MSP	Marie Todd MSP
Michael Willmot	Far North Line Community Rail Partnership
Tina Wrighton	NRS Dounreay

2. Minutes of last CTF meeting 20.03.24 – CTF (2024) M002

- 2.1. The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the last meeting.
- 2.2. Proposed by – Cllr Willie Mackay, seconded by Cllr Ron Gunn.

3. Update on Actions

- 3.1. **See Appendix A** for updates on actions from the last meeting.
- 3.2. The Chair expressed disappointment in Scotrail’s engagement with the Transport Forum. It was agreed that Ryan Savage was not the correct representative for the Forum, and a representative with an operational role would be better suited.

CTF2024 M003/A001: The Chair to contact Scotrail for an alternative representative to attend and feedback to the Forum.

- 3.3. Wick Lidl Car Park and access road potholes were discussed as there had been no action taken by the landowners based in London to address the issue. There had been no communication from the Highland Council Roads Department.

CTF2024 M003/A002: Cllr Jan McEwan to follow up with the Highland Council Roads Department regarding the disrepair of the Wick Lidl car park and access road.

3.4. The landslip at Scrabster was discussed. The Forum were concerned that there would be repeat landslips during future bad weather. Hazel Moore reported that the work was complete, and the area was stabilised, with the delta blocks removed.

CTF2024 M003/A003: Graeme Paget to feedback to the Forum whether the Geotechnical team at Jacobs have completed all works regarding stabilising the hill to prevent future landslips at Scrabster.

3.5. The A9/A836 junction in Thurso was discussed. Nick Warwick explained the new type of pedestrian crossings at the junction along with its features. The Chair asked how this could be communicated to the public.

CTF2024 M003/A004: Simon Heron to provide an instruction sheet on the operation of the new pedestrian crossings at the A9/A836 junction for CCoC to distribute to the Community Councils and on social media.

3.6. Cllr Ron Gunn requested that BEAR Scotland consider signage or road markings on the A9 Bridge in Thurso for the filter lane turning left on the A836 to Castletown to prevent tailbacks along Traill Street in Thurso. Kevin McKechnie proposed that this work be considered during the resurfacing works later in the year.

CTF2024 M003/A005: BEAR Scotland to consider road markings and signage for the filter lane turning left on the A836 to Castletown on the A9 Thurso bridge to prevent tailbacks along Traill Street in Thurso.

3.7. New actions arising from this meeting in **Appendix B**.

4. Review of the Forum

4.1. The Chair ran through the following priorities regarding the A9 Road for 2024/25 raised by the Forum members at the last Transport Forum meeting:

- Widen sections of the road
- Improve drainage
- Straighten sections of the road
- Flooding issues North of Portgower
- Bridge at Culgower

4.2. The Chair noted that priorities will be discussed with Graeme Paget and re-circulated among Forum members.

4.3. The Forum agreed to continue to work with all stakeholders with regards to maintenance of the county road network. The importance of Highland Council Roads representation at the meeting was noted with an increasing number of issues in Wick and Thurso towns.

4.4. The Chair specifically raised issue with maintenance/potholes on Swanson St/Couper St/Market St in Thurso where pedestrians had struggled to navigate potholes, particularly those with needs such as pushchairs/disability buggies/wheelchairs. Deepened potholes and loose grit that covered the footpaths had created a slippery surface.

CTF2024 M003/A006: Councillors to raise the concerns to the Highland Council Roads Department over the poor condition of Swanson St/Couper St/Market St in Thurso at the next roads meeting.

4.5. Cllr Ron Gunn reported that the pavement from Dunbar Hospital to the Castlegreen Road junction on the town side in Thurso was due to be replaced and drop kerbs included. The Highland Council

Active Travel team planned to replace the pavement along the Mall parallel to Janet Street, Thurso with new entrances to the riverside path and replace the wooden barriers on Victoria Walk in Thurso with metal barriers.

- 4.6. David Swanson reported that he was on the Active Travel Team and would provide an update on planned works from the department for the next meeting.

CTF2024 M003/A007: David Swanson to provide an update from the Active Travel Department for the next Transport Forum meeting.

CTF2024 M003/A008: Councillors to put pressure on the Roads department for an up-to-date priority list to enable the Forum to communicate it to others.

5. Questions, Clarifications and Urgent Matters

Roads

- 5.1. No written update was provided by Highland Council Roads Department.
- 5.2. Flooding on the A9 in Traill Street, Thurso was discussed. Marco Bardelli had discussed reinstating the Flood Working Group. Hazel Moore noted that the flooding on Traill Street was due to an issue with a combined Scottish Water sewer and the local road network that caused run off onto the A9 drains. The A9 trunk road drainage system was designed to collect trunk road drainage only. The Highland Council had looked at rectifying this with Scottish Water.
- 5.3. Cllr Ron Gunn reported that there was a pipe in Mansons Lane that required replacement to help resolve the Traill Street flooding issue. Contractors were being engaged by the Highland Council due the substantial nature of the work.

CTF2024 M003/A009: Graeme Paget to update the Forum regarding the progress of the reinstatement of the Flood Working Group.

- 5.4. Hazel Moore had circulated the 3-month programme for A9 works before the meeting. She reported that convoys and amnesties had worked fine during previous road closure works and reminded the Forum that travellers on the roads needed to arrive before the amnesty time. The convoys and amnesties had cut down the length of time on past works.

CTF2024 M003/A010: CCoC to circulate the BEAR Scotland 3-month programme to all members.

- 5.5. The Chair noted that BEAR Scotland engagement had been good and the past A9 works completed by BEAR were also good and well communicated.
- 5.6. Cllr Willie Mackay reported that the Dunbeath bridge expansion plate issue had been resolved and the A9/A836 junction had been realigned and new signage put in place.
- 5.7. Cllr Jan McEwan raised the issue of HGV lorry use of the layby on the A99 at Mid-Clyth and damage that had been caused repeatedly to the wall.

CTF2024 M003/A011: Hazel Moore to investigate resolving wall damage and HGV use at the layby on the A99 at Mid-Clyth and to determine if the layby could be restricted to no HGV use.

- 5.8. BEAR Scotland representatives left the meeting at 1055hrs.

Air

- 5.9. Written updates were provided by HIAL (**see Appendix C**) and Highland Council Wick PSO (**see Appendix D**)
- 5.10. The number of flight cancellations was discussed by the Forum. David Swanson reported that two Jetstream aircrafts were back in service as of 18th June. The Forum agreed that regaining public confidence was required.
- 5.11. The Chair reported that the PSO Working Group was working hard to secure the service for the long term along with exploring other opportunities.

Sea

- 5.12. A written update was provided by Scrabster Harbour Trust (**see Appendix E**)
- 5.13. There had been successful cruise ship visits to the new pier at Scrabster Harbour with over 5000 visitors in 2024 so far. There were 6 further ships scheduled for the 2024 season.
- 5.14. The Chair noted the positives of the increase in visitors and praised the hut at the riverside in Thurso and the town market for visitors.
- 5.15. A written update was provided by Wick Harbour Trust. (**see Appendix F**)
- 5.16. There was feedback from leisure customers at Wick Harbour regarding the poor bus network and lack of services at the marina.

CTF2024 M003/A012: CCoC to feedback to David Summers regarding the difficulties faced by visitors to Wick Harbour with the bus network.

- 5.17. A written update was provided by NorthLink (**see Appendix G**)
- 5.18. The Forum noted their congratulations to NorthLink for their Green Tourism Gold Award.
- 5.19. A written update was provided by Pentland Ferries (**see Appendix H**)
- 5.20. The Chair noted that the MV Pentalina was operating on the Pentland Firth route and it was good that the MV Alfred was still being utilised on charter by CalMac. The Chair also reported that Pentland Ferries had achieved passenger levels in excess of pre-Covid.
- 5.21. Cllr Jan McEwan reported that the John O’Groats Trust had discussed the possibility of reinstating the John O’Groats Ferry.
- 5.22. The Forum noted their thanks to Venture North for the positive work done for the cruise passengers that had visited Thurso.

Bus

- 5.23. A written update was provided by Highland Council Public Transport Department (**see Appendix I**).
- 5.24. The Chair noted the new Stagecoach buses had been in operation.
- 5.25. Alex Flanagan reported that one of the six new buses was off the road due to damage from a pothole. He also reported that Stagecoach had resolved their recruitment issues at the beginning of the year.
- 5.26. Alex Flanagan noted that Stagecoach were covering the Aaron’s of Wick routes on an emergency contract until August. The routes were going out to re-tender in August and Stagecoach intended to submit a tender for them.
- 5.27. Robert Gillespie confirmed that Stagecoach were covering the 1630hrs bus that connected with UHI in Thurso

5.28. Cllr Willie Mackay requested Stagecoach review the the last bus timings on route 80 from Wick to John O’Groats. The times had changed from 1735hrs to 1243hrs.

CTF2024 M003/A013: Alex Flanagan to confirm if the last bus on route 80 from Wick to John O’Groats was at 1243hrs and whether it could go back to the later 1735hrs departure previously operated by Aaron’s of Wick.

5.29. Alex Flanagan reported that the Stagecoach app has not been fit for purpose in rural areas. A revision of the app was planned for 2025.

Rail

5.30. Alex Flanagan confirmed that Stagecoach was invited to tender for the bus replacement services contract.

5.31. The Chair expressed disappointment that there was no Scotrail representative or update for the meeting. Action CTF2024 M003/A001 refers.

5.32. Ian Budd ran through the plans to mark the 150th anniversary of the Far North Line. **See Appendix J** for the event information.

5.33. He noted Scotrail had a driver on long term sick and were training new drivers to meet the shortage.

5.34. Ian Budd also noted the Friends of the Far North Line had received a letter from Transport Scotland about the limited scope for further enhancements and that the Delmore Loop remained in consideration for future delivery.

CTF2024 M003/A014: The Chair to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport regards funding for the Delmore Loop improvements.

6. Any Other Business

6.1. No other business was raised for discussion.

7. Date of Next Meeting

7.1. The next meeting was booked for **Wednesday 6th November 2024** both in person and virtually – venue to be confirmed.

7.2. There being no further business, the Chair thanked everyone and closed the meeting.

Trudy Morris

Chair

18th June 2024

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Appendix A – Actions from last meeting

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M002/A001	ICP	CTF to respond to the consultation of the Island Connectivity Plan (ICP) to ensure the Caithness side of the Pentland Firth is considered. All members to provide feedback to Laura at comms@caithnesschamber.com by COP Thursday 6th April 2024.	All CTF Members	Complete	Response required by: COP Thursday 6th April 2024 (Related to Action CTF 2023 M002/A001) Chair attended Transport Scotland Consultation Event held in Stromness on 29.04.24. 18.06.24 – Complete.
CTF2024 M002/A002	ICP	CCoC to formally respond to the ICP consultation with member's feedback.	CCoC	Complete	(Related to Action CTF 2024 M002/A001 above) Response submitted: 06.05.24. 18.06.24 – Complete. Onward connectivity was discussed
CTF2024 M002/A003	Rail	CCoC to follow up with John MacQuarrie, Scottish Rail Holdings with regards to the franchise plans for Caledonian Sleeper.	CCoC	Ongoing	(Supersedes Action CTF2023 M002/A012) 18.06.24 – Ongoing. Awaiting a response due to a change in secretary.
CTF2024 M002/A004	Rail	Ryan Savage to check the updates to the summer programme regarding catering services.	Ryan Savage		18.06.24 – No update.
CTF2024 M002/A005	Roads	Fiona Richardson to establish who the owning service is of Thurso Co-op Car Park.	Fiona Richardson	Complete	18.06.24 – Complete. The lease was checked, and the Highland Council was determined as the owner. It will be repaired.
CTF2024 M002/A006	Bus/Air	David Summers to feedback to the CCoC from the meeting with Aaron's regarding the timetable and longer bus layovers at the airport.	David Summers	Complete	18.06.24 – Complete. A written update was provided, and this was addressed.
CTF2024 M002/A007	Bus	David Summers to produce combined timetable for printing and copies to be distributed.	David Summers	Ongoing	18.06.24 – Ongoing. Due to the withdrawal of Aaron's services, the timetable had been delayed. Stagecoach ran an interim service and covered these routes before the longer term contracts were awarded..
CTF2024 M002/A008	Priorities	Forum members to feedback on 24/25 Priorities with requests for consideration.	All CTF Members	Complete	18.06.24 – Discussed at agenda item 4.

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M002/A009	Priorities	Cllr Raymond Bremner to feedback to the Forum after the meeting with Marco Bardelli and Graeme Paget at Transport Scotland.	Cllr Raymond Bremner		18.06.24 – No update.
CTF2024 M002/A010	Air	Dougie Cook to report back to the Forum on HIAL’s input into the national aviation strategy.	Dougie Cook	Complete	https://consult.gov.scot/transport-scotland/aviation-strategy/consultation/view_respondent?show_all_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q_text=Wick&uuld=505203748 18.06.24 – Complete. Submitted in 2022, Aviation strategy was still to be issued.
CTF2024 M002/A011	Air	David Swanson to consult with Head of Service at Highland Council regarding their input into the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) response and whether Transport Scotland's strategy was on target.	David Swanson	Ongoing	17.05.24 – David will follow this up with Tracey Urry internally. 18.06.24 – Ongoing. David Swanson reported that the aviation strategy document would be published after the General election.
CTF2024 M002/A012	Air	CCoC to write to Kevin O’Leary (HIAL C.O.O.) regarding the issues blocking and delays with recruitment requests and the risk to the PSO. The Highland Council to be copied in.	CCoC	Complete	18.06.24 – Complete. Trudy Morris reported that the issues were resolved after contact from CTF to Kevin O’Leary.
CTF2024 M002/A013	Sea	CCoC to send David Summers’ contact details to Helen Inkster. Helen Inkster to discuss with David Summers about the connections being considered by Aarons Bus services and the Ferries.	Helen Inkster	Ongoing	CCoC to send David Summers info to Helen Inkster - Complete. 16.05.24: Correction to include - Helen Inkster to discuss with David Summers about the connections being considered by Aarons Bus services and the Ferries. 03.06.24: Alex Dewar, Pentland Ferries Customer Service Manager details sent by Helen Inkster to David Summers regarding Aaron's service not stopping at Ferry terminal. 18.06.24 – Ongoing. This was impacted by the changes to the Aaron’s services – related to Action CTF2024 M002/A007.

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M002/A014	Roads/ Sea	CTF to request further information and timeline in regard to removal of traffic lights by Transport Scotland at Scrabster Harbour to alleviate backlog during the Spring/Summer.	CCoC	Complete	<p>Update from Graeme Paget 12.04.24 - Site investigations undertaken by the geotechnical specialists last Friday determined that it is not possible to remove all loose material from the slope using mechanical means alone, due to the distances involved and the limited reach of the largest of plant available. This means that loose material at the highest points will have to be moved down the slope by operatives using roped access and high pressure lances. BEAR are in the process of obtaining quotations for these works, now that they understand the methodology involved, and aim to complete the work by the 15th May when I understand that the abnormal load movements are planned. In the meantime, I have asked BEAR to review the traffic management arrangements to determine if a "Priority" system can be safely achieved whereby the traffic signals could be removed, the overall length of traffic management shortened and signage installed giving priority to traffic heading uphill. I'll have more information about this early next week.</p> <p>Update from Sandy Mackie 23.04.24 - The cones and traffic lights were removed around lunchtime yesterday, but the blocks remain in place. Signage is in place giving priority to traffic leaving the harbour.</p> <p>Update from Sandy Mackie 21.05.24 - blocks and lights were removed yesterday. The lights were reinstalled for the previous week whilst a team was working on the hill. I am not aware that they removed any loose material rather redistributed and smoothed it.</p> <p>Update from Graeme Paget 10.06.24 - work to remove the loose material on the slope has now been completed. BEAR are in discussions with their geotechnical consultants to determine the next course of action and it is anticipated that recommendations will be formed later in the summer.</p> <p>18.06.24 – Complete. Hazel Moore reported that all works were complete. The long-term solution of the landslip was discussed.</p>

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M002/A015	Roads	CTF to request information regarding safety railings at the junction by Tesco Thurso and enquire if re-installation of these is planned.	CCoC	Ongoing	<p>Graeme Paget response - Feedback from the Road safety team indicated that whilst the scheme is substantially complete, there are still some outstanding works to carry out, including some footway works and road markings, which are due for completion by the end of April. There is a general presumption against installing pedestrian guardrail in the design of new crossings such as this, however each location is assessed independently and a Road Users Safety Audit is now being planned in the coming few weeks to help determine if the guardrail should be installed. Finally, we have raised the issues regarding the crossing timings and the filter lights with the traffic signals installers (Yunex) and asked them to review these to determine if improvements can be made to address the concerns your members have raised. We can monitor this over the coming weeks and feedback accordingly.</p> <p>Update from Graeme Paget 10.06.24 - Kevin McKechnie, Road Safety Manager at BEAR Scotland, confirmed that their traffic signals contractor (Yunex) recently visited the Puffin Crossing at A9 Castletown again and have made a few tweaks to the timings to improve its operation. It would appear that there may be an element of unfamiliarity with the public as to how this particular type of crossing works – ie. when the button is pressed, the pedestrian starts crossing and the beeping stops, which is normal, then the system should detect the pedestrian until they fully cross the road before giving a green light to waiting vehicles. One issue that was observed was that some pedestrians appear to cross away from the detectors. Whilst the crossing design was not originally intend to include any new pedestrian guardrail, it does appear that occasionally, pedestrians are using the crossing at the A836 leg as a single stage crossing, whereas it is actually a 2-stage. Whilst there isn't anything technically wrong with the current layout, the use of some short lengths of guardrail here may be advantageous to help direct pedestrians towards the designed desire lines, therefore BEAR will now arrange to install these. Yunex will continue to monitor the junction operation over the coming few months to identify if any further alterations are needed.</p>

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
					18.06.24 – Complete. The new crossing timings were discussed and Kevin McKechnie reported that the barrier installation was planned for September 24.
CTF2024 M002/A016	Roads	Cllr Raymond Bremner to discuss the Highland Council’s communication to the public regarding the maintenance and repair programme.	Cllr Raymond Bremner	Ongoing	18.06.24 – Ongoing. No update.
CTF2024 M002/A017	Roads	Cllr Raymond Bremner to raise the issue of clarifying the insurance and claims process for the public at the next monthly roads meeting.	Cllr Raymond Bremner	Ongoing	18.06.24 – Ongoing. No update. Cllr Jan McEwan agreed to raise the issue at the next roads meeting later in the week.
CTF2024 M002/A018	Bus	David Swanson and David Summers to discuss the missing bus connection at the UHI North, West and Hebrides Thurso campus.	David Swanson/ David Summers	Complete	David Swanson update 08.05.24: Discussed with Fiona Webster in Employability Service, who originally raised the issue, and with David Summers. Understand that a solution has been found and the service will be restored in line with requirements 18.06.24 – Complete. Robert Gillespie confirmed that Stagecoach was covering the 1630 service for Aaron’s in the interim.
CTF2024 M002/A019	Bus	Stagecoach to confirm when the X99 would return to the Riverside bus stop.	Robert Gillespie	Complete	X99 will service the Riverside stop from 19th August 18.06.24 – Complete.
CTF2024 M002/A020	Rail	Frank Roach to email Laura at comms@caithnesschamber.com with comments and questions on the Scotrail update.	Frank Roach	Complete	update 03.06.24: -Rail Decarbonisation Action Plan- refreshed version is due out. The dates originally envisaged for new rolling stock may slip -28 July sees the 150th anniversary of the line opening in its entirety. The occasion will be marked -Reliability- FNL performance is currently is affected by ageing rolling stock and traincrew shortages leading to cancellations once or twice per week -Altnabreac remains closed while the access issues are being resolved -Plans are being developed for improved on train wifi 18.06.24 – Complete.
CTF2024 M002/A021	Rail	Ryan Savage, Ian Budd and Michael Willmot to meet and discuss planned exhibitions and celebrations of 150th anniversary of the Far North Line.	Ryan Savage/ Ian Budd/	Complete	update 31.05.24: The event is planned in Forsinard on 21 June and the 150th Anniversary will be marked on Saturday 27 July with the unveiling of a plaque in Wick Station, accompanied by an exhibition. A

ACTIONS – LAST MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
			Michael Willmot		request has been sent to Jo Maguire, Managing Director of ScotRail to see whether a Class 158 might be named for the occasion. 18.06.24 – Complete.
CTF2024 M002/A022	Rail	Ryan Savage to email CCoC with information and requests from the Highland Tourism group for sending to the Community Councils.	Ryan Savage/ CCoC	Ongoing	18.06.24 – Ongoing. No update.

Appendix B – Actions arising from this meeting

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M003/A001	Actions	The Chair to contact Scotrail for an alternative representative to attend and feedback to the Forum.	CCoC		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A002	Actions	Cllr Jan McEwan to follow up with the Highland Council Roads Department regarding the disrepair of the Wick Lidl car park and access road.	Cllr Jan McEwan		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A003	Actions	The Chair to discuss the landslip at Scrabster with Graeme Paget to ensure the Geotechnical team at Jacobs have completed all works stabilising the hill and prevent future landslips.	CCoC		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A004	Actions	Simon Heron to provide an instruction sheet on the operation of the new pedestrian crossings at the A9/A836 junction for CCoC to distribute to the Community Councils and on social media.	Simon Heron / CCoC		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A005	Actions	BEAR Scotland to consider road markings and signage for the filter lane turning left on the A836 to Castletown on the A9 Thurso bridge to prevent tailbacks along Traill Street in Thurso.	BEAR Scotland		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A006	Priorities	Councillors to raise the concerns to the Highland Council Roads Department over the poor condition of Swanson St/Couper St/Market St in Thurso at the next roads meeting.	Councillors		18.06.24 – New

ACTIONS – THIS MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M003/A007	Priorities	David Swanson to provide an update from the Active Travel Department for the next Transport Forum meeting.	David Swanson		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A008	Priorities	Councillors to put pressure on the Roads department for an up-to-date priority list to enable the Forum to communicate it to others.	Councillors		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A009	Priorities	CCoC to contact Graeme Paget regarding the progress of the reinstatement of the Flood Working Group and if there is a resolution for the Traill Street flooding issue.	CCoC		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A010	Road	CCoC to circulate the BEAR Scotland 3-month programme to all members.	CCoC		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A011	Road	Hazel Moore to investigate resolving wall damage and HGV use at the layby on the A99 at Mid-Clyth and to determine if the layby could be restricted to no HGV use.	Hazel Moore		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A012	Sea	CCoC to feedback to David Summers regarding the difficulties faced by visitors to Wick Harbour with the bus network.	CCoC/ David Summers		18.06.24 – New
CTF2024 M003/A013	Bus	Alex Flanagan to confirm if the last bus on route 80 from Wick to John O’Groats was at 1243hrs and whether it could go back to the later 1735hrs departure previously operated by Aaron’s of Wick.	Alx Flanagan		18.06.24 – New

ACTIONS – THIS MEETING

Action reference	Meeting Item	Action Details	Actionee	Status	Additional Comments
CTF2024 M003/A014	Rail	The Chair to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport regards funding for the Delmore Loop improvements.	CCoC		18.06.24 – New

Appendix C – HIAL

Wick John O’Groats Airport

Ceangailte · Connected



Caithness Transport Forum update June 2024.

Public Service Obligation (PSO)

Further 12 months funding until March 2025 has been confirmed.

PSO reliability has been an issue during April and May.

HIAL Management update

Our new CEO Paul Kelsall is now in post and comes with a wealth of aviation experience.

Kevin O’Leary the interim COO has left the business, a replacement COO is being sought.

Aviation Statistics

Statistics for HIAL:

February 2024: Year to date passenger numbers have decreased by -2.2% against May 2023.

February 2023: YTD Aircraft movements have decreased compared to last year with a reduction of -6.1% on 2023.

Statistics for Wick JOG:

Passengers, May 2024 v 2023 -7.9%, YTD -3.5%, the forecast to end of year is over 9k pax.

Aircraft movements down -12.5% on May 2023, YTD -22% the forecast is just over 3k movements this year.

It should be noted that we are only in month 2 and there has been a significant amount of weather disruption.

Ongoing works

This year’s maintenance budget has been approved and there is now to be a focus on paint markings.

Projects update

Heating consultants have been appointed to provide recommendations and design for replacement boilers to supply the service and terminal buildings.

AIR – HIAL UPDATE

The new vehicle for security has been delivered.

Our environmental consultants Ricardo will present their findings on the drainage system next month.

A new tractor mower has been purchased with delivery expected next week.

Audits and Safety meetings

The CAA air traffic audit went well with all findings now closed.

The HIAL Senior management will be carrying out an audit of Wick Airport in June.

Staffing levels

ATC staffing is currently reduced to three operational ATCO's.

Our two ATC trainees are progressing well through their validation training. Their validations are now expected for October 2024.

Opening hours

The reduced staffing levels in ATC means the requirement for tactical closures of the airport throughout the day remains in place.

Eastern Airways and other stakeholders have been informed of the issues we face and will continue to receive regular updates.

The 24/7 cover for emergency flights remains unchanged.

Dougie Cook

HIAL

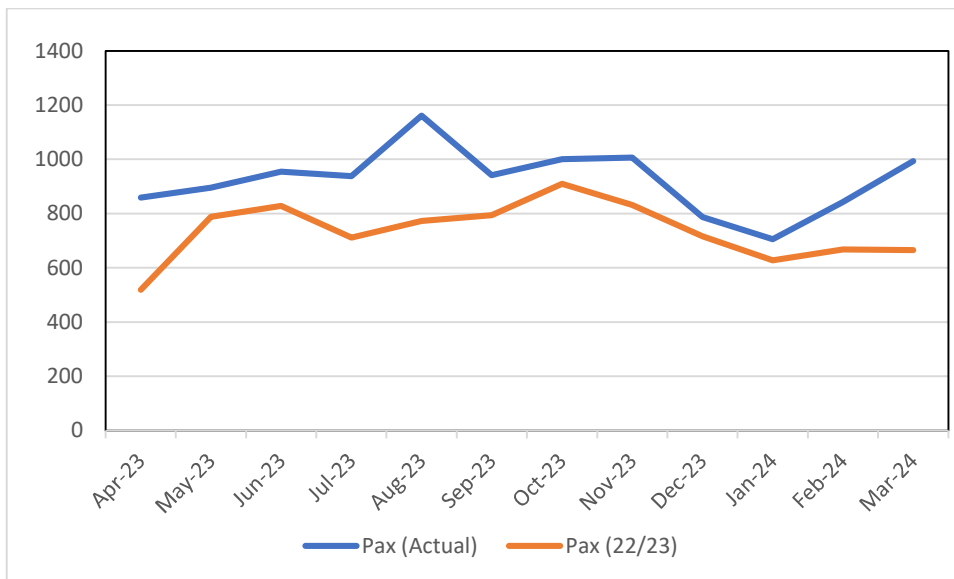
June 2024

Appendix D – Wick PSO

Wick PSO update

Year 2 summary / Year 3 to date

Year 2 saw a consistent and substantial rise in passenger numbers compared to Year 1, with a final total for the year of 11,089 passengers flown compared to 8,835 over the previous period.



Year 3 has seen passenger numbers to date remain effectively flat, with very small variances in April and May compared to the previous period. With regards to May 2024, these have been affected by a period of poor reliability – approximately 1,100 passengers booked for the month compared to 852 flown.

Performance and Reliability

Performance and reliability over March and April 2024 was largely in line with expectations, albeit with a slightly higher than expected level of controllable cancellations and delays during the period. May 2024, by comparison, was significantly affected by a prolonged period of heavy fog in Wick, leading to a significant number of weather-related cancellations.

Coming into June 2024, the service has unfortunately seen a very high level of disruption for operational reasons, with two of Eastern Airways’ fleet of Aberdeen-based Jetstream 41s out of action due to ongoing engineering issues. This has had a significant impact on passenger numbers and on passenger/stakeholder confidence, and the Council is working closely with Eastern to monitor the situation and the expected timeline for a return to normal service.

In order to address the short-term issues caused, Eastern Airways have temporarily brought an ATR72 – a significantly larger aircraft at 72 seats – into service on the Wick-Aberdeen route, and this has been in operation since 10 June 2024 with no issue. As of the date of this report, it is expected that both Jetstream 41s will be back in operation and normal service resumed from 17 June.

AIR – WICK PSO UPDATE

Month	Planned	Operated	%Operated	CANX Reasons	Reliability (controllable)	OTP
Mar-24	94	84	89%	2 x ATC 6 x Operational 2 x Weather	94%	71%
Apr-24	96	84	88%	8 x Operational 2 x Crew 2 x Weather	90%	CAA data not yet available
May-24	100	74	74%	16 x Weather 6 x Operational 4 x Crew	90%	CAA data not yet available

Wick John O’Groats Airport Working Group

As previously advised, as part of the funding conditions for the third year of the PSO, Transport Scotland asked the Council to set up a Working Group to look at the long-term sustainability of both the service and of Wick John O’Groats Airport. This group has now met three times and agreed a set of workstreams covering a broad range of categories including business development, growth in the existing PSO, modelling of future PSO/scheduled service requirements, and sustainable/net-zero aviation technologies. Work on these is progressing well and the group hopes to present a short report to Transport Scotland by September 2024 outlining the case for continued funding and a clear action plan for development towards a more long-term sustainable operation at Wick.

David Swanson

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

June 2024

Appendix E – Scrabster Harbour Trust



CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 18th JUNE 2024 SCRABSTER HARBOUR UPDATE

Scrabster Harbour is managed and operated by Scrabster Harbour Trust, established in 1841 and governed by its own legislation. The Trust seeks to serve the local community and all surpluses created are reinvested into the port.



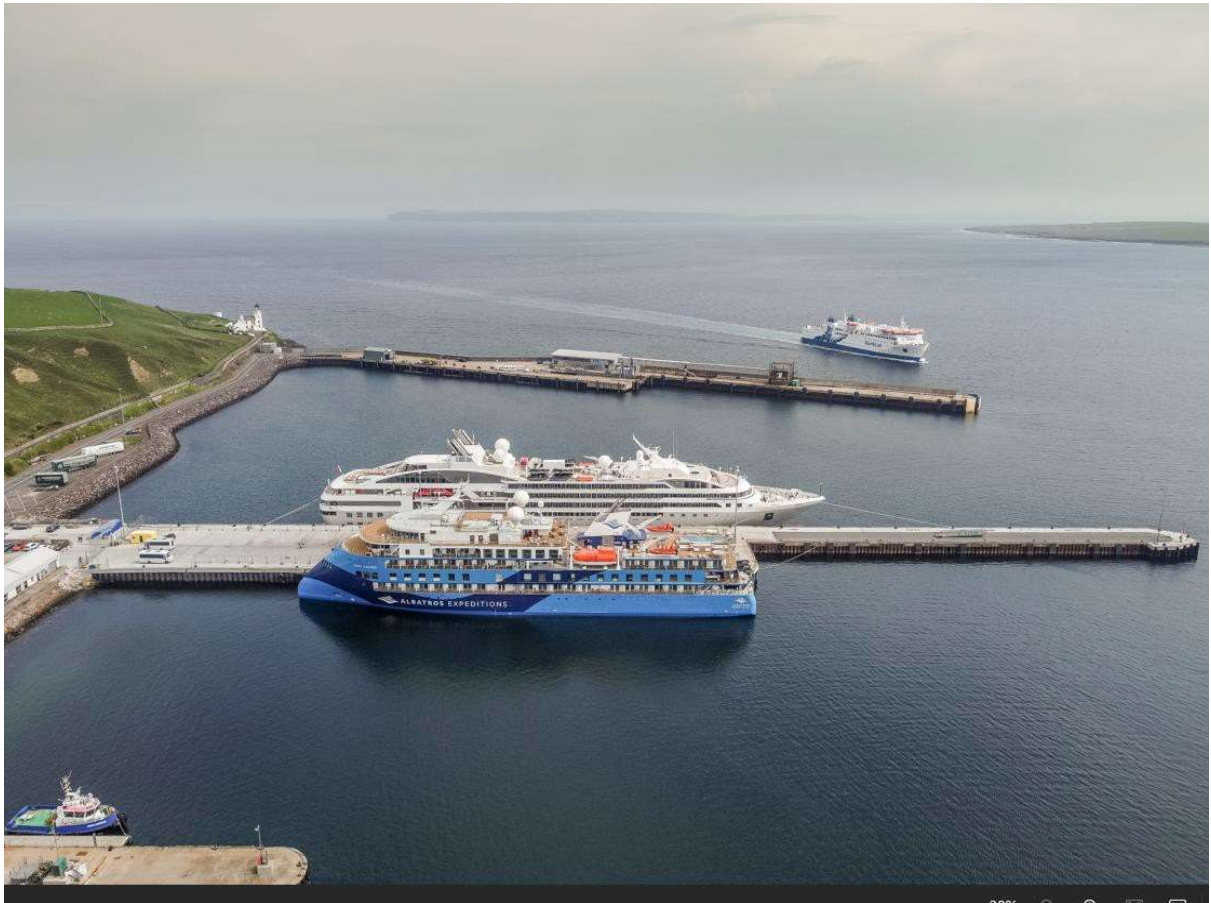
1. PORT ACTIVITY

The Trust's 2023-24 financial year ended on 31st March 2024. Record revenues were recorded in the trading period. The activity highlights for the year were as follows.

- Total vessel arrivals totalled 2,099 (2022/23 - 2,050).
- Total vessel tonnage totalled 8.802 million tonnes (2022/23 - 8.595 million).

SEA – SCRABSTER HARBOUR TRUST UPDATE

- Ferry Passenger numbers 212,257 (2022/23 - 163,538).
- Fish box landings amounted to 283,837 boxes, a decrease of 32,960 boxes on the previous year.
- General cargo volumes totalled 81,277 tonnes, an increase of 38,648 tonnes on last year.
- Fish cargo volumes fell by 42% compared to 2022-23 reflecting disruption to the sailing schedule in April/May 2023.
- Fuel deliveries by coastal tanker amounted to 36,201 tonnes, a 10% fall on the prior year.
- Offshore Energy activity involved 72 vessels with a combined tonnage of 321,783 tonnes, a 35% decrease.



2. CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND ISSUES

Current activity and issues affecting the port include the following.

- The Trust was designated as a Border Control Post on 24th April 2024.
- Turbine component deliveries for the Limekiln onshore windfarm development began on 12th May. To date there has been three deliveries of components. The delivery programme is expected to continue through to October 2024. In total the components for twenty-four turbines will arrive across fifteen separate deliveries.
- The blocks and traffic lights restrictions, put in place on the A9 following the landslip on 27th

SEA – SCRABSTER HARBOUR TRUST UPDATE

December 2023, were finally removed on 20th May.

- There was a general strike in the Faroe Islands from 14th May to 9th June. The strike meant no cargo or produce could be landed or discharged at any Faroes port. Accordingly, the weekly fish cargo service from Torshavn to Scrabster, operated by Eimskip, did not operate during the industrial action. However, a number of Faroese fishing vessels landed their catch at Scrabster.
- There have been seven cruise ship calls so far this year bringing over 5,000 visitors and a combined tonnage of 229,737. The arrival of the German vessel AidaSol on 29th April was the largest vessel to ever berth alongside at Scrabster. There are a further six scheduled cruise calls before the 2024 season ends in early August.



- The peak season ferry sailing schedule began on 1st May 2024.

Sandy Mackie

Scrabster Harbour

11th June 2024

Appendix F – Wick Harbour Trust



Wick Harbour

Update for Caithness Transport Forum - 06 June 2024

Marina

- Wick Marina has had an encouraging start to this year's season. Yacht numbers so far are almost identical to 2023. Weather has been a bit erratic, meaning vessels are not moving about as fluently as they would like, but looking ahead we are confident that we will have another very successful season. 2023 was a record year for the marina and we hope to replicate this year.
- Wick Marina is becoming a popular place for owners to berth their vessels for up to a month as they return home for various reasons and then return at a future date to resume their sailing.
- One of the major gripes we receive from leisure customers is the poor bus network that we have in the area. Many would like to explore the county further but find it difficult to arrange suitable journeys.

Cargo

- Harbour has been kept busy with pipe shipments for Subsea7's latest contracts. One outstanding shipment due.
- Camster 2 Windfarm components. Shipments due, commencing around 9th June. 6 Ships
- Other cargo shipments of salt and lime have been discharged.

Offshore Wind

- Presently 4 Crew Transfer Vessels working daily from the port on Beatrice Windfarm.
- No activity from other operational Windfarms so far this year.

Surveys

- Several small survey vessels have been utilising the harbour on various contracts. Varying in time stays of 2-3 days to a month at a time. These are in support of future planned windfarms and cable laying projects.
- **Fishing.** Local landings of shellfish only.

Ian Cormack

Wick Harbour Harbour Master

June 2024

Appendix G – NorthLink Ferries



Serco NorthLink Ferries Caithness Transport Forum Update – 18th June 2024



Volumes

2024	January	February	March	April	May	Total YTD	PCP
Passengers	4,083	6,829	10,078	14,199	27,171	62,360	+2%
NCV	1,634	2,700	3,943	5,114	8,587	21,978	+1%
Freight (lane metres)	3,921	8,057	6,911	6,950	10,427	36,266	+9%

Operational Activity

The M.V Hamnavoe has been operating to the peak timetable since 1st May and this will continue through to 30th September 2024.

Since March M.V Hamnavoe has operated 550 sailings, with 10 cancellations, and 25 delays.

Green Tourism - Gold Award

Serco NorthLink Ferries has been recognised for its sustainability standards by independent body, Green Tourism, and is the only ferry operator to currently have its Gold rating.

NorthLink Ferries has been praised for excelling in the health & wellbeing, awareness, community, and travel categories.

Green Tourism was impressed by NorthLink's increase in environmental and sustainability awareness throughout the organisation. Initiatives ranged from:

- NorthLink's use of eco-lighting across all offices and port flood lighting;
- Captains sailing more efficiently to reduce emissions;
- Rainwater from the lairage being harvested to wash the building, and;
- Animal waste being delivered to local farms for use as fertiliser.

Kris Bevan

Serco NorthLink

June 2024

Appendix H – Pentland Ferries



07 June 2024

Caithness Transport Forum Update

MV Pentalina continues operation on the Pentland Firth route, operating three returns sailings per day.

Passenger and Cargo carrying numbers are very good, numbers are exceeding pre-covid levels on this route.

Resident Discount Scheme remains active for Orkney Residents with strong uptake of this noted over the year so far.

MV Alfred remains on charter to CalMac until September 2024. The vessel is currently serving on the Troon – Brodick route.

Helen Inkster

Managing Director Pentland Ferries

June 2024

Appendix I – Highland Council

CAITHNESS TRANSPORT FORUM 19 JUNE 2024

PUBLIC TRANSPORT UPDATE

Aaron's of Wick have withdrawn from two of their public service contracts: John o'Groats – Thurso (915) and Wick – Thurso (917) with effect from 10 June. The Council has made an interim arrangement with Stagecoach to cover these journeys. Stagecoach have publicised these as additions to their services 80 and 82. We will be inviting tenders for longer term replacements shortly.

Aaron's submitted their timetable changes for Gills Bay – Wick including Wick town service (914) and Berriedale – Wick (918) on 10 June. The date of change will be confirmed by the Traffic Commissioner's office but will be around late July. These changes include improved timings for the airport connections, an additional journey between Wick and Keiss, and an improved pattern for the town service (including Staxigoe). The last journey from Wick to Dunbeath is retimed later (to 1735).

There is a desire for a journey at 1630 from Thurso to Wick for college students. This will be included in our tender invitations for a replacement 917 contract.

Obviously the withdrawals, and the later than expected revisions to other routes, have delayed the production of a combined timetable for all operators. We will produce an interim timetable to cover the period until longer term contracts are awarded.

Stagecoach will route their X99 service (Thurso – Inverness) via Wick Riverside from 19 August. From the same date, their 1801 departure from Scrabster will be retimed to 1830 to connect with the Northlink ferry.

The Council's Economy & Infrastructure Committee agreed a response to the Islands Connectivity Plan consultation, which focussed mainly on the ferries serving Highland Council's islands and ferry-connected peninsulas, and the land-based connections with them.

David Summers

Highland Council Passenger & School Transport

14 June 2024

Appendix J – Far North Line Community Rail Partnership



150th Anniversary Event to mark the opening of the northern section of the Far North Line



(Helmsdale – Wick/Thurso across the Flow Country)

This year, 2024, marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Sutherland and Caithness Railway. This now forms the northern part of the Far North Line from Helmsdale, across the dramatic Flow Country to Wick and Thurso. The 25 miles of



Andy Grant

track across the Flow is amongst the most remote in the UK and the derelict lineside cottages of surfacemen of past ages bear witness to lives lived – in service to the railway – in isolation with no road access and none of the services most households in the country take for granted today.

The Flow itself is a place of rare habitats developed over thousands of years. The deep layers of peat beneath the blanket bog are a hugely important carbon store. Such peat bogs cover just 3% of the world, but hold nearly 30% of all the earth's carbon. Hence the renewed interest in the area as a contributor to combatting climate change with the application for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, currently being assessed.

To celebrate the anniversary and the survival of this remarkable route, the Far North Line Community Rail Partnership, in collaboration with the Friends of the Far North Line, the Highland Railway Society and RSPB Forsinard, are staging an event at Forsinard on Friday 21st June. Speakers will cover the history and the future prospects of both the line and the landscape. Following this a bus will take those interested to Thurso to travel the line back to Forsinard – and on to Inverness if required – on the last southbound train of the day.



Flow Country Partnership

Participants will receive a booklet which will include both a line guide to the route and an account of the history and operation of this lonely, scenic line.

Completing the Far North Line, by Keith Fenwick, published to mark the event, will be on sale.

Details and a booking form from Michael Willmot at hello@fnlcrp.co.uk



150th Anniversary Event to mark the opening of the northern section of the Far North Line



(Helmsdale – Wick/Thurso across the Flow Country)

Friday 21st June 2024 at RSPB Forsinard

(The 07.00 departure from Inverness arrives Forsinard, 10.21)

- 10.30 COFFEE
There will be a small exhibition of artefacts and photos curated by Timespan
- 10.55 Welcome by John Yellowlees (who will chair the meeting)
- 11.00 Musical salutation by the children of Helmsdale Primary School
- 11.10 History of the Line Keith Fenwick, Highland Railway Society
- 12.00 Life on the line in BR days and up to the present William Bruce
- 12.45 LUNCH
Buffet lunch and refreshments provided by Forsinard Lodge
- 13.30 Introduction to RSPB Forsinard
Milly Revill Hayward, Peatland Engagement and Communications Officer
- 14.15 Far North Line Future Prospects and Development
Frank Roach, Hitrans
Michael Willmot, FNLCRP
Ian Budd, FoFNL
Ryan Savage, ScotRail
- 15.15 Coach departs Forsinard (29 miles to Thurso station)
- 16.15 Arrive Thurso railway station
- 16.32 Depart Thurso on southbound train
- 17.11 Arrive / Depart Forsinard. Train arrives Inverness at 20.14

The cost of the event including refreshments and lunch will be £15 and for the coach/rail travel afternoon activity £18 (or £13.50 for senior citizen and other valid rail card holders). Booking essential. Booking forms available from Michael Willmot by email from hello@fnlcrp.co.uk or by phone 07864 081 094.

10% of the charge made for attendance will go towards the Helmsdale Primary School visit. After their musical salutation, the children will have a short talk about, and tour of the RSPB Reserve - part of FNLCRP's commitment to raising the next generation's awareness of the importance of caring for this fragile environment. This school visit is generously supported by ScotRail

The Far North Line CRP is grateful to the Friends of the Far North Line, the Highland Railway Society, Helmsdale Station CIC, Timespan and ScotRail for support, both financial and in-kind.