



Lochaber Transport Forum

Co-chruinneachadh mu ghoireasan - siubhail Lochabair

Minutes of the Lochaber Transport Forum Meeting

Tuesday 6th August 2019, 11.00

The Duncansburgh Church Hall, the Parade, Fort William

Present;

| | |
|---|-------|
| Brian Murphy – Chairperson | BM |
| Benny MacDonald – Lochaber Transport Forum | BMcD |
| Tony Dobson – Strontian resident | TD |
| Donald Stewart – bus user | DSt |
| John Barnes - Friends of the West Highland Lines/Glenfinnan Station | JB |
| Ian Langley – SB, RB & A CC/West Highland CC | IL |
| Iain Macniven – Chair, Arisaig & District CC | IMcn |
| Don McKillop – CalMac | DMcK |
| Finlay J MacRae – CalMac | FJMcR |
| Hege Hermes – West Highland CRP | HH |
| Kate Willis – Lochaber Environmental Group | KW |
| Ali MacDonald – HC | AMcD |
| Ewan Standing – bus user | ES |
| Ronald Wenger – RMT | RW |
| W MacPhee – RMT | WMcPh |
| Arthur Cowie – Lochaber Disability Access Panel | AC |
| Nick Jones – Local transport user | NJ |
| John Friel – Shiel Buses | JF |
| David Simpson – ScotRail | DSi |
| Ewan Tait – ScotRail | ET |
| Sue Evans – ScotRail Alliance | SE |
| Sally Morris | SM |

1. Welcome

Brian Murphy chaired the meeting and asked for introductions around the table.

2. Apologies;

Flora McKee – Voluntary Action Lochaber
Bryan Greig – Voluntary Action Lochaber
James Wilkin – West Highland CRP
Peter Knight – Citylink
Chris Hoon – West Coast Motors
Christine Hutchison - Kilmallie CC
Cllr Denis Rixson – Highland Council
Julie McDonald – Kinlochleven resident
Sarah Kennedy – FWMSC
Vikki Trelfer – HITRANS
Lucy Clarke - Sustrans
Chris Evans – Strontian resident, bus/train user
Kath Small – Ballachulish CC

3. Confirmation of minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th May 2019 were approved by Arthur Cowie and Nick Jones with two amendments.

Lochaber Transport Forum
An Drochaid, Claggan, Fort William, PH33 6PH

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Item 5, Cycling & Walking, “there is planning permission” should read “there is a planning application”.

NJ gave an update on the upgrade of this slipway at Corpach. Highland Council have modified their plans to add side steps to keep the path open for walkers.

Item 6d, Rail. “Action PS” should read “Action SP”.

4. Matters Arising

Under 6d) as stated in the minutes Scott Prentice, ScotRail responded quickly to the issue raised with residents in Morvern unable to access a rail card on the ScotRail website because they have a PA80 postcode.

NJ advised the price of a West Highland Rail Card has risen from £9.50 to £15.

5. Cycling & Walking

NJ gave a short presentation on the Rail Trail around Fort William which he has put together for the 125 Anniversary of the West Highland Line. This is a walking route around the town to view the history and changes of the rail line. There is a fully illustrated trail guide available for a self-guided walk. This can be downloaded from the website – www.fortwilliamrailtrail.co.uk The trail will be a permanent feature with a possibility of way markers if funding can be accessed.

BM thanked NJ for a very detailed presentation.

KW gave details of current projects by Lochaber Environmental Group. A funding application was successful for bike racks and a shelter in Glen Nevis, they have worked with Nevis Landscape Partnership, e-bike workshops are arranged. There was also a mention of a Transport Scotland Grant of £2.5m available for Highland Region.

KW will be meeting Vikki Trelfer, HITRANS, to discuss active travel projects and collect copies of the Fort William Active Travel Map.

There was discussion on all the work and maps related to active travel and there was confusion over who does what. BMcD said he had contacted Sustrans prior to this meeting to enquire about attending. Their work in the area is mainly the National Cycle Network 78 pathway and they also work closely with HITRANS on the Active Travel Maps.

BM – it would be good to have HITRANS and Sustrans at a meeting together to understand the work being done. We’ve been asking for better signage for cyclists but I don’t see this has improved.

AC – I don’t see the walk from the back of the swimming pool to the Braveheart Carpark on the maps.

Action – the Forum to invite HITRANS and Sustrans to the October Forum Meeting.

NJ had concerns with the path to the viewpoint across from Marks & Spencers. There is a stile on the first fence but a second fence was erected recently blocking easy access. This shouldn’t be allowed.

Action – the Forum to enquire with Highland Council

6. Public Transport

a) Ferries

FJMcR introduced DMcK as the new CalMac Area Manager for Argyll and Lochaber based in Oban. There are still resilience issues but all working well this week. We are doing our best while waiting on new vessels.

Timetabling now shows a year in advance. Transport Scotland issued the contract and requires all to be cost neutral or cost positive. We have worked with HITRANS to refurbish port offices and replace signs.

DSt asked about passenger number in general.

FJMcR – the North West Highlands are showing a rise in car and passenger numbers with a higher rise in motorhomes. The Clyde is slightly quieter.

BMcD – the Forum received a complaint about the morning train to Mallaig not allowing sufficient time to access the 10.10 ferry to the small Isles. Not allowing prior booking for several smaller ferries also gives problems.

FJMcR – there are some issues we'd like to see improved and we're working on it.

KW asked if CalMac are lowering carbon emissions.

FJMcR – we're introducing the new hybrid diesel/battery powered vessels where possible. The new vessels using cleaner fuel were discussed.

BMcD – the Forum had an email saying drivers were keeping engines running while crossing on Corran Ferry, what is CalMac's policy?

FJMcR – on closed decks engines must be stopped. We don't have a restriction on open deck ferries but would expect engines to be off. It may be in very cold weather some drivers keep engines on for heating.

b) Buses

SM asked for a mid-afternoon 44 service to Kinlochleven as the break between 14.30 and 17.30 was too much.

JF – we have extra costs to consider with additional services. There also has to be sufficient passengers. It's difficult to add a journey on mid-afternoon each day as Fridays have a different school closing time.

IL raised an issue with older coaches being used on the 919 service to Inverness.

There was discussion on the older coaches being used by Stagecoach which are breaking down. Shiel Buses have gone to help restart coaches at Fort William Bus Station.

JF – Shiel Buses have made a big investment in vehicles to operate a reliable service but Stagecoach still use older coaches which are breaking down regularly.

BMcD – I had also noticed older coaches on the 919 route. As Peter Knight, Citylink, could not attend today this matter was raised by email. The reply stated;

The Stagecoach Inverness Citylink Fleet comprises 7 vehicles which cover 5 vehicle workings on both the 917 and 919/920. 4 of these vehicles are the new 67 plates that were brought a couple of years back by Stagecoach. Therefore if all are available there will be 1 vehicle between the 5 cycles that is not the new type.

In the winter the Stagecoach Inverness work drops by 2 vehicle cycles, therefore it would be almost guaranteed that the new vehicles will always be on the 919/920.

IL – this contradicts what I've seen. There are older coaches being used all day at times.

HH asked about a larger bus for the Mallaig route. The bus passing through Glenfinnan at 16.30 from Mallaig is frequently full resulting in people being turned away.

JF – we need drivers to tell us this. It is possible to make improvements.

DSt asked why there are not more coaches going round by Glasgow airport.

I also asked a Highland Council Finance Manager to find £85K to support the 44 service to Kinlochleven and he had no idea how to find it. This is not reasonable. Transport Scotland are paying for coaches to connect with the sleeper train in Crianlarich for Oban. Why don't we ask Transport Scotland for £85K.

JB raised the problem with the 920 late coach service from Inverness missing the late train to Mallaig.

JF – drivers are aware of this and will help if they know of passengers wanting to continue on to Mallaig by train.

BMcD contacted both Citylink and HC regarding this and it's hoped the coach time can be adjusted for the winter timetable.

AC – at Glenfinnan drivers may not see passengers clearly who are waiting in the shelter on the other side of the road.

SM –the 918 service is still sometimes late but it can't be related to school journeys as it's holiday time. The coach was full yesterday.

BMcD received a later email from Chris Hoon, West Coast Motors. He had hoped to attend the meeting but something urgent came up before travelling. He sent the following details;

The changes to the timetable that were implemented this year are not due to change again for the foreseeable future. We will be running a duplicate service for the Appin kids when the schools go back which should avoid the delays that were experienced last summer. The later departures from Fort William to Oban also seem to be helping to reduce delays, though I admit reliability is not as good as we would like it to be. This is compounded by a number of issues including heavy, slow moving traffic, roadworks, awaiting the service from Inverness and also a number of breakdowns we have experienced with one of our buses which has had overheating issues. The engineering department has had this in their workshop several times to try to fix the problem, but unfortunately it seems that it has yet to be fully resolved. It has now been taken off service while engineering give it a thorough test which we hope will sort out the problem.

BM – I know HITRANS are looking into improvements for this service.

BMcD received an email from a bus user disappointed in the lack of a fuller service between Fort William and Oban.

BMcD raised an issue with Citylink which he received from another bus user by email. As previously reported earlier in the year the Citylink Glasgow services are continuing to skip the bus stops at Inchree and Bunree. The Forum received a response from Citylink which included;

I note your concerns regarding the bus stops at Bunree and Inchree and the reluctance of our drivers to use these stops. I have reviewed the location of these stops and see no reason why our vehicles cannot stop if required.

Travelling North, I note the lay-by at Bunree Caravan Site Road end as well as the designated bus stop a little further up at Inchree. With regards to the Southbound carriageway, it would not be safe for our vehicles to stop on the A82 opposite the bus shelter at Inchree. There is a designated bus stop opposite Bunree Caravan Park Road end which could be safely served by our services.

Passengers wishing to travel towards Fort William are advised to book tickets from Onich and then call our customer services team and request that we place a note onto the passenger manifest advising the driver that passengers wish to board either at Bunree Caravan Park or at the bus shelter at Inchree.

Again, passengers travelling south are advised to book from Corran and call us to advise of their wish to board at the stop opposite Bunree Caravan Park. Our customer services team are available between the hours of 08:00 and 20:00 on 0141 352 4444.

I have contacted the relevant depot managers and advised that these instructions be relayed to the drivers of all our services to and from Fort William. I am mindful of our responsibility to all our passengers in rural areas and we are delighted to be able to continue to offer a reliable and sustainable transport solution.

c) Community Rail Partnerships

BMcD gave notice of the West Highland Community Rail Partnership AGM to be held on Saturday 21st September at 12.30. A venue has still to be confirmed.

HH gave an update on the building on Corpach Station. This has been closed for a long time and the CRP have been looking into it being made available for lease to a local group. More recent news from Network Rail have said they are now willing to allow the building to be surveyed to assess its condition and potential.

d) Rail

BM welcomed the rail representatives who had recently arrived for the meeting.

DSi gave an update on the storm damage to the West Highland Line which is closed at five sites. Crianlarich to Oban has three of these areas closed but are not thought to be too serious. The other two are south of Crianlarich and will take at least a week to repair but have still to be fully assessed. We're doing as much as possible to set up road replacement and there are four trains on this side which will be kept operating.

On train performance, there haven't been enough new trains available. We've had a large recruitment programme and now fully staffed. We are still working on our remedial plan with Transport Scotland.

On the West Highland Line route punctuality is low, with percentage in the 80's. There have been problems with refurbished 156 carriages, mainly with toilets. A new collection installation in Fort William will help. The introduction of 153 carriages to carry bikes and larger baggage will help. All decisions on rolling stock are made by Transport Scotland.

We've had good feedback on the proposed new timetable which was discussed at the last Transport meeting.

The 125 years Anniversary trip to Glenfinnan will be announced soon.

Our current priority is to get the route open again.

NJ said it's good that most of the line can still be used while repairs are ongoing. Regarding the new timetable, how do we feedback comments?

DSi - We'll have a meeting around the end of August. We are still recruiting for this extra work. The final timetable will be up to Transport Scotland.

HH – The current Line Review has been split into four categories. I'm keen to see liaison between the Transport Integration workstream and the Timetabling workstream. Also, will all groups get access to discussions within the other groups?

FJMCR - we have been involved with the discussions on the new timetables.

ET – CalMac are part of the Line Review Group and have worked together on projects.

RW – has there been problems with drivers leaving ScotRail for other rail companies?

DSi – this has been a problem as other companies pay more which ScotRail can't match. We are working with the unions to find a way to retain drivers, it's a long term plan.

RW – on some new station signs the information disappears before the train arrives.

DSi – this requires work to be done to improve the G4 signal, we have a big investment trying to improve these problems.

IL – there are problems when signing in/out with a smart card at rural stations.

SE took details to report the problem.

IL had issues with current trains not suitable for this area and suggested HST 125's should be used. There are also problems with seat reservations.

DSi – we work to a contract from Transport Scotland who still want 158's to be used on the line, 125's would not be suitable on this route. I'll talk to a colleague who deals with commercial issues regarding seat reservations.

RW – although there is an alliance between ScotRail and Network Rail since the start of the new franchise five years ago some workers are still waiting to get passes.

DSi – we will look into this.

RW – will there be consideration given to a commuter service for Fort William in the new timetable? Also, parking and bike storage at stations.

ET – we're looking at this, it's a very constrained network but the initial work on the new timetable had this added.

There was discussion on the closure of the line in October for work around Bridge of Orchy and Corroul. There was no proper discussion done with local businesses and it's still not clear with some information saying one thing and the website saying differently.

DSi – we're currently talking to businesses and want to hear of problems.

HH – just try booking on line during the closure dates to see how confusing it is.

NJ gave notice of a problem with point display boards.

SE – I've taken a note to get this checked.

Other problems were reported, replacement buses don't show up on station signs and timetable clocks have shown the wrong time.

7. Community Transport

As AMcD had left the meeting BMcD gave notice of a HC Committee Meeting coming up in August to discuss the recommendations for the CT Grant Fund for April 2020 to 2023. When recommended community groups will be informed of an invitation to bid for grants.

8. A82 - Update

BM – Draft Traffic Orders for the A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Upgrade had been expected to be published during the last financial year however these are still awaited.

Transport Scotland are currently undertaking further work on the Fort William Strategic Transport Study Pre-appraisal which was carried out by AECOM for HITRANS.

DSt – there was no allowance for community involvement in the recent Strategic Transport Projects Review. The other reviews/reports had community consultations.

RW – the state of the road in Glencoe is becoming a problem while we wait on the new road for Loch Lomond side.

IL – there have been no repairs to the road after the heavy wind turbines were transported from Corpach up through Spean Bridge, verges and gullies have been damaged. Who is responsible?

BM – this will be Transport Scotland.

9. AOCB

DSt – I want again to report the appalling state of the bus station and the Middle Street shelter. We should be writing to Highland Council, both are filthy. The underpass also needs to be cleaned up.

BM – HC have spent a lot of money improving the underpass over the years but it needs to be cleaned regularly.

IL – I think the underpass has been improved recently.

10. Date of next meeting

The next Transport Forum Meeting is on Tuesday 29th October in the Duncansburgh Church Hall. Our AGM will start at 11.00 with the regular quarterly meeting from around 11.20.

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From meeting 29th October

Confirmation of minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th August 2019 were approved by Arthur Cowie and Iain Macniven with one amendment.

Under Item 3, Confirmation of Minutes, it was Ferguson's Transport and not Highland Council who have modified their plans to add side steps to keep the path open for walkers. The outcome remains the same.

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