



Lochaber Transport Forum

Co-chruinneachadh mu ghoireasan - siubhail Lochabair

Minutes of the Lochaber Transport Forum Meeting

Tuesday 14th May 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
Chris Evans – Strontian resident, bus/train user	CE
Donald Stewart – bus user	DSt
Cllr Ben Thompson – HC	BT
John Barnes - Friends of the West Highland Lines/Glenfinnan Station	JB
Iain Erskine – CalMac	IE
Sarah Kennedy – FWMSC	SK
Kate Willis – Lochaber Environmental Group	KW
Arthur Cowie – Lochaber Disability Access Panel	AC
Nick Jones – Local transport user	NJ
Vikki Trelfer – HITRANS	VT
Gillian Llewellyn – Morvern resident	GL
Peter Llewellyn – Morvern resident	PL
David Summers – Highland Council	DSu
Scott Prentice – Abellio	SP

1. Welcome

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

2. Apologies;

Cllr Andrew Baxter – Highland Council	Sonia Cameron
Kate Forbes – MSP	Steve Roberts
Cllr Allan Henderson – HC	John Stafford – Sottish Canals
Kath Small – Ballachulish CC	Ronald Wegner – RMT
W MacPhee	Ali MacDonald – HC
Flora McKee – Voluntary Action Lochaber	Iain Macniven – Arisaig CC
Christine Hutchison - Kilmallie CC	Gwyn Moses
Cllr Denis Rixson – Highland Council	
Ian Langley – Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry CC/ West Highland CRP	
Laura Cheetham – Lochaber Action on Disability	
Julie McDonald – Kinlochleven resident	

3. Confirmation of minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th February 2019 were approved by Tony Dobson and Sarah Kennedy with one amendment.

Under 5. Cycling & Walking, BT wished to clarify what he said. 'Work is ongoing to find a suitable route from Inchree to Lundavra. It would probably help if groups pushed for these improvements.'

This should be replaced by, 'I have raised the issue with Sustrans given the time we will have to wait for Transport Scotland to do something about Corran to Fort William. They have looked at other options but there is no work ongoing unless groups push for alternatives like Inchree to Lundavra.'

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

Tel: 07789517990

Email: transportforum@carelochaber.org

Web Site www.lochabertransport.org.uk

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4. Matters Arising

Under Matters Arising, cost of the late evening service between Fort William and Kinlochleven. DSt and Julie McDonald attended a meeting with Shiel Buses recently and had hoped to receive a figure for this journey.

There was further discussion on possible funding from local wind farms and hydro schemes to provide some bus services through Community Transport.

DSu – there is no HC budget for further services.

SK – Voluntary Action Lochaber have a holding account to help local groups manage funds.

Under Cycling & Walking at top of page 3, bike lockers outside Fort William rail station. BMcD has made further enquiries with ScotRail and Transport Scotland and hopes to get a quick response.

SK – there has been £200k made available to improve the town. The town team and other groups will be looking into how this can be spent. One request is to have a proper crossing on the A82 to enable pedestrians to get from the area of the old fort to the High St. without walking around Morrison's supermarket.

5. Cycling & Walking

VT is the new Active Travel Officer with HITRANS and took up the post in January. She is working on the Active Travel Map for Fort William and surrounding area which didn't get printed two years ago when it was last discussed.

VT received quite a bit of updates to the map recently but had several more queries to ask about which led to discussions and feedback from those present.

AC had issues with accessibility and drop kerbs showing on the map. Also, there needs to be better signage for cycle paths.

SK asked if the pontoons at the west end car park can be highlighted and if the map will be available by app.

VT – the map will not be available by app.

DSt – there is a bike hire in Glencoe, Crank it up Gear, which should be included.

VT appreciated the feedback and hoped to go to the printers in June.

BM – there is a meeting on 23rd May to update the Active Travel Audit for this area. AECOM have been appointed by HITRANS and HC to work on this.

John Barnes agreed to attend on behalf of the Transport Forum.

NJ – there is an issue at Corpach near the boatyard. There is planning permission to upgrade the slipway which may lead to a path being blocked. I've commented on the application.

BT – it might be an option to write to Ferguson Transport regarding this.

BM - as Scott Prentice, Abellio, will be arriving on the 12.10 train from Glasgow we will re-arrange the agenda. Next up will be CRP's.

6. Public Transport

a) Community Rail Partnerships

BMcD – there was a very successful opening day for the newly refurbished Glenfinnan Viaduct Trail recently. This was funded by ScotRail, Network Rail with support from the Station Museum to stop visitors from walking on the rail line when viewing the steam train. The event was filmed as part of a television programme to be shown later in the year on communities living along railway lines.

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Friends of the West Highland Lines have organised celebrations for the 125 year anniversary of the line from Glasgow to Fort William. There will be an HST 125 travelling on the line to Glenfinnan on 11th August.

The CRP are holding competitions to mark the anniversary. There will be a short story, a poster and photograph options for school children and young people. Leaflets are almost ready and will be available all summer.

The upgrading of walks from various stations is continuing this summer and will result in a booklet. At present there is more info on the website along with The Line for Dining, which details places to eat on or close to stations. WWW.westhighlandcrp.com.

b) Ferries

IE gave a report. Figures for Armadale/Mallaig are showing a decrease in travel in January and February from the same period last year. April has shown a rise. There were also dips in other areas. CalMac performance figures can be found on their website - <https://www.calmac.co.uk/calmac-performance-data-browser>

The Lochaline/Fishnish route will be closed for vehicles for six weeks from the start of the winter timetable in October. Lots of notices will be going up at appropriate places on route to terminals.

There is no news on the delays to the two new vessels which have been built.

IE has been working in Lochaber on secondment which is due to finish soon so will not be attending the next Forum Meeting. The post has been advertised.

c) Buses/coaches

There were no representatives from operators present.

DSu – summer timetables will start soon on Citylink routes. There is a new 913 service operating from Edinburgh to Fort William daily.

There will be changes to the Fort William/Inverness service. The current HC contracted services will show as Citylink services along with all others giving a clearer timetable for all journeys.

BM - I welcome the Edinburgh service but it's very limiting with just one morning service from Edinburgh and one afternoon service from Fort William.

DSu – it's a commercial decision.

DSt – Citylink issued draft summer timetables to HC for consultation which were not looked at and reported on. Kinlochleven has been left disadvantaged by not having any connections with the Shiel Buses 44 service and Citylink Glasgow services passing Glencoe.

There were issues with Citylink timetables which never went up over the winter. Councillor Allan Henderson has since intervened and arranged with HITRANS to have this carried out between Bridge of Orchy and Spean Bridge. There were also assurances to have then updated with the summer timetables on 20th May.

DSu – HIRTRANS and HC Transport Officers have met with Shiel Buses to discuss improving co-ordination of timetables and connections. I have also checked timetables at local bus stops. There are problems but we're working on streamlined solutions.

NJ – there have been previous problems of the early train from Mallaig and the coach to Inverness not connecting. Has this been improved?

DSu – the initial problem which caused delays was getting pupils to Glenmoriston High School. This has now been rearranged and Citylink will be made aware of the connection with the train.

AC – there are no arrangements made for public transport around the new housing on the Blar Mhor.

DSu – at present the scheme is not big enough for extra buses, it's close to the Medical Centre which has a stop.

AC – there is no direct access between the two areas.

DSu – I have reported this area to planning. There will also be a review as the site expands.

DSt – the hospital may take a few years yet but the STEM Centre and further house building will continue. There should be a plan. Who is responsible?

DSu – HC are involved with planning. I can look into it further.

BMcD read out a recent email from Chris Hoon, West Coast Motors. He was unable to attend the March Meeting of the Bus User's Group because of ill health and now there is a major shortage of drivers which is causing problems. He confirmed the times of the 918 leaving Fort William will change and will pass on details when known. There won't be any additional services but at busy times they will operate a duplicate service for the schools which will relieve the strain on the afternoon 918 service out of Oban in terms of timing and passenger numbers. The times from Oban will remain the same.

DSt – Councillor Henderson says HITRANS are reviewing the options of services to Aviemore and to Oban.

d) Rail

BM welcomed SP who had just arrived on the midday train from Glasgow.

PL & GL have been refused a Highland Rail Card from ScotRail because of their postcode in Morvern. The postcode is PA80 though they are living in Highland Region and not Argyll & Bute.

SP said it's not ScotRail who set the postcode. **Action – PS to look into the problem.**

The Forum received a later email from SP to say ScotRail has revised its eligibility criteria for purchase of a Highland Railcard to include residents of postcode PA80 (Morven). More info will be given at the next Forum Meeting.

CE – I travelled on the train this morning and was concerned about the gap between the door and the platform.

There were several other issues discussed regarding the refurbished 156's used on the local line.

SP – we have taken comments on the refurbished trains and happy to continue with feedback.

AC – there is an issue with just being compliant with regulations and providing fully accessible trains. Many groups such as SATA have not been consulted. I can't sit on these trains for a long journey.

NJ – if agreed the design process should be stopped until trains are suitable for all.

SP – the trains have to be compliant with new legislation for Persons of Reduced Mobility which comes into effect on 1st January 2020. The contracts for overhaul of the trains were awarded in 2016 in order to ensure this deadline was met. The trains are fully compliant with all legislation and have had positive feedback from customers who use them in other parts of Scotland, including the WHL to Oban. However we recognise journeys to Fort William and Mallaig are longer and will continue to gather feedback on where we can make further improvements.

SP gave a presentation on the West Highland Lines Review and a potential new timetable for the Glasgow/Mallaig route.

He thanked local groups for help with the new timetable report. Growth in passenger numbers is twice as fast as the whole of Scotland.

Reliability has improved with most recent issues restricted to the Central area. There will be a new Sunday winter service this year.

There has been £10M spent on the line. This includes improved CCTV at all stations and new customer info screens at stations though some have current operating issues. Construction is underway to install a new machine at Fort William Station to empty toilets. This will improve availability of toilets on ScotRail and sleeper services.

There is a lot to consider when making changes to the timetable. There are restrictions on the line with using additional carriages. It's also limited when the new 153 bike carriages can be used, at present this could only be on the 18.21 from Glasgow and the 06.03 from Mallaig.

Consideration has to be given to freight trains which are slow, the steam train and charter trains.

At present most services from/to Oban and Mallaig split in Crianlarch which restricts the length to two units for Oban and four units for Fort William/Mallaig. Refurbished 153's will have space for

bikes, tandems, large luggage, prams, extra toilets and additional seating. To ensure they are used as much as possible there will need to be separate services from Glasgow to Oban and Fort William/Mallaig. This will require a net cost of £1.5m per annum to increase staff, etc. It takes 18 months to train drivers so the earliest can be December 2020. We are working on the best timetables with the current infrastructure on the line including limited passing loops, etc. Larger changes require bigger investment.

Future specification from Fort William can include;

- Four ScotRail departures to GLQ each day.
 - Earliest service to arrive in GLQ mid-morning.
 - Last service to depart Fort William between 17:30 and 18:00.
- Four ScotRail arrivals from GLQ each day.
 - Earliest arrival mid-morning.
 - Last from Glasgow as late as possible and no earlier than 18:15 from GLQ.
- AM peak arrival at Fort William from Tulloch between 08:15 and 08:45.
- Minimum of 2 services to be formed of 4 carriages.
- Provision to be made for minimum of 1 x useful class 153 strengthened service in each direction.

Future specification from Mallaig can include;

- Five ScotRail departures to Fort William each day.
 - Three must connect with services to GLQ.
 - AM peak arrival at Fort William from Mallaig between 08:00 and 08:45.
 - Evening service to connect with sleeper at Fort William
- Five ScotRail arrivals from Fort William each day.
 - Three must connect with services from GLQ.
 - One PM peak departure from Fort William to Mallaig between 17:00 and 17:45.
- Ferry connections to be maximised.
- Services would ideally run in front of Jacobite in each direction.
- Minimum of two services in each direction to be formed of 4 cars.
- Provision to be made for minimum of 1 x useful class 153 strengthened service in each direction.
- Fort William to Glenfinnan service if it's not possible to run additional service all the way to Mallaig.

SP stressed the illustrative timetable used has been prepared to show what level of service is possible with the existing infrastructure. It needs;

- Much more detailed development and refinement through consultation before it could be introduced.
- Retiming of other operators' services may require their agreement.
- This gives an opportunity to strengthen services and offers more flexibility in how we deploy the Class 153s.
- The timetable needs at least one additional train (10 in service compared to 9 today), more drivers, conductors and catering staff. Estimated net cost is >£1.5m pa.
- We are looking for feedback on:
 - Is the Specification a reasonable vision of what we should be aspiring for?
 - Does the illustrative timetable meet the needs of residents and visitors in the interim?
 - What could be improved?
 - What trade-offs could be considered?
 - If we are unable to deliver the full timetable, what are the priorities?

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Discussion followed the Presentation. There was concern about the first morning service from Mallaig being set later. Though a commuting service from Tulloch was included there is insufficient parking at stations such as Roy Bridge.

SK – the Jacobite Steam Train don't like large block bookings and there's an opportunity for excursions when cruise ships arrive. We'd like to see trips to Glenfinnan.

BM asked if people were happy with work done to date. He hoped it can progress with a chance for feedback. There was general agreement this is positive but more time is needed to study the timetables.

Thanks were given to SP for his detailed presentation.

As the meeting overran it was decided to close and the remaining agenda items will roll over to the next meeting.

SK circulated details of cruise ship bookings for 2019. There are four visits in May starting with the Le Champlain on 21st.

7. Date of next meeting

Dates for 2019 are;

There are Transport Forum Meetings on Tuesday 6th August and Tuesday 29th October (will include the AGM).

There are no further Bus User's Group Meetings organised.

From meeting 6th August 2019

Confirmation of minutes

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

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".