



# Lochaber Transport Forum

*Co-chruinneachadh mu ghoireasan - siubhail Lochabair*

## Minutes of the Lochaber Transport Forum Meeting

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019, 11.20**

**The Duncansburgh Church Hall, the Parade, Fort William**

### **Present;**

Brian Murphy – Chairperson	BM
Benny MacDonald – Lochaber Transport Forum	BMcD
Iain Macniven – Chair, Arisaig & District CC/West Highland CRP	IMcn
Don McKillop – A.O.M. CalMac	DMcK
Kate Willis – Lochaber Environmental Group	KW
Arthur Cowie – Lochaber Disability Access Panel	AC
Sally Morris – 918 bus user	SM
Lucy Clarke – Sustrans	LC
Sarah Kennedy – FWMSCIC	SK
Cllr Denis Rixson – Highland Council	DR
Peter Knight – Citylink	PK
Chris Hoon – West Coast Motors	CH
Julie McDonald – Kinlochleven resident	JMcD
Flora McKee – Voluntary Action Lochaber	FMcK
Bryan Gregg – Voluntary Action Lochaber	BG
Mark Drayton	MD
Hanna Leask – Bus User’s Scotland	HL
Jean Sinclair	JS
M Falconer – Bus user	MF
D Falconer – Bus user	DF
David MacGillivray – Shiel Buses	DMcG
Scott Prentice – Abellio/ScotRail	SP
Derek Glasgow – Abellio/ScotRail	DG

### **1. Welcome**

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

### **2. Apologies;**

Christine Hutchison - Kilmallie CC	Cllr Ben Thompson - Highland Council
Chris Evans – Strontian resident, bus/train user	Cllr Allan Henderson – Highland Council
Kath Small – Ballachulish CC	Tony Dobson
Donald Stewart – bus user	Sonia Cameron
Ian Langley – SB, RB & A CC/West Highland CC	
Nick Jones – Local transport user	
Finlay J MacRae – CalMac	
Ali MacDonald – HC	
Ronald Wenger – RMT	
W MacPhee – RMT	
Liz Loudon –	
Greig MacKay – Bus User’s Scotland	

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### **3. Confirmation of minutes**

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **4. Matters Arising**

Item 5, Cycling and Walking, the Forum invited HITRANS and Sustrans to this meeting, unfortunately HITRANS could not attend.

Item 5, Cycling and Walking, the Forum have enquired about the path to the view point opposite Marks and Spencer but have not yet received a reply.

Item 6, Public Transport, under Buses at bottom of Page 3. The 920 coach from Inverness now arrives at 22:05 allowing time for onward travel to Mallaig on the late train.

### **5. Cycling & Walking**

LC gave an overview on the work done locally by Sustrans which is a UK wide Charity promoting Walking and Cycling. Their main work in this area is the National Cycle Network (NCN) 87 pathway. A major part of the path is currently being completed with a new bridge being installed at Inchree. They are currently working with others to match fund a suitable cycle route along Kilmallie Road in Caol.

Sustrans are working with HITRANS on the Active Travel Masterplan for this area to review priorities.

AC – the Active Travel Plan is only for able bodied people, it's not accessible for all. Last week I walked along Belford Road with David Devine, Transport Scotland, and pointed out the lack of drop kerbs, etc. Also, Kilmallie road is not accessible which has been pointed out for many years. Can the maps and plans give more detail for people with disabilities?

LC – we work with Highland Council who make decisions on all paths except the NCN. Funding is required for more improvements.

AC – too many cyclists are using the pavement along Belford Road, more signs are required to restrict this. There are wheelchair users and people with disabilities on this pavement heading to the hospital and bus/train stations. David Devine indicated there may be funding available from next year's budget to make it more accessible.

LC – we work with Transport Scotland but can improve the relationship we have. I'm aware of an email from David regarding this so I'll check this and Belford Road.

BM – there are issues with cyclists using pavements where cycle paths exist, there should be much better signage.

SK – I cycle and though I don't use pavements I haven't seen any signs restricting this.

KW – there's a big issue for the NCN 78 from Corran to Fort William. As the A82 is not safe for cyclists they are advised to cross Corran Ferry and Camusnagaul Ferry which isn't always suitable.

LC - major work is needed on the section with no decisions made. A report from several years ago stated £5m to £10m would be needed to create a path because of the amount of rock alongside the roadside. I think there is a business plan to keep Camusnagaul Ferry operating.

BMcD - HC invited tenders for a new contract for Camusnagaul Ferry from April 2020. There may be changes to the timetable.

KW gave an update on the work of the Environmental Group. There are Active Travel maps available. We have completed an application for an E-Bike Hire Scheme which will have several

docking stations around the greater Fort William area and provide residents with low-cost access to high tech electric bikes. We are currently working on match funding.

We are also working with the Nevis Partnership and Shiel Buses to access funding for an improved bus service for Glen Nevis. This will reduce the amount of cars using the area.

## 6. Public Transport

BM adjusted the agenda and moved on to buses to allow an earlier discussion on some issues.

### a) Buses/coaches

D&M Falconer – we have a good bus service for the Plantation on weekdays but no Sunday service. People have to walk down the hill to access a bus in the town centre and then walk up the hill when returning. It's a problem for people who are less able, are carrying shopping, etc.

DMcG – any changes will require rearranging the timetable so it's not straightforward. I can look into it.

AC – there will need to be consideration taken with planning given for the new houses in the area.

JS asked about the confusing times for the 918 service to Oban. We now have even less time in Oban, only 1 hour 55 mins. It has been very popular to visit from Fort William but it's not worth it for such a short time. Can Shiel Buses provide a better service for Fort William passengers?

There was discussion on the times of the service. There was confusion because the Citylink winter timetable changed at the end of September and the West Coast Motors timetable changed at the end of October. The 918 departing Fort William remained at 12.00 until 31<sup>st</sup> October but some places were showing this had changed to 12.30 from 30<sup>th</sup> September.

DMcG – to provide a service will require Shiel Buses to spend around £200K on a coach. We can't do this without support from Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council. Summer services are much busier but it's also difficult to have a vehicle for just seasonal work. We do keep some services going at a loss.

SM – I heard about a meeting of the Councils on 11<sup>th</sup> October to discuss the 918 service.

None of the bus operators present were aware of this meeting.

CH – as the 918 service we provide begins in Oban and is supported by Argyll and Bute Council we need to consider Oban passengers. This is why there is more time allowed for passengers visiting Fort William.

BM – I can't understand how this service has been so poor over many years. The Transport Forum recently raised the issue with Kate Forbes, MSP. She is keen to see an improvement and has listed some actions.

*After the meeting DR contacted The Transport Forum to confirm the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October mentioned above was this meeting with Kate Forbes, MSP. There were no bus operators present as it wasn't necessary at such an early stage of discussion.*

At the meeting there were discussions with the NHS and SAS about the number of residents from Lochaber attending Oban Hospital and Oban residents attending the Belford Hospital. It was suggested at previous Transport Forum Meetings that if residents from South Lochaber could attend Oban Hospital rather than Raigmore Hospital it would be a much shorter journey. Also, if there was a suitable option to travel by public transport it will help support the 918 service.

CH – WCM will be trialling a low floor coach on the 918 route over the winter. This will be easier for wheelchair users and people with disabilities.

BMcD – As Citylink had moved to winter timetables I was checking local bus stops. A lot of work was done in May to ensure summer updates were available and it's important this continues. Stops from Lochybridge to the bus station had been updated but travelling north from the bus station had not been updated.

There was discussion on the continuing confusion timetables are causing.

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PK – we have put out at bus stops all the timetables we were issued from HITRANS. Our online timetables are in order.

DMcG – we have staff attending a three day course on an improved software programme for timetable.

BMcD confirmed he received an apology for this meeting from Ali MacDonald, HC, who is also attending this course. The new programme has been designed to provide one copy of each timetable from the operators which are then available for various uses, therefore avoiding conflicting information.

HL gave some background to her work with Bus Users Scotland;

We monitor bus services in Scotland on behalf of the Traffic Commissioner. In Scotland, four Bus Compliance Officers monitor registered bus services and complete reports that are shared with the Traffic Commissioner and the operator in question. Such monitoring often comes as a result of complaints that have been raised. The reports cover many compliance issues, including: frequency, reliability (including failures to stop or run), vehicle condition, signage, driver attitude and ticket accuracy.

We act as the voice of bus passengers. We hold engagement events, called 'Your Bus Matters' where we invite bus passengers to share their feedback with us. We invite local bus operators to these events and share any feedback with them and the relevant passenger transport executive in the hope of supporting bus use.

We deal with complaints. If a bus passenger has raised a complaint with an operator and has either failed to receive a reply, or is not satisfied with the response, then Bus Users Scotland can support them with their complaint.

There was discussion on the issue raised at the previous meeting regarding older coaches being used on the Fort William/Inverness route. AC said there was a short period when the new coaches allocated for the service were removed. PK confirmed they were needed for an event but gave assurances they are remaining on this route.

Another bus issue was covered under Ferries below.

## **b) Ferries**

AC – many people were disappointed to hear the CalMac office in Fort William closed at the end of August. This was announced shortly after the August Transport Forum Meeting so why could we not have been notified of this.

DMcK – unfortunately this could not be announced earlier as it was still being dealt with and classed as sensitive at the time of the Forum meeting. The decision was the office wasn't busy enough for CalMac ticket sales and enquiries.

SK – where do local people now buy ferry tickets?

DMcK – tickets are available online or from a call centre. Also at a port office, Mallaig is the nearest.

JMcD – the office now closed also sold Citylink coach tickets and was the only place nearby where passengers could speak to a person for more coach info. This has now changed, Citylink passengers need to go to the Visit Scotland shop in the High Street which may not be easy and quick. Also, there are no signs around the bus station to indicate this. There may be a sign still showing in the CalMac office relating to coach ticket sales. Above the doorway of the rail station it says Transport Centre but people can't get bus info now, or ferry info/tickets.

DMcK – I'll check the closed office for any misleading signs.

**BM – Action, we should find out who can put a sign up relating to bus/coach information.**

DMcK gave a ferry report.

We are now into winter timetables. There was an increase in travel during September in Highland compared to September 2018. Mallaig/Armadale has seen a rise of 41% for cars and pedestrians.

Also, there were big increases in other areas. Schedules are on track for maintenance. Lochaline/Fishnish is currently only a passenger service while maintenance work is done on the Lochaline slipway. Robert Morrison has been promoted to Operations Director and is based in Oban. This is a change from directors being based in Gourock so good for the west coast.

MD – has there been a move to using cleaner fuels?

DMcK – five vessels are using two fuels. We also have a ferry which is charged overnight. We are continually looking for improvements and checking our carbon footprint.

AC – what is the impact of breakdowns and issues on the Mallaig/Armadale route?

There was discussion on the difficulties some vessels have on certain tides at Mallaig.

DMcG – there are problems for coaches accessing the ferry at Lochaline/Fishnish.

DMcG – this is because the ferries use batteries and fuel which reduces space for coaches. There is also a weight issue with this new technology.

AC asked if there is any update to report on the continued delay with the two new ferries.

DMcG – there is no update and the delay is causing a big problem. Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) is the company who are dealing with this so we wait to hear from them. There is also no further news on acquiring second hand vessels, CalMac need and want more ferries.

### **c) Rail**

SP introduced Derek Glasgow who may attend Forum meetings in future. He has recently been working on improvements in Aberdeen and is now focusing on this area.

SP discussed the current plans for an improved timetable on the West Highland Line. The short term planning is proving to be expensive and we can't move forward as quickly as thought. We are now looking at 2021 and will be able to put new staff in position in 18 months. There have been assurances of funding being approved for this.

We've had closures because of damage caused by the weather. We also had a 10 day planned closure on the Fort William/Crianlarich route. This is now complete.

During September we recorded 330k passengers on this line which is full capacity and justifies a new timetable.

DG – The Transport (Scotland) Bill is continuing to be worked through in Stages. There will be more integration of the public transport network.

The Far North line had a full review of services similar to the current West Highland Line Review. New software will be installed during November to improve journeys. This uses advanced technology for better communications and smart cards, etc.

AC - I've been disappointed about the lack of advertising for the new Mallaig/Fort William Sunday service as it needs to be used to be viable. Shiel Buses have cancelled their Sunday bus service as there are now more trains. SP - the appropriate agencies have been notified. Most visitors don't need to know there's a new timetable, when checking to travel they will just see the winter service and book accordingly. Locals have a responsibility to make use of the service but I note your issues and will look at it.

BMcD- the winter timetable was discussed at a recent CRP meeting and there will be a press release put out very soon.

AC – there is a problem for some passengers if the early service from Mallaig is removed as mentioned in the draft timetable Scott discussed at the Forum meeting in May. It's a lifeline service connecting health and transport as it currently links with the coach to Inverness for passengers attending hospital.

SP – our Transport manager is discussing this with all involved, there's been good feedback from the Forum and the CRP. Every timetable change has issues and if necessary alternative plans need to be in place. We will be represented in all discussions.

SK – there are problems for cruise ship passengers booking the steam train. Will the timetable changes affect the steam train?

SP – there will be no changes next summer, the steam train will operate twice daily. We also hope the ScotRail winter timetable can continue similar to this winter.

The WHL Review Group will meet again at the end of November. There's a need to improve tracking signalling on the line.

It's hoped there can be five return journeys per day Monday to Saturday for the new timetable. Sundays are restricted for maintenance.

AC asked about the introduction of 158's onto the West Highland Line.

SP- work has begun making the necessary changes to stations on the Oban line and then there will be changes on the Fort William and Mallaig line.

AC – when the 153 carriages are introduced to carry more bikes and large baggage it will be very limited when they can travel. They can only be used on two carriage sets and not on four carriage sets as this is too long for several stations. Four carriage sets are always full on the Mallaig summer service so can't be changed to take a 153.

SP - this highlights the need to change the current timetable and has come up during feedback and discussions. The 153's will start on limited trains then we can design the new timetable to suit the issues raised.

It will help to know how many people need journeys for health reasons. We are willing to work to identify the need and then set a timetable.

#### **d) Community Rail Partnerships**

BMcD – there have been two meetings of Scottish CRP's in June and October to discuss a Scotland wide network.

There was a prize giving held in the Highland Bookshop for a competition of the 125 years Anniversary of the West Highland Line. This involved school children writing a short story, designing a poster or taking a photo relating to the railway. There were many entries and the winning poster entry will be made full size and hung in Fort William Railway Station.

The West Highland CRP are keen to establish the Rail Trail set up around Fort William to show the changes to the railway over many years. Ideas include numbered markers at places which previously had important rail features, more Rail Trail leaflets, a large poster at the railway station and promotional material online.

### **7. Community Transport**

BMcD - The application process for the Highland Council Community Transport Grant has closed. This will now go to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> November. The Transport Forum is currently funded from this grant and the new application will cover the period from April 2020 to March 2023.

### **8. A82 - Update**

BM - There have been no updates on the expected upgrade to the road along Loch Lomond side.

### **9. AOCB**

There was no AOCB.

### **10. Date of next meeting**

The next Transport Forum Meeting is on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February in the Duncansburgh Church Hall at 11.00.

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### Meeting from 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019 were approved by Arthur Cowie and Derek Glasgow with the following amendments.

Under Item 5 Cycling and Walking, the second line says the NCN 87 and the correct number is NCN 78. There was further info from Lucy Clarke, Sustrans;

- I've been quoted as saying "*we work with Highland Council who make decisions on all paths except the NCN*", which is not the case. Sustrans works in partnership with the Highland Council and Transport Scotland on all projects we're involved in, whether NCN or not. In the majority of instances we will actually need permission and/or involvement from these organisations, mostly because it's good practice but also because most of the land/paths Sustrans work on aren't within Sustrans's ownership nor management.
- To clarify Sustrans's position on Belford Road: it isn't part of the National Cycle Network if Transport Scotland were to look into how to improve it for walking and cycling we would be happy to be part of that conversation.
- A82 between Fort William and Corran: "*major work is needed on the section with no decisions made*". I'm not sure it's accurate to say that no decisions have been made as that report concluded that the greatest cost-benefit would be to keep the ferry service. If this route were ever to be progressed on the main land, the estimated costs from the 2010 report produced suggested it would take between £5-£10million to create a high quality walking and cycling connection. That decision would lie with Transport Scotland.

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