

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS PUBLIC TRANSPORT FORUM
Minutes of Meeting held on 2 November 2005, 10.45 am
at Cairngorms National Park office, Grantown-on-Spey

PRESENT

David Summers	Highland Council (Chair)
Maggie Lawson	Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport
John Thorne	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Alasdair Henderson	Calmac
Richard Wheater	Go-skills
Neil MacRae	Highland Council
Frank Roach	Highland Rail Partnership
Chris Kendall	Highland Rail Partnership
Jim McCreath	Inverness & Nairn Transport Forum
Peggy Kourmoulaki	Lochaber Transport Forum
Neil MacArthur	Outer Hebrides Tourism Association
Alisdair Goodall	Rapsons Coaches
Alan Renwick	Scottish Independent Hostels
Scott Pearson	Stagecoach Inverness
Tim Dearman	Tim Dearman Coaches
Janet Aykroyd	HIPTF

1. APOLOGIES

David Taylor	Calmac
Sheila Fletcher	Community Transport Association
Tony Harmsworth	Discover Loch Ness
Alan Pratt	First Scotrail
Catherine Masson	First Scotrail
Tony Jarvis	HIE
Gordon Ireland	Highland Council Tourism Officer
Ranald Robertson	HITRANS
Alex Dunnachie	Isle of Jura Bus Service
Peter Findlay	Moray Council
Gareth Crichton	Northlink
Mike Dean	Scottish Citylink

David Summers welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked all in attendance to introduce themselves for the benefit of any new attendees.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

(a) The Minutes were approved subject to the following amendment:

Item 10 on Page 7 reads “would be desirable”, however, it should read “should be desirable”.

(b) There were no matters arising.

3. TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

DS said the Agency was being set up but there was little further to report.. His main dealing concerning its functions was over concessionary fares.

4. STATUTORY REGIONAL TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIPS

Membership of HITRANS.

DS said that the Executive has decided on 7 regional partnerships:-

- ? Shetland
- ? Highlands & Islands
- ? North-East
- ? Central and Tay
- ? South-east
- ? West
- ? Dumfries & Galloway.

The significant thing for HIPTF will be its membership of HITRANS. DS outlined the structure – there will be one Councillor member from each Council and either two or three non-Council members appointed by the Transport Minister. Although non-Council members would be appointed as individuals, he would expect that anyone proposed by HIPTF would in practice represent the Forum. The meeting had to decide if HIPTF wants to remain involved in HITRANS. DS believed that we were the widest interest group for public transport. There was a general discussion and FR queried whether they would have voting rights. DS believed that only Councils would have this. DS said that HIPTF is a constituted body but that members are there as individuals, and the format works well. It was agreed that we should be on it and that it would be better to nominate someone from the private sector. FR nominated AG, NMCA seconded and Mike Dean was suggested as a substitute, and it was agreed he would be asked.

5. NATIONAL CONCESSIONARY FARES SCHEME

The date for the start of the Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel scheme is 1st April 2006 – not 2nd as previously announced. There is still a lot of work to get it set up, and TD said he had only recently received two sets of documents. DS said that the draft statutory instrument was out to public consultation and the closing date is 5 December. The continuation of the non-bus elements of the Highland Council scheme was due to go before the Highland Council on 26 January.

ML asked if concessions could be extended to community car schemes. DS said that the Council works under the 1985 Transport Act which allows Councils to provide concessionary fare schemes on public transport and he felt that schemes which require membership did not come within this definition. Not all users of community car schemes would necessarily be eligible for a card, but all benefit from general support given by the Council which allows fares to be kept down. ML said that she felt many people are disadvantaged. DS said that free travel means that money is not being targeted on some of those who need it. He also said that the Council still have to decide whether the current position on car schemes is to remain, and he invited ML to take up matter with Council.

There was a discussion about the current schemes in operation to/from the islands, and it was noted that the Scottish Executive are not going to support a further voucher scheme as the technology is not yet available. TD felt that they were missing the ideal opportunity for increased trade with the islands.

DS said that Shiel Buses now had new ticket machines in use and he expected to have the back office set up by end of the month. TD queried whether operators would have a choice as to what machines they had - DS said they would, but that the Council would only offer one type of machine to operators who want to use the Council back office functions (this would not be compulsory). AG suggested that TD should contact MVA for help.

DS said that the Executive would be co-ordinating publicity on a national level, and they will also be publicising local schemes as well. Concern was expressed that Transport Scotland would not make it in time, and the meeting was advised that arrangements would be made to allow use of the old cards after 1 April 2006 if necessary.

6. HITRANS MINUTES

The Minutes had been circulated by e-mail. NMCA had a query in the HITRANS Minutes regarding Visit Scotland under AOB. DS said he would ask Howard to clarify and report back.

DS said that Strategic Sea Crossings would be an item on next HITRANS agenda. There had been an initial report from a consultant, which had had a mixed response at the October meeting of HITRANS. They are looking ahead at the long term future and expect the matter to come up for discussion in a while.

7. HITRANS PUBLIC TRANSPORT FUND PROJECTS

RR was not in attendance, and there was no report from him. NMCR said he would circulate Ranald's latest progress report.

8. NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

9. REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

10. LOCAL TRANSPORT STRATEGIES

DS felt that there will be a great deal of interplay between the three strategies.

The Scottish Executive had held a long programme of seminars and presentations, from which will come a draft National Strategy.

The Regional Transport Strategy will be produced by HITRANS. This is a statutory function. At present this was being planned and DS invited members to contribute their views and aspirations.

There was no fixed deadline for the 3 year local transport strategy.

ML wanted to make sure Community Transport has representation and has a voice. JMcC said that there had been strategy events in Inverness and they had looked at inclusion of community transport. There had also been a healthy discussion with NHS patients.

DS said that there were issues of centralisation of health services. There was the practicality of people travelling great distances and it may be that different methods of providing transport would have to be sought.

TD said that Raigmore was well served by local buses but there was little from other areas. He felt that there was a lot of spare capacity in rural areas.

AG questioned how planning is given to expanding housing, hospitals, shops etc. and that measures should be put in place to ensure better public transport.

ML said that the priority is accessibility, followed by affordability.

TD said that every group had its own priority and he couldn't see a short term solution.

SP felt that encouraging public transport use was a matter of changing attitudes. He believed that a park and ride system on the A96 and A9 would be ideal.

There was a discussion on how to persuade people from their cars onto buses. SP felt that the frequency of services was vital, and bus lane priority would be a major help. SI could not just do a Park and Ride – there had to be joined up thinking. NMCR queried where BEAR stood on this and DS said that changes to the trunk roads were a Scottish Executive requirement and it would be useful to see a policy for this in the National Transport Strategy.

DS questioned cross town travel and what would encourage use. AG believed that integrated ticketing is the key. NMCR felt timing was a greater issue – if it takes longer on public transport, then people will use car.

DS said that a travel questionnaire had been put to Lifescan's staff (formerly Inverness Medical), and JMcC said that he had been invited into Lifescan and would report back. He also said that it seemed that most journeys overlap from rural to urban.

SP brought up the issue of Carlton Bingo and that planning had enforced minimum car parking and bus service provision. Whilst this was a positive move, he felt that it was part of a bigger picture which must be addressed and not done as fire fighting.

AG said that there is an overlap between community transport and general public transport. Community buses, dial-a-rides and conventional buses are all part of the overall transport solution.

11. CO-ORDINATION ISSUES

AG said that Northlink had agreed not to require a shuttle bus at Scrabster. Some misunderstanding had been overcome, and this would enable a much better connection. He said that there was now a northbound connection by bus and southbound by train.

DS had nothing further to report on connections at Oban.

12. DAYS OUT 2006

DS said AP from Scotrail would consider reviving some multi-modal Days Out trips for next year. As AP was not in attendance it was not worth discussing on the day.

AG said his priorities would be Skye – the Fort William – Inverness loop. He said that there has been a reasonable take up of Freedom of Scotland pass and Rapsons were keen to be involved in any of the schemes.

TD had agreed 10% discount with Scotrail but it came in late last year. He said that he would like to be included in Days Out. He also said the people will ask about the north ring (Inverness – Durness – Thurso).

13. RECENT SERVICE UPDATES/FUTURE PLANS

Air

There was no-one present to give an update on Air services.

NMcR reminded Stagecoach and Rapsons to contact Easyjet as no bus service was shown on their timetables.. There was then a discussion regarding taxis at Inverness airport.

Ferry

AH said that the Calmac summer timetable was fixed for 2006. There was a lack of information from Northlink to both tenderers and there may be further delays in the tender process. Calmac felt that they may not be the operator on Gourock – Dunoon shortly. He said that Motability Form 404A is being withdrawn and disabled drivers may have to produce their tax exempt licence which would mean that they could only gain reduced fare if they were travelling in a specified vehicle.

TD queried whether the Ullapool office was being moved, and AH said there were no firm plans as yet. AG asked if the Northern Isles tender was similar to current and AH confirmed it was.

Rail

FR reported that Invernet was due to start on 12 December. It would initially include Kingussie, Tain and Lairg. Macleods Coaches will call at Lairg Station to meet the morning commuter train. AG will adjust his timings from Newtonmore to Kingussie. There would be publicity drops to households. The 0709 from Arrochar would be starting the same day. FR said that Mary Dickson would be announcing tomorrow.

FR said he was currently working on Invernet 2: Inverness - Elgin. HITRANS were doing a STAG appraisal. Scott Wilson were doing a Room for Growth study of the Highland rail network, including network capacity and potential for increased demand.

FR said that Club 55 discounts started on 1 November, but barred peak times out of Inverness.

DS said that at Fearn, the current train and bus timetables do not connect in the evening. He said that he had a subsidised taxi contract on until the end of year. It appeared that the usage was small usage and he would look at the cost of continuing an arrangement.

Bus

SP reported that on 31 October there were changes to Inverness city and Easter Ross services. The public seem to be happy with the new ½ hourly service for Invergordon. He has new vehicles on these routes. Wheelchair accessible coaches will be introduced on the Service 10 corridor.

TD reported that the cycle trailer showed encouraging results with 165 bikes in 2005. He said that in general passenger numbers are down and felt that fewer people travel from Inverness with more using it as a centre for local trips. He could only assume that a certain type of passenger was no longer coming to Inverness. AG concurred saying it was similar for Rapsons.

JMcC said that Sight Seeing Tours were seeing a drop. He felt that people were travelling outwith Inverness less when they visited.

AG stated that internet enquiries dropped drastically after the London bombing. The majority of international tourists travel via London. Passenger numbers took a real dip in July and they had seen very few from Europe. He said that Orkney seems to be holding, but it marketed itself as a “brand”. Orkney also has the cruise liner trade.

AR said that over the years numbers have gone down and he felt that for the cost of coming to Scotland, people can fly to Europe and other destinations. It may be a trend in the market. DS commented that the recent 6 day orienteering event in Deeside had a significantly higher foreign participation than usual, with fewer UK entrants.

AG reported that Rapsons were adjusting Inverness Airport services and improving the Sunday service. They were missing the Belfast flight but by missing Fort George out of one journey, they could resolve the problem. They had the bike racks up and running at Aviemore and people were using them. The fee is £3 for a day. He had received a request from Orkney for a bus to be fitted. AG had anticipated poor feedback but it has been better than expected. He might convert an Inverness route and was looking at Inverness – Ullapool with RR. Inverness – Thurso would be next.

AG reported that Kickstart was going live in January on Inverness – Cromarty route. In Fort William the Glen Nevis and Nevis Range services have been linked to a through service and had done quite well. Orkney had the benefit of most services being converted to low floor operation, and the Scottish Executive had confirmed a Kickstart grant for Orkney. Skye didn't go as well as planned but he was still keen to get Skye on a more even timetable next year. In Inverness they might possibly reintroduce the Tourist Trail. Cawdor showed no real down turn and they may do a bespoke summer service.

NMcR reported a £318,000 grant award on the Stagecoach 25X service including improvements to bus shelters and bus priority at key points.

14. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT UPDATE

There was no Community Transport update as Sheila Fletcher was caught in Stornoway by bad weather.

ML said that the national CTA Event was next week and if anyone wanted information she could assist.

PK mentioned that Transport Solutions were doing a survey which was looking at difficulties for wheelchair users in Lochaber.

Inverness and Nairn – are awaiting the outcome of 2 bids for the current round of the Rural Community Transport Initiative which were for:

- ? New community minibus in Ardersier
- ? Inverness & Nairn transport worker continuation funding

15. TIMETABLE PUBLICITY

DS said it was the Council's intention to carry on with timetable publicity with Rapsons and eventually to upgrade to something that Stagecoach would want to buy into. The map would hopefully be out in April 2006.

JT said he would be printing the same again next year and expected to include some sponsored advertising.

16. CYCLING ISSUES

There were no cycling issues to report.

17. AOB

NMcA mentioned a new promotion to enhance the visitor experience which was called Pride and Passion. Businesses were to be encouraged to become Friends of Pride and Passion and it was to encourage shop assistants to give welcoming smiles – which of course cost nothing.

18. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be in February in the Inverness area.