

## **Action Note of Ward 9 Transport Forum held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009, Council Chamber, Dingwall**

**Present:** Councillor Angela MacLean (Chair)  
Councillor Peter Cairns  
Councillor Margaret Paterson  
Councillor David Chisholm  
Cameron Kemp, Integrated Transport Manager, Highland Council  
Neil Young, Transport Officer, Highland Council  
Ranald Robertson, Hitrans  
Edwin Stewart, Transerv  
David McCallum, Stagecoach  
William Mainus, Stagecoach  
Liz Cowie, Ward Manager, Highland Council  
Colin Craig, Ferintosh Community Council  
Sean Mackenzie, Conon Bridge Community Council  
Ian MacPhail, Conon Bridge Community Council  
Tom Davis, Muir of Ord Community Council  
Nigel Greenwood, Dingwall Community Council

### **Introductions**

Cllr. Angela MacLean opened the meeting with an overview of the format of the Forum and explained to those present that the transport specific Forum had arisen from the Ward Forum that had been held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 looking at the Local Transport Strategy. At the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, the transport providers could not be present due to an awards ceremony in Glasgow, however they had given a commitment to come back to a future meeting to speak to local concerns and this evening's meeting was the result.

### **Northern Constabulary**

Cllr. MacLean explained that Inspector Reiss, Northern Constabulary, had to leave the meeting due to another commitment so had asked if he could give an overview of Policing matters for the Ward and in particular pick up any issues regarding transport. Inspector Reiss began by stating that Northern Constabulary had been dealing with a major Mountain Rescue incident at Kinlochewe and that he had just returned from this. He then advised that over 70,000 of drugs had been seized in the local area (possibly more) so policing was extremely active in this area. He was pleased to advise that vandalism was down by over 40% in the Ward. The new Police shift system was referred to and he explained that this would mean more Police were on duty for the weekend and at peak times. A general overview of issues particularly regarding the gathering of young people was given. Local Police had seen a slight drop in incidences occurring and this seemed to have improved through recent publicity and heightened parent awareness. The Police were also looking at working with other local agencies to address the issue. Unfortunately he had to report that house-breaking was up and that this could potentially be linked to the current economic downturn. He finished by saying that the theft of central heating oil continues to be a big problem in the area and asked for all present to be vigilant with this regard. No further issues were raised, Inspector Reiss then left the meeting.

Cllr. MacLean then introduced Cameron Kemp, Integrated Transport Manager. He referred to the Local Transport Strategy consultation process and advised how valuable the feedback that had been given through the Ward Forums had been to date. Given the commitment to attend Ward Forums and discuss transport issues with local people, TEC Services were reviewing the length of the consultation period as the draft document still had to be finalised. This was linked directly to the large volume of feedback that had been received from Ward Forums to date. The draft document will be available on The Highland Council website within the next few weeks and copies would also be made available at Service Points and Libraries. Neil Young, Transport Officer, TEC Services, then advised that two bus shelters had been installed in Dingwall and that he had brought with him several timetable boards for installation in bus stops in and around the Ward. Cllr. MacLean thanked Neil Young for work done to date.

Cllr. MacLean introduced Ranald Robertson, Hitrans (the Highlands and Islands Strategic Transport Partnership). She advised that he would give an overview of rail issues in and around Highland in the absence of Frank Roach. Ranald Robertson then went on to explain the new 'Invernet' system that had been introduced for the inner Moray Firth area. The Dingwall commuter train had been part of this initiative. There had been an 82% increase in passenger numbers, there had been rolling stock investment and also the introduction of cycle lockers. The Muir of Ord Railway Station had been improved with better parking. Additional services had been provided and a fresh look at timetables had relieved pressure on local commuter trains. The Conon Rail Halt was also a development that was in the pipeline and this would be discussed with those present when public questions were taken. He advised that Dingwall Station is now the busiest north of Inverness and that the CCTV at the Station is now linked to Scotrail 24 hour monitoring. The cycle lockers at Dingwall have been a great success and he was delighted to announce that there would be additional parking provided on the Ferry Road side of the Station. He then went on to ask if consideration could be given to promoting the 'Adopt a Station' scheme. Scotrail are keen to work with local communities in this regard and Cllr. MacLean suggested taking this forward with Dingwall in Bloom. Ranald Robertson advised that Frank Roach had had discussions with Dingwall in Bloom and they were hopeful that they could take this forward this year. Returning to Conon Rail Halt, three feasibility studies had been carried out and estimated passenger numbers were in the region of 30,000 for the catchment area. There was an outline capital cost of £500K and the Halt would accommodate four Class 1 'cars'. It would be a single station platform and provisional stops would be shown in the timetable due to be published shortly. Design and funding are the next steps with a view to aiming for a 2010 opening. He then discussed Hitrans and the importance of sustainable travel. The Car Sharing Initiative that had been launched in 2008 was outlined, further information on this can be found at [www.ifyoucareshare.com](http://www.ifyoucareshare.com). Ranald Robertson then concluded by talking about local travel plans and discussed how further information could be outlined to anyone who was interested. Cllr. MacLean then opened up the floor to questions.

- Terry Cullingham, local resident. Mr Cullingham raised the issue of companion cards on railways for train travel. This seemed to be an issue and it was one that he looked for information and advice on. He advised that he was Chair of the Visually Impaired Society.

- Mr Stirling, Conon Bridge. Mr Stirling raised his concerns over the proposed parking for the Conon Rail Halt. He felt that the number of parking spaces that would be made available had been grossly underestimated and raised grave concerns about the impact on local residents of parking problems arising when the Station finally came into being. He did emphasise that overall he supported the development of the Rail Halt, but did want to raise the real concerns of many local residents about the parking issue now. Ranald Robertson took the question and responded that with Beauly Rail Station, car parking needs had been assessed and that 10 car parking spaces provided. On average, on monitoring usage of the car parking, 8 spaces were used on a regular basis. Mr Stirling challenged this having visited Beauly on a number of occasions and having looked at parking in and around the Station area, had witnessed cars parked along street ways due to the spaces in the car park being full. Mr Stirling said he felt that this really needed to be looked at and contingency plans put in place now for parking for local residents. Sean Mackenzie, Conon Community Council, wished to raise the issue of capital funding for the Rail project at Conon. Cllr. MacLean advised that the Councillors were currently looking at the capital programme and that this would be raised at the forthcoming Ward Forum in February with a view to its inclusion. Colin Craig, Ferintosh Community Council, wished to raise concerns about parking as he felt that given the huge catchment area for the Conon Rail Halt, that the only way that people from Highfield, Bishop Kinkell etc. could reach the Railway Station to use it was by using cars to get there. Ranald Robertson stated that they wished to encourage people to walk to the Railway Station and also that provision could be made for park and walk to the Station. The issue of upgrading the Car Park at the Conon Church was discussed and upgrading and improving the pathway from the Church Car Park to Railway Station. Mr Stirling felt that this would have to be given real consideration and good planning and design as people may feel that this would be a dark area to walk through on winter evenings. Cllr. Cairns felt that there were a lot of very good reasons for this proposal to go ahead. Many present agreed and felt that it was a positive development particularly for the Conon and Maryburgh area. However they did feel that parking was a key issue that should be raised now for consideration. Cllr. David Chisholm then asked if Mr Cullingham could leave his details so that he could forward him information from Inclusion Scotland.

**Action Point:** LC to action this at the end of the meeting.

- Ian MacPhail, Conon Bridge Community Council. Mr MacPhail referred back to the footpath upgrade that had been proposed. He said that Conon Community Council would fully support this proposal. He wondered if the figures given in terms of 30,000 were 'trips' as opposed to people using the station. Ranald Robertson to confirm this. Mr MacPhail also wondered if any research had been done to estimate the move to trains from buses and cars. Ranald Robertson to respond on this item in statistical terms. The point was made that the rail fares in Highland are some of the cheapest in the network through subsidy.
- Cllr. Margaret Paterson wished to make the point that they would be very grateful for the additional parking in Dingwall. Young people were using the trains in increasing numbers and this was a hugely positive move. However she did raise her concerns about the short connection times from local stations to Inverness for onward travel south. She did want this point noted and did flag the tightness of the timetable as only 7-8 minutes were allowed between trains arriving and

trains departing for some journeys. In the event of any delay the connection could be missed. This was resulting in people taking cars to Inverness to ensure train connections, or having to take taxis at considerable expense. Ranald Robertson offered to take this matter forward and to provide a written response. Cllr. Paterson then raised the issue of 'football trains' and asked if it could be looked at for local derbies between Inverness Caley Thistle and Ross County for example. Ranald Robertson again said he would respond to this issue.

- A gentleman raised the issue of unmanned stations and the difficulty for people with sight issues finding the 'Helpcall' boxes and advised that they needed to be much more visible and located in more accessible areas. Ranald Robertson responded that implementation of DDA in new station design should address this, however Scotrail are currently looking into this for existing stations as well. The gentleman then went on to ask if it were possible to consider tactile markings at the edge of platforms. Ranald Robertson took this point on board. Cllr. MacLean thanked Ranald Robertson for the very informative and interesting discussion on train travel and said that all issues with regard to the points raised would be dealt with and reported back on.

Cllr. MacLean then introduced David MacCallum and William Mainus from Stagecoach and opened the floor to public questions.

- Mr and Mrs Stirling, Conon Bridge. Mr and Mrs Stirling began by thanking Cameron Kemp for resolving an issue for them that had been raised at the previous Ward Forum. They then asked to highlight the issue of buses not turning up at scheduled times. David MacCallum from Stagecoach advised that there had been a backlog of complaints to deal with due to a change in management, and whilst admitting that this was unacceptable said that all that was possible was being done to deal with each of the individual problems raised. Mrs Stirling then went on to give the example of a recent journey which had taken place approximately three weeks ago from Inverness to Tomich. There was very obviously an issue with bus driver and on enquiring Mrs Stirling found out that the driver did not know the route and did not know where he was going. She had had to assist him in taking the right direction to ensure that the bus went on the route that was timetabled. Stagecoach to look into this issue.
- Kim Sharples, Strathpeffer, advised that she worked in the Dingwall Business Park and that she had a list of complaints that she wished to raise. These related to buses not stopping, buses not turning up, erratic timetabling, timetables not suited to travel to work times. There was one example given of a bus stopping and then reversing back up the main road to turn back into the Business Park as if the driver did not seem to know if this was a scheduled stop or not. She also highlighted the problems with the manner and attitude of some bus drivers. She felt very strongly that there was no consistent service provided by Stagecoach and wished to raise all of these issues now. Stagecoach Managers did advise that they offered to meet Mrs Sharples. Mrs Sharples did state that she felt there was little point in this as any previous complaints made had not been dealt with effectively and she felt that she had been left with no option but to raise the issues in public at the meeting.
- Mrs MacDonald, Evanton. Mrs MacDonald concurred completely with Mrs Sharples on her view of issues with driver attitude. She felt that many of the drivers were poorly trained in dealing with people with disabilities or mobility

issues. Customers were made to feel that they were an inconvenience and were not given the afforded courtesy and consideration. David McCallum advised that this issue was currently being addressed with specific and targeted training for drivers. Mrs MacDonald appreciated this but wished to ensure it was the right type of training. This point was taken on board.

- Sheila Fletcher, Community Transport Association. Question was asked when fares are coming down in line with fuel costs. She also wished to raise the need for parity in fares and return fares as these are not equal. She also wanted to raise the point that there was no way for passengers to alert bus drivers that they required the bus to stop through a bell or alert system. Stagecoach responded that all new buses would be provided with bell stops. Another person present did highlight that this was all very well but quite often the only way of alerting the bus driver was with a button in the middle of the bus and this was no use for someone with mobility or visual impairment issues as there was often not enough time to get to the alert button to request the bus driver to stop. There was also a problem highlighted with drivers not pulling into designated stances at the bus station in Inverness and passengers being left confused about where to get buses and to ensure that they were at the right stance for the bus. This was taken on board by the Stagecoach Managers.
- Timetabling issues were raised by Nigel Greenwood, Dingwall Community Council. He highlighted that the timetable on the web did not match the timetable of the actual bus and that this had caused problems recently when using the bus to travel. He then highlighted the problem of young people not being given their entitlement on Young Scot cards. Not all bus drivers seemed to be aware of the scheme and some had been downright rude in refusing young people the discount that they were entitled to. Both Highland Council and Stagecoach to look into this problem as it had been raised before.
- Neil Young, Transport Officer, outlined the proposal for a bus stop at the Ambulance Station on the Strathpeffer Road. This was in response to issues raised about lack of a convenient place to disembark the bus for those working on the Business Park and in that area. Mrs Sharples responded that this would be welcomed but that there would be then a need for a path for people to get across the road and this will have to be taken into account.
- Terry Cullingham, Visually Impaired Society, asked why there was no town bus service to the Health Centre and hospital. Neil Young responded that there is dial-a-bus provision for Dingwall and this is operated by C&E Taxis in the Town. Mr Cullingham was not aware of this service and asked if information for this could be provided to the Health Centre. Cllr. Margaret Paterson advised that a town bus service had been trialled previously but had been very poorly used by the local public. This was acknowledged, however it was agreed that times had changed and that many more people were using public transport. A request was made that this be looked at again.
- Stagecoach Managers then asked if they could have opportunity to respond to some of the points raised. Issues were discussed and William Mainus, Commercial Manager, advised that they would take all of the issues raised back and would talk to manufacturers about the problem with the alert systems on buses. He also advised that he would look into the discrepancy in information between the web and timetabling.
- Member of the public asked if fares information could be put on the website as this was problematic when you went to get a bus with no idea of how much the

bus journey would cost. He also asked if there could be a form on the website for comments and complaints as was the case with many organisations these days. William Mainus thought this was an excellent idea and offered to take this forward. He also advised that timetable amendments would be dealt with as this had been raised as an issue as well.

- Margaret MacDonald, Evanton. Issue was raised of the main bus stop in Dingwall at the Royal Hotel. This was not a good stop as there was a dip in the pavement and it was difficult to get on and off the bus. It was agreed that the Community Council and Highland Council look at this again. She highlighted that often there was a backlog of buses and that these could not be identified as they were stacked up behind each other so it was difficult to know which bus to go to carry on your next journey. Stagecoach to look into how to improve this.
- Cllr. Paterson responded to a point made about a request to have buses coming into the South Car Park. This had been looked at on numerous occasions and at recent walk-about with Dingwall Community Council this had also been considered.
- Fiona Sutherland, Station Road, Dingwall. Miss Sutherland asked if a bus shelter could be provided for the stop opposite Wyvis House on Station Road. This was now a busy bus stop given the Care Home positioning and many people used this stop from the flats at the Old Distillery. This request was noted by Neil Young.
- A request for better driver training was made for those with mobility issues. Walking mobility issues can cause a real problem. There is not enough time for people to get onto the bus and to find a seat before the bus takes off. This can also be a problem for mothers and young children. Could priority seating be looked at? This was noted.
- The question was asked if there is a protocol for queuing buses at bus stops in general given the point raised earlier re the stop at the Royal Hotel. Stagecoach responded that as far as they were aware there was none in place. Cllr. MacLean asked if this could be looked at.
- Sheila Fletcher, Community Transport Association. Could a bus stop be considered for the National Hotel? There was much discussion around this as many suggestions had been put forward for different bus stop solutions in Dingwall but to date a solution had not been found that suited everyone. This issue was subject to ongoing discussion and it was hoped that a solution could be found that best suited passengers.

Cllr. MacLean then drew the Stagecoach discussions to a close and moved on to Scotland Transerv introducing Edwin Stewart, the Area Manager, to deal with any issues raised.

- Colin Craig, Ferintosh Community Council raised the issue of the Ferintosh Community Link and asked how the A835 road could be crossed. He asked for advice on how Ferintosh and Conon Community Councils could take this issue forward. Edwin Stewart noted this point and offered to give feedback to the Ward Manager for passing on to the Community Councils. Discussion then moved onto cycle routes and issues were raised about the recent cold weather and the treacherous state of the cycle path along the A835 as it had not been gritted. Mr Stewart advised that cycle routes are the responsibility of Transport Scotland. The issue was then raised about using Transerv as a local contractor then there was discussion around this. Members to take this forward.

In closing the session, Cllr. MacLean asked that given all the issues raised and the robust discussion that had taken place, if there was support for the development of a Local Transport Forum. There was an overwhelming support received from all of those present for this proposal. Cllr. MacLean offered to take this forward with the Ward Manager.

There was discussion around how to publicise the issues raised and how answers to these issues would be forthcoming. The suggestion was made by the Ward Manager that feedback could be given via The Highland Council website and a note of the meeting could be sent to individuals. Whichever communication method suited the individual, Highland Council would be happy to meet this. The idea of giving feedback via The Highland Council webpage for Ward 9 was agreed. The Ward Manager also asked if anyone wishing a copy of the note of the meeting could leave their details. A final point was made by Terry Cullingham over access difficulties for wheelchair users at the south platform at Dingwall Station. This was noted by Ranald Robertson.

Cllr. MacLean closed the meeting by thanking all for attending and asked anyone present who wished to receive further information or to be contacted re development of a Local Transport Forum to leave details with the Ward Manager. Cllr. MacLean then closed the meeting.