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MINUTES of MEETING of COWAL TRANSPORT FORUM held in the TIMBER PIER BUILDING, DUNOON on MONDAY, 16 MARCH 2020

Present: Councillor Alan Reid (Chair)
Councillor Bobby Good
Councillor Jim Anderson

Attending: Archie Reid - Strachur Community Council
Gordon Ross – Western Ferries
Captain Alistair McLundie – Western Ferries
Melissa Stewart – Governance Officer
Tommy Gore – Area Operations Manager, Calmac
Iain Slorach – Client Manager, Calmac
Iain Catterwell – Timber Transport Group
Paul Paterson – Kilfinan Community Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were intimated by:

Chief Inspector Douglas Wilson – Police Scotland;
Police Inspector Simon Shanks - Police Scotland;
Graham Revill – Kilmun Community Council;
Willie Lynch - Dunoon Community Council;
Neil MacFarlane – Transport Scotland;
Cathleen Russell – Colintrave & Glendaruel Community Council;
Michael Breslin – South Cowal Community Council;
Allan Comrie – Scottish Passenger Transport;
Councillor Gordon Blair;
Councillor Audrey Forrest;
Eleanor Stevenson – South Cowal Community Council;
Iain McInnes – Lochgoil Community Council;
Iain MacNaughton – Sandbank Community Council;
Martin Arnold – Contract Officer; and
Marta Zawadzka – Community Transport Officer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Good made a financial declaration of interest in item 7 (f) on the basis he is a part time employee of West Coast Motors. He remained in the room taking no part in the short discussion.

3. MINUTES

The minute of the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum held on the Monday 23 September 2019 was approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

In response to the concerns raised by the Forum regarding the economic impact of higher fares on the Dunoon-Gourock ferry service, the Governance Officer read out the response from Ishabel Bremner, Manager for the Economic Growth Team, who advised that;

“The impact higher fares on the Dunoon-Gourock ferry route would have on visitor numbers and tourism is not something Economic Growth has analysed. In addition, there may be other wider factors influencing demand on a route than just ferry fares. Therefore, we do not have the required information to provide input to Monday’s discussion at the CTF.”

Outcome

The Forum agreed to invite Transport Scotland Ferries Section to attend a future meeting to discuss fares and what analysis had been undertaken on economic impacts of RET.

In relation to item 5 (a) Councillor Bobby Good informed the Forum that the 482 and 483 services pick up from John Street 4 or 5 times daily.

4. FERRIES UPDATE

(a) Verbal Update by Chair

The Chair informed the Forum that at the Bute and Cowal Area Committee on 3 March 2020 Members were invited to appoint someone to Gourock – Dunoon Infrastructure and Vessels Project Reference Group and agreed to appoint him.

The Forum also noted that a condition of participating on the group was to adhere to Transport Scotland’s rule regarding confidentiality which meant he was not in a position to share everything discussed however, Transport Scotland had announced publicly it will be at least three years, after the design which takes at least one year, before a new vessel will be in service.

Outcome

The Forum noted the Chair’s update.

(b) Gourock to Dunoon Ferry Service

The Forum were invited to consider an update from the Ferries Policy Officer on behalf of Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, in response to the Chair’s letter of 29 September 2019 regarding the Gourock to Dunoon ferry service.

Discussion focussed on the free travel pass for under 19 year olds not being applicable to ferries and the serviceable life of the linkspan.

Councillor Bobby Good updated the Forum on the decision of the Bute and Cowal Area Committee to write to Mike Russell and Paul Whitehouse ([LINK](#)) in relation to the Dunoon to Gourock ferry service.

Outcome

The Forum:

1. noted the update provided by the Ferries Policy Officer;
2. agreed to write to the Minister requesting clarification if the free bus scheme for under 19 year olds can be extended to all ferry services;
3. noted the infrastructure at Gourock had a lifespan of 40 years, was now 49 years old and that there was no planned replacement at this time; and
4. agreed to circulate the letters sent on behalf of the Bute and Cowal Area Committee to the Forum.

(Reference: Letter from Ferries Policy Officer dated 28 October 2019, submitted)

(c) Shore Side Infrastructure at Dunoon

The Forum noted that there was still a need for clarity on new ferries in order to move forward.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

(d) Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL)

The Forum were invited to consider the submitted update by Kevin Hobbs - Chief Executive Officer, Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) in response to the issues raised at their last meeting regarding the lack of parts available and/or in storage for repairs such as those required at Gourock. Since the update was submitted the Forum noted that CMAL had advised that they will make repairs on the existing vessels until the new ferries are ready.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(Reference: Update by Kevin Hobbs - Chief Executive Officer, Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited dated 30 September 2019, submitted)

(e) **Caledonian MacBrayne**

The Forum discussed the submission to Caledonian MacBrayne (Calmac) asking for consideration to be given to making more use of the Coruisk ferry during the winter.

In addition Tommy Gore, Area Operations Manager – CalMac provided the below figures:

Gourock to Dunoon Route

January figures indicated 13.6% fewer foot passengers which was reflected in all routes due to weather conditions.

Contractual Reliability was 99.63% and Actual Reliability was 82.12%

Colintraive/Rhubodach Route

	Actual Reliability	Contractual Reliability
CHFSII Contract Year 17/18	98.5%	99.53%
CHFSII Contract Year 18/19	97.98%	99.67%
Change YoY	-0.52%	+0.14%

Discussion focussed on the small reduction in Actual Reliability, by half a percent which was still well above other routes on the Clyde in terms of service levels and that Contractual Reliability (technical and operational reasons for disruptions) had improved.

In relation to the Tarbert/Portavadie route the Forum noted a downturn in vehicle figures of 11.6% and passenger figures by 14.77%. Contractual performance was 92.06% and actual reliability was 78.04%. The Forum also noted that the Timetable Team had advised that there seems uncertainty about the change for the Winter timetable from stakeholders and hauliers so they are holding off on this decision for now until they get a clearer view. Calmac are happy to start pushing it through various channels (e.g. social media) as well as local comms, however at the moment a lot of their output is Covid-19 related so they are reducing the amount of marketing content given the uncertainty that there is at the moment. They have not had any feedback from West Coast Motors regarding their Summer 2020 timetable yet, and are still awaiting this from the local Operations Manager in Dunoon.

Discussion focused on how safety is always at the front of the decision making process when there is a decision as to whether to sail or not due to adverse weather conditions and that skippers make the ultimate decision; the age of vessels and refurbishment plans; the vessels in Holy Loch and their use as reserve vessels; and how when the Colintraive to Rhubodach ferry service is often cancelled the bus service is also cancelled. The Forum noted how this has wider implications as this service includes the school run.

Outcome

The Forum:

1. noted the submission to Calmac regarding the use of the Coruisk during winter and that no final decision had been reached;
2. agreed to write to Transport Scotland in support of the request by the Arran Ferry Committee for the Claonig-Lochranza ferry to be operational all year round, which would free up the Portavadie-Tarbert vessel to operate for the whole day on the winter timetable;
3. agreed to write to the Council to look at the possibility of having a provision in the bus service contract to ensure that the 479 service between Dunoon and Colintraive continues to operate should the Colintraive to Rhubodach ferry be cancelled; and
4. agreed to write to the Traffic Commissioner to ask if she can do anything to ensure that West Coast Motors operate the 479 service between Dunoon and Colintraive should the Colintraive to Rhubodach ferry be cancelled.

(Reference: Submission to Caledonian MacBrayne dated 9 December 2019, submitted)

(f) **Western Ferries** (Pages 13 - 14)

Gordon Ross, Western Ferries, spoke of his appreciation and gratitude to staff for keeping the service going and keeping Dunoon connected during the shocking weather in January and February.

He spoke about how the funding has been cut for the concessionary card system which is administered by the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Joint Committee but the fund needed to be refinanced as Western Ferries are still not charging the full amount and are currently absorbing some of the costs for card holders. The Forum discussed why there was no reference to this in the council's budget pack; the need to ensure Cowal is being treated fairly; and how neighbouring councils are dealing with this.

In relation to coronavirus the Forum heard how Western Ferries are attending the Scottish Public Health and NHS meetings twice weekly in Glasgow and they are following self-sanitising processes for business as usual. The contingency plan provides for the company operating the service with a 20% staff absence rate; potential to undertake overnight and daily cleaning of vessels; and continued assistance in transporting emergency services to Gourock.

The Forum further noted that there had been no complaints about disabled parking since their last meeting and it is hoped that the parking bays will be reinstated by mid-summer.

In Michael Breslin's absence the Chair tabled an update from him as attached to this minute.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the update;
1. agreed that they would write to Transport Scotland about the funding to Strathclyde Concessionary Joint Committee concessionary ferry card holders in light of the 50p increase; and
2. agreed to make enquiries about the budget process for Argyll and Bute Council in respect of their contribution to concessionary ferry card funding.

The representatives from Calmac and Western Ferries left the meeting at this point.

5. POLICE SCOTLAND

Having submitted their apologies no discussion was had on this item.

6. TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

(a) VMS and Manual Signs (Pages 15 - 16)

In the absence of Neil MacFarlane, Transport Scotland the Chair circulated an updated as attached to this minute.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(b) A83

In the absence of Neil MacFarlane the Governance Officer read out an update which advised the Forum that during May 2020, over the course of 3 weeks of local closures, they currently plan to carry out resurfacing at the following locations;

- Campbeltown;
- South of Furnace;
- White Bridge Cottage;
- Meall Mhor;
- Erines;
- North of Bellochantuy Straights; and
- North of Gartnagrenach in June 2020.

In addition they are progressing an urgent scheme at A83 Erines, South

Lodge the week commencing 23 March 2020.

The Group were also advised on disruptive works on the A82 noting that during April 2020 there will be 17 nights of convoy working on Loch Lomondside and between 10 and 21 May 2020 for 10 nights there will be a road closure.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

7. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(a) McGills 907 Service to Glasgow

As there was no Officer present from Public Transport there was no discussion held on this item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position and agreed to continue the item.

(b) Bus Stop at Rest and Be Thankful

Following on from a site visit on Monday 9 March, the Chair updated the Forum on the two preferred options that would be considered. The first was the preference of bus drivers to turn into the stop in an anticlockwise direction so that in winter they were going down and not up the hill at the sharp bend, and the second was to extend the carriageway towards the A83 to encompass two parking bays specifically for tour buses. Costings for the second option (which would also provide for the first option) would need to be prepared before any decision could be made.

Outcome

The Forum noted the information provided.

(c) Dial-A-Bus

The Forum discussed the Cowal booklet aimed at promoting the Dial-a-bus service.

Outcome

The Forum agreed to ask Officers for an update on the production of the booklet and if available, to circulate the booklet to the Forum.

(d) Fountain Quay Bus Shelter

As there was no Officer present from Public Transport there was no discussion held on this item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position and agreed to continue the item.

(e) Kames Bus Stop

With no update available, discussion focused on buses leaving early or not stopping at all at the stop, agreeing to ask Martin Arnold to make enquiries on this with West Coast Motors. The Forum also raised concerns that there had been no reply from Murray Rogers, General Manager – West Coast Motors on issues previously raised regarding the joining up of the service from the Hunter's Quay ferry and reinstatement of the Cowal Games service to Strachur.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. agreed to ask Officers to write to Colin Craig of West Coast Motors regarding the outstanding responses;
2. requested that Martin Arnold provide an update on outstanding action regarding the bus stop; and
3. requested that Martin Arnold explore, with West Coast Motors, reports that the bus service was leaving early at Kames and thereafter to report back on this to the Forum.

(f) 479 Dunoon to Rothesay West Coast Motors Service

As there was no Officer present from Public Transport there was no further discussion held on this item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position agreed at item 4(e) above and agreed to continue the item.

(g) Integrated Transport

In the absence of Willie Lynch the Governance Officer read out his submitted question asking if there are a number of West Coast Motors vehicles which do not comply with the Disability Act and some EU Regulations and therefore disabled people, people with limited movement and mothers with prams are unable to travel then when will West Coast have all vehicles compliant?

Councillor Good confirmed that as he understood it all coaches were compliant but it may be that a low floor access bus was required to take account of the types of user on the service.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. agreed to ask Martin Arnold to look at the possibility of a low floor bus being used in any new contract for bus services; and
2. agreed to instruct Officers to look provision within contracts for a service level agreement to the contractor requiring responses to queries from council within 1 month.

8. TIMBER TRANSPORT GROUP

Iain Catterwell, Timber Transport Group updated the Form with the detail on this year's application to the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme. The Forum noted that the 2020/21 application to the Fund was specifically related to key Timber haulage routes totalling £1.25m co-funded as part of a £2m programme. This included proposal schemes valued at a third of a million in the Cowal area. These proposals would continue the works to improve capacity and safety completed in previous years. Specifically the proposed works are on the B8000 between Otter Ferry and Millhouse which included;

- Balliemore - overlay, culvert replacement and HGV passing place;
- North of Kilfinnan (S.Lodge) - overlay and HGV passing place;
- Drum - HGV passing place;
- Auchoirk Farm - HGV passing place; and
- Auchoirk Cottage - HGV passing place.

The Forum noted that as with all applications to competitive funds, there is no guarantee that the application will be successful, however Mr Catterwell thought the proposal was a strong candidate for funding and will be received positively by the awarding panel.

In addition the Forum noted that there had been a private application for Kilfinan Community Wood to divert timber straight to the A8003 road.

Outcome

The Forum noted the updated provided.

9. ROADS UPDATE

(a) Carriageway Roundels and Additional Signage at Colintrave

The Chair stated that the signage was there but the last time he had passed the roundels were still outstanding.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

(b) Dunoon Pier

The Forum noted that the Traffic Road Order (TRO) process was currently

suspended whilst under review and due to be discussed at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 17 March 2020 ([LINK](#)).

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

(c) **Parking Restrictions- Bus Bays at Queens Hall; Tudor Rooms and Morrisons**

As there was no Officer present or update submitted there was no discussion held on this item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position and agreed to request an update.

(d) **Road Markings in Cowal - General update**

The Forum considered a Members' Briefing Note, prepared by Roads and Infrastructure, in reference to lining work.

Outcome

The Forum noted the Briefing Note and that they hoped for improvement this year.

(Reference: Members' Briefing Note dated October 2019, submitted)

(e) **Speed Surveys**

Discussion focussed on the lack of a Speed Survey report at the last meeting of the Bute and Cowal Area Committee.

Outcome

The Forum agreed to instruct Officers to present a Speed Survey report to the Bute and Cowal Area Committee and that Officers send a link of where the results could be located on the council website.

(f) **Traffic Management in Tighnabruaich, Kames and Millhouse**

As there was no Officer present or update given there was no discussion on the item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position and agreed to continue the item.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was a general discussion on the use of car parks during the Dunoon Presents event for the Easter Festival and how the loss of free car parking spaces may impact on local businesses.

Outcome

The Forum agreed to seek confirmation as to the policy around the use of council car parks for local events.

(a) Railings

The Forum considered a response from Artem Derevyankin – Trainee Purchasing Officer, Argyll and Bute Council in relation to railings at Argyll St and John St in Dunoon.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(Reference: Update from Artem Derevyankin – Trainee Purchasing Officer, Argyll and Bute Council dated 9 October, submitted)

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum would be held on Monday 22 June 2020.

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Thanks again Alan. Here is a summary then of what I have been doing:

- 1 Making efforts to persuade those still wanting a vehicle service resurrected to drop this and concentrate on a passenger only service. I know your view Alan and I try and respect everyone's views on this but the decision has been made, whether we like it or not and, like you, I desperately want new ferries on the route as quickly as possible. I do agree with Neil Kay on the damage being done.
- 2 I have written twice to Paul Wheelhouse urging him to try and speed the process up. He has had a copy of the attached which CMI International gave to CalMac the best part of a year ago.
- 3 The response to those 2 letters is attached Alan and apart from the obvious flannel, they are now saying it will take 5, yes 5, years. The CMI option was that, once a decision was made, vessels could be in the water within a year. I have made it clear to TS that 5 years is just not on and have urged the minister to take advice from a marine consultancy to see if 5 years is correct, or not.
- 4 I met with Robbie Drummond of CalMac in January, at his request, and the key issue for me was that communications between TS, CMAL and CalMac don't seem to be that great, especially over vessel selection.
- 5 I have, as you know, been trying to get the council to change its policy and to fully support the passenger only position, so far without success but I do think what you agreed at the last area committee is helpful.

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We intend to make the VMS at Strachur and Kilmun fully operational and capable of being controlled remotely. BEAR are going to contact the original supplier to see how much modems are and what sort of signal strength they need to operate. I have actually spoken to them myself briefly. Apparently their signal works across all operator networks, so we only need one to be in range.

We also plan to have a comprehensive and far reaching system of flip down signage that can be operated manually. These have been designed and only need to be manufactured and installed.

I trust this is sufficient information for the Group.

Regards

Neil

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