

**MINUTES of MEETING of COWAL TRANSPORT FORUM held by MICROSOFT TEAMS
on WEDNESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2022**

Present: Councillor Alan Reid (Chair)

Councillor Audrey Forrest
Councillor Jim Anderson
Councillor Gordon Blair
Stuart McLean – Committee Manager
Alistair McLundie - Western Ferries
Gordon Ross – Western Ferries
Stewart Wohlgemuth - CalMac
Ruairidh Campbell - CMAL
Alex Leslie – Technical Officer
Neil MacFarlane – Transport Scotland
Allan Comrie – Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Iain Catterwell – Timber Transport Group
Paul Bulmer – Colintrave and Glendaruel Community Council
Gordon Revill - Kilmun Community Council
Iain McInnes – Lochgoil Community Council
Kirsty Reid – Strachur Community Council
Ronald McAlister – Bute Community Council

Attending: Megan Bonar – Dunoon Observer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were intimated by:

Iain Slorach - Client Manager, Calmac;
Cathleen Russell - Colglen Community Council; and
Michael Breslin - South Cowal Community Council.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minute of the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum held on the Tuesday 16 November 2021 was approved as a correct record.

4. FERRIES UPDATE

(a) Caledonian MacBrayne

The Forum considered a verbal update from Stewart Wohlgemuth, Port Operations Manager, Calmac. Further to the actions in the Minute of the previous meeting Mr Wohlgemuth advised that the reason the MV Ali Cat was not used in foggy weather was due to the skippers having more confidence in the MV Argyll Flyer due to the

fact that it is faster and easier to manoeuvre in the water at short notice should an issue arise. He advised that the MV Coruisk was currently at Gourock awaiting a part for the lift and it was hoped that it would be back in service later in the month.

Kirsty Reid enquired about the use of cash on Calmac ferries as some people had reported an issue with this on the Bute service. She was advised that cash could be used and that Calmac were aware of the issue she referred to and that it had been resolved.

Councillor Reid raised the issue of a 16 seater bus being used by West Coast Motors during ferry cancellations when the contract was for a larger vehicle. He was advised that this had been raised with West Coast Motors.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(b) Western Ferries

Gordon Ross, Western Ferries, provided an update advising that the customer parking area to the west side of the terminal, which had been closed due to covid restrictions, had now been reopened. He advised that they were currently running the winter timetable and that the summer timetable would run from April. He advised that in terms of the replacement bus service, passengers would be issued with Western Ferries tickets. Mr Ross reported that the removal of the road parking from the north side of the terminal would go ahead and they were currently waiting on the Council providing line painters. In relation to the Rankin Brae signage he told the forum that queuing traffic was more likely when there was a closure on the Rest and Be Thankful.

Graham Revill asked if it was possible for the crew on Western Ferries to request that drivers turn off their engines during the crossing. Mr Ross advised that there is a safety announcement on the ferries that requests that drivers turn off their engine but during adverse weather conditions many drivers keep their engines running for their own comfort. He advised that as it was an open vessel there shouldn't be a build-up of fumes but if there was an issue with excessive fumes then crew could ask for engines to be turned off.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(c) CalMac Timetables for Winter 2022-23

Councillor Alan Reid referred to the consultation on timetables and the proposal that the last sailings from Rhubodach and Colintrave be booked in advance. He advised that he had received comments from Bute and ColglenCommunity Councils that they were opposed to this proposal. Mr Wohlgemuth advised that he would raise this with Tommy Gore as he was unsure of the reasons for this proposal. Councillor Reid advised that there was strong opposition to this on both the Bute and the Colintrave sides of the crossing and a quick reply would be appreciated.

Gordon Ross referred to the current timetable between Portavadie and Tarbert and

asked when this would revert back to the normal timetable. Mr Wohlgemuth advised that he would request confirmation from Mr Gore on this matter.

Councillor Anderson asked for confirmation that late night sailings would be something that would continue in the future. Councillor Anderson was subsequently advised that they would continue.

Outcome

The Forum –

1. Noted the update.
2. Noted that confirmation would be provided from Mr Gore on the reasoning for the proposal that the last sailings from Rhubodach and Colintrave be booked in advance.
3. Noted that confirmation would be provided from Mr Gore on when the Portavadie to Tarbert timetable would revert back to normal.

(d) Gourock to Dunoon Ferry Service

The Forum considered an update from Ruairidh Campbell, CMAL, on the Gourock/Dunoon/Kilcreggan ferry services. He advised that since the last meeting a consultation exercise for the Dunoon Concept vessel had been undertaken. Mr Campbell confirmed that the feedback had been taken into account and that the information on the website had been updated. There had been no announcement on the preferred vessels as yet. He advised that Transport Scotland were currently reviewing the outline business case for the two vessels for the Gourock/Dunoon ferry service. Transport Scotland had confirmed that due to the volume of work there would be an anticipated delay of approximately two months but design work was continuing and would be completed as far as possible. Councillor Reid asked if it was likely that this delay would affect the delivery of the vessel and he was advised that it was unlikely.

Alistair McLundie referred to the 250 passenger capacity of the vessel and asked why this was the case as between June 2011 and March 2020, 99% of sailings had less than 100 passengers. He was advised that the capacity of the vessel was due to the size of the vessel required for the wave height and weather conditions it was likely to encounter, not passenger demand. Councillor Reid asked why a vessel of that size could not be used for vehicles, as this would reduce costs as a consequence of the income generated. Mr Campbell advised that the fact that the vessel was passenger only had been set down in guidance from Transport Scotland and that he would take Councillor Reid's comments back to them.

Outcome

The Forum –

1. Noted the update.
2. Noted that Mr Campbell would make contact with Transport Scotland regarding

the suggestion from Councillor Reid about vehicles on the ferry as a source of income.

(e) Shore Side Infrastructure at Dunoon

The Forum considered a written update from Scott Reid, Marine Operations Manager, which detailed the preparation of an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the redevelopment of the passenger only service infrastructure at Dunoon and Kilcreggan Ferry Terminals. The Forum noted that funding options would be explored when the plan's costs could be narrowed to a single confirmed preferred option for each location.

Alex Leslie, Technical Officer, was present to answer questions. Councillor Anderson referred to the investment in the Victorian Pier and asked why this was now deemed unfit for use and asked to see the report detailing this decision. There was further discussion the existing infrastructure not being suitable for vessels and the impact of further extending the existing enclosed area.

Outcome

The Forum –

1. Noted the update.
2. Noted that clarification would be given on the reasoning for the Victorian Pier being deemed unfit for use.

(f) Concessionary Fare Increases

Allan Comrie, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) advised that a report on the increase in concessionary fares would be considered at the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee meeting on 18 March 2022. He advised that there was a commitment by the Scottish Government to look at all fares and that they were currently undertaking two studies. He advised that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland would be replacing the current Ferries Plan with an Islands Connectivity Plan and were currently looking at RET (Roads Equivalent Tariff) and how it was working. He advised that given the unknowns, a half price fare would be instigated on 4 April 2022 which was a considerable increase to concessionary fares. He advised that a £4 price cap would be applied, which was still a significant reduction on the £10.20 fare but was a significant increase from the fare that was currently charged. He told the Forum that the Dunoon to Gourock ferry was currently the busiest route and therefore had the greatest drawdown of funds.

The Forum expressed their disappointment in this and sought confirmation that there would be ongoing publicity and advertising to ensure that all passengers would be aware of this before it came into operation in April 2022. They also requested that it be made clear that it was not the ferry operator's decision but that of the Joint Committee. The Chair advised that he would write to the Scottish Government highlighting that the Dunoon Gourock / Gourock Kilcreggan routes did not benefit from the current RET scheme. Mr Comrie advised that the Council would also have the opportunity to comment on the consultations.

Outcome

The Forum –

1. Noted the update.
2. Noted that the Chair would write to Scottish Government highlighting that the Dunoon Gourock / Gourock Kilcreggan routes did not benefit from the current RET scheme.

The Chair noted that the Ferries representatives usually left the meeting at this point. He took the opportunity, with it being the last meeting of the Forum in the life of the current Council, to thank the representatives for their contribution and support over the previous five years of the Forum.

5. POLICE SCOTLAND

It was noted that there was no representative from Police Scotland at the meeting.

Stuart McLean read out an update that had been given to the Bute and Cowal Community Planning Group earlier in the week.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

6. TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

(a) VMS and Manual Signs

Neil MacFarlane, Transport Scotland, apologised that he had been unable to attend the meeting in November. He advised that there had been no occasion where the diversion route had been required to be used in Glen Croe and the message had not required to be changed.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

(b) A83

Neil MacFarlane, Transport Scotland, advised that there were 4 resurfacing projects planned, one of which was significant to Cowal. He advised that resurfacing works were planned south of Arrochar between 21-29 March 2022 but were subject to change. He advised that formal notification from BEAR would be given nearer the time.

The Chair advised that Iain MacInnes who had left the meeting earlier had requested that the issue of the bus not stopping at the top of the Rest and Be Thankful between the months of November and February be raised, along with the issue of tour operators parking there. Mr MacFarlane advised that these issues could be raised at the Task Force meeting in March.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

7. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(a) Reduced Bus Services

It was noted that there was no representative from West Coast Motors present at the meeting.

The Chair advised that bus services had still not returned to pre-covid levels and that it was causing concerns. He advised that implementation of the decision to split the Dunoon to Rothesay service into two due to Calmac cancellations was causing issues and added half an hour to the journey time between Dunoon and Portavadie. He advised that he intended to write to West Coast Motors in this regard.

Councillor Forrest advised that the early morning bus service from Toward to Dunoon pier was not running and this was causing issues as the only other options were to drive or take a taxi as the Pingo service did not run that early. She asked if this could be included in the letter to West Coast Motors.

Kirstie Reid advised that the Inveraray to Cairndow evening service was no longer running and was causing issues for people who used the service when travelling to and from the Beatson on the Glasgow service bus. She asked if this could be raised as well.

Outcome

The Forum noted that the Chair would write to West Coast Motors highlighting the issues raised.

(b) Bus Stop at Rest and Be Thankful

There was nothing discussed at this item as it had been raised earlier in the agenda.

8. TIMBER TRANSPORT GROUP

Iain Catterwell, Timber Transport Group, updated the Forum on recent activities which included that the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme fund work had gone well and that they were in the process of preparing a bid for 2022/23. He advised that it was the quiet time of the year for timber transport in Cowal. He reported that further to complaints about bark on the road from timber transportation, he had done some informal monitoring and had not seen any issues on the public roads in Sandbank which required to be addressed further than what they were doing already.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

9. ROADS UPDATE

(a) Traffic Management in Tighnabruaich, Kames and Millhouse

As there was no one present from Kilfinan Community Council to give an update

there was no discussion on the item.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

No issues were raised.

11. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To be confirmed after the Local Council Elections in May 2022 had taken place.

The Chair, as this was the last meeting of the Forum in the life of the current Council, thanked all Members of the Forum for their contribution over the past five years, he thanked the Committee Staff for their support, especially Melissa Stewart and Adele Price-Williams who were not in attendance at the meeting. The Chair advised that he hoped the Forum would continue in the life of the new council as it had been a useful meeting and a lot of improvements had been brought forward as a result of the work done by the Forum.