

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COWAL TRANSPORT FORUM HELD BY MICROSOFT
TEAMS
ON TUESDAY, 16 MAY 2023**

Present: Councillor Daniel Hampsey (Chair)
Councillor William Sinclair
Councillor Gordon Blair
Stuart McLean, Committee Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Martin Arnold, Contract Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Neil MacFarlane, Transport Scotland
Captain Alistair McLundie, Western Ferries
Gordon Ross, Western Ferries
Kerris Bone, Kilmun Community Council
Graham Revill, Kilmun Community Council
Kirstie Reid, Strachur Community Council
Allan Comrie, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
Tom Warren, Dunoon Community Council
Iain Slorach, Calmac

Attending: Liz Neilson, Resident in Sandbank
Andy Galloway, Local Democracy Reporter

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

Apologies for absence were intimated by:

Sergeant Eddie McGunnigal, Police Scotland;
Neil Stewart, West Coast Motors;
Iain Catterwell, Timber Transport Group;
Councillor Audrey Forrest;
Councillor Ross Moreland;
Ronald McAlister, Bute Ferry Committee; and
Don McKillop, Calmac.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest intimated.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum held on Tuesday 14 February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

The Chair highlighted matters arising from the last meeting, specifically in relation to the attendance of the NHS at the Forum. The Chair confirmed that the NHS were not core partners and any issues relating to patient transport should be directed to the Integration

Joint Board, adding that should there be any specific issues they would like to raise that they could be invited to a future meeting.

The Chair also advised that he continues to highlight the need for new Calmac ferries in Dunoon and that Calmac are facing issues with tickets and expiry dates with it being noted that an online booking system is soon to be launched which should help; concerns had been raised with McGill's Buses in relation to the large cuts in services in Inverclyde which may cause issues for people travelling to and from Dunoon.

4. FERRIES UPDATE

Calmac

The Forum considered an update from Iain Slorach from Calmac. Mr Slorach provided information relating to reliability and punctuality statistics for March; the new booking system which is to be launched this week, adding that expiry dates for tickets bought under the new booking system will be extended until the end of the timetable period in which they were bought. He also gave a commitment that Calmac will be looking at the current timetable to align it with Scotrail's newly published timetable and that they intend to engage with Councillor's and the Community Councils on this matter.

The Chair advised that he was very pleased to hear about Calmac's engagement with Scotrail and highlighted his thanks to Councillor Sinclair for his continuous work on this subject.

Tom Warren advised that the digital timetable provided by Calmac online is an embedded PDF which is not accessible for all. Mr Slorach advised that Calmac are aware of this and that they are currently looking at improving the timetable formats this year.

Discussion took place in relation to the carrying figures on the Gourock to Dunoon route with it being noted that it was 30% down. Mr Slorach advised that they haven't seen a return on most routes to pre-covid figures. Councillor Sinclair advised that the removal of Scotrail's peak time tariff will make travelling cheaper and could increase service usage.

Mr Slorach advised that he would make enquiries on passenger numbers with the Operation's Team and provide a fuller response at the next meeting of the Forum.

Outcome

The Forum:

1. noted the update by Calmac; and
2. noted that Mr Slorach would provide carrying figures for the Gourock to Dunoon service at a future meeting and advise colleagues of Scotrail's plans to remove the peak time tariff.

Western Ferries

Gordon Ross from Western Ferries highlighted that they are running their summer timetable and advised that they are waiting to see what the summer brings.

In the absence of a representative from Hunters Quay Community Council the Committee Manager read out the following question which was submitted in advance of the meeting:

The public announcements (safety etc.) made on Western Ferry vessels have noticeably increased in volume leading to complaints, Can this be addressed/adjusted?

Mr Ross advised that Western Ferries monitor the sound levels but the public announcement have to be at levels that customers can hear them and with the improving weather conditions these announcements may sound louder and travel further.

Gordon Ross enquired about proposals for Dunoon Pier and asked about progress. The Committee Manager advised that this would be subject to consideration at the Harbour Board and that he would contact Mr Ross as soon as a date for this had been agreed.

Mr Ross enquired about a meeting on the 2nd of March which mentioned that new vessels for Dunoon and Kilcreggan would be expected in 2026 and asked if Transport Scotland could provide more information.

The Committee Manager advised that he would submit this question to Transport Scotland on behalf of the Forum and circulate the response once received.

Councillor's Sinclair and Hampsey wished Western Ferries a successful season ahead.

Outcome

The Forum:

1. noted the update by Western Ferries; and
2. noted that the Committee Manager would submit Mr Ross's question to Transport Scotland and circulate the response to the Forum.

5. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)

Allan Comrie advised that the Carrick Castle bus service fares have been frozen with the service level being maintained and that the SPT have replaced some of the services which were withdrawn with publically supported services. Allan further advised of changes to Scotrail timetables highlighting the loss of 4 fast trains from Glasgow and 5 from Gourock during the off peak period. Allan added that SPT have written to Scotrail and Calmac offering to liaise with them to try and improve connection services and hope to have a response from both soon.

Mr Comrie advised that there is currently no increase to concessionary fare and added that the SPT are mindful that customers are facing a Cost of Living Crisis.

Kirstie Reid highlighted her concerns at the under 22 free bus travel and advised of the publicity around young people going on buses and causing issues.

Allan advised that the scheme is operated by the Scottish Government and that they are legally obligated to ensure a safe environment for all passengers, adding that if any passengers are making it unsafe drivers would be advised to contact the Police.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update from SPT.

Public Transport

Kerris Bone highlighted that residents of Strone, Blairmore, Ardintinny, Kilmun and surrounding areas would like to have the bus service back to pre-pandemic timetables. Ms Bone advised that the lack of bus services are causing problems for people getting to and from jobs.

Martin Arnold advised that he is in continual discussions with bus operator's to determine the right level of service for the areas served and that he would discuss with West Coast Motors to explore how the issues raised could be solved.

Kirstie Reid highlighted the lack of bus services in Strachur on a Saturday and asked if the Saturday services could be restored as the current service is not practical.

Martin Arnold advised of the Pingo bookable service, which can be accessed by calling 01289 385506, and that he would take Kirstie's comments away and provide an update at the next Forum meeting.

Discussion took place in relation to connectivity and the size of service vehicles available. Mr Arnold advised he is working with operators to get the right sized vehicles for the routes to ensure passenger demands are met.

The Chair reported that he had been advised by South Cowal Community Council that the bus service (489) no longer goes up North Campbell Road and asked why the decision to cut this was made. Mr Arnold advised that he was aware of some issues with the buses travelling the road due to them being low floor accessible and that the size of the vehicles was also causing problems due to poor manoeuvrability within such a tight area. Mr Arnold further advised of the Pingo provision which allows a more suitable vehicle travel to use this loop, adding that he would take the comments back to West Coast Motors.

Outcome

The forum noted that the Contract Manager would liaise with West Coast Motors to explore whether the bus service issues highlighted can be resolved and that an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

6. ROADS UPDATE

In the absence of a representative from Hunters Quay Community Council (HQCC) the Committee Manager read out the below questions which were submitted in advance of the meeting:

1. Signs indicating queuing traffic were ordered last April for placing either side of Western Ferries terminal, where are they and what was the cost?
2. Can HQCC have the results of the local speed survey (last year) and will this be published?

The Committee Manager advised that he had passed the questions onto colleagues in the Roads Department and would circulate the response to the Forum once received.

Councillor Sinclair highlighted that Transport Scotland had advised that both carriages at the Rest and Be Thankful would be open to traffic this month. Neil MacFarlane advised that he was not aware that there was a date for this and highlighted that Bear Scotland are working as quickly as possible, advising that road resurfacing would commence on the 31st of May at the Rest and Be Thankful following the removal of the protective fencing.

Kirsty Reid, Strachur Community Council advised that she had been approached numerous times by a lady with disabilities who had been struggling to use the pavements in Dunoon due to street furniture, cars being parked on the pavements and cyclists. Mrs Reid advised she had reported it to the Council and had received an acknowledgment email but no formal reply.

The Committee Manager requested that Mrs Reid forward the acknowledgement email and he would request Colleagues expedite the response.

Liz Neilson, resident in Sandbank, enquired about the speed assessment in Sandbank and asked if it had been done and if so when the results would be available.

The Committee Manager advised that he would take note of the question and would pass it to the relevant department on behalf of Liz.

Councillor Sinclair advised that there was a speed survey carried out with new radar equipment which monitors both ways and highlighted that he still does not have the information back but would follow it up.

Outcome

The Forum noted that the Committee Manager would circulate a response to Hunters Quay Community Council's questions to the Forum once received.

7. POLICE SCOTLAND

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

8. TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

Neil MacFarlane from Transport Scotland provided the Forum with a verbal update. Mr MacFarlane advised that that road resurfacing would be getting carried out at the Rest and Be Thankful from the 31 May until the 11 June, with no works being carried out on Friday and Saturday nights. The update also highlighted that layby and cycleway vegetation cut-backs had been carried out on the A82 Loch Lomondside with more planned and solar bollards had been installed at Loch Lomondside laybys with an overhaul of the brown and white tourist signage at the same location also in planning. It was also noted that overnight resurfacing works would be taking place along the A83 at Campbeltown during the summer.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

9. TIMBER TRANSPORT GROUP

In the absence of Iain Catterwell the Chair provided the following update which was submitted before the meeting:

The normal timber haulage season is just starting and is going well in the Cowal area. The Strategic Timber Transport Scheme hasn't reported yet, and until it does I'm unaware whether or not the A8003 improvement proposal has been successful.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was no other business.

11. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chair thanked everyone in attendance at the meeting and the Group noted that the Committee Manager would circulate a calendar invite for a meeting, week beginning 11 September 2023, in due course.