

**MINUTES of MEETING of COWAL TRANSPORT FORUM held via MICROSOFT TEAMS
on FRIDAY, 20 AUGUST 2021**

Present: Councillor Alan Reid (Chair)
Councillor Bobby Good
Councillor Audrey Forrest
Councillor Jim Anderson
Councillor Gordon Blair

Attending: Melissa Stewart – Governance Officer
Alistair McLundie - Western Ferries
Iain Slorach – Calmac
Stewart Wohlgemuth, Calmac
Allan Comrie – Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Iain Catterwell – Timber Transport Group
Neil MacFarlane – Transport Scotland
Murray Rogers – West Coast Motors
Jeff McCormick – West Coast Motors
Iain McInnes – Lochgoil Community Council
Michael Breslin – South Cowal Community Council
Graham Revill - Kilmun Community Council
William Sinclair - Sandbank Community Council
Ronnie McAlister – Bute Community Council

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

Apologies for absence were intimated by;

Tommy Gore – Calmac;
Gordon Ross – Western Ferries;
Marta Zawadzka – Community Transport Officer;
Iain MacNaughton - Sandbank Community Council;
CI Emma Grimason – Police Scotland; and
Willie Lynch – Dunoon Community Council.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bobby Good made a financial declaration of interest in items 7 (a) and (b) on the basis he is a part-time employee of West Coast Motors. He remained in the meeting taking no part in the discussion.

3. MINUTES

The minute of the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum held on the Monday 24 May 2021 was approved as a correct record.

4. FERRIES UPDATE

(a) Caledonian MacBrayne

The Forum considered an update from Stewart Wohlgemuth, Caledonian

MacBrayne, who advised that carryings had more than doubled compared to the same period last year due to covid-19 restrictions easing sooner in the year. He advised that the Gourock linkspan was to be removed for essential works for 9 days from 25 August 2021 and that the Argyll Flyer was scheduled to return to service week commencing 4 October 2021 due the need for certification works.

The Forum noted that during the linkspan works a taxi service via Western Ferries would be provided for disabled travellers and people with prams if required.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the update;
2. agreed that the Chair would write to CMAL to request publication of their cyclical maintenance plans;
3. agreed that Iain Slorach would pursue options to make publically available any upcoming dates of planned vessel maintenance;
4. agreed that Stewart Wohlgemuth would confirm to the Forum the reason why the MV Ali Cat cannot be utilised in foggy weather;
5. agreed that Iain Slorach would confirm to the Forum why ticketing for sail and rail had been suspended following his discussion with the Marketing Team;
6. agreed that Iain Slorach would seek clarification from Transport Scotland and report back to the Forum as to why 10-journey tickets were only available on the boat and why they were no longer issued as plastic cards ; and
7. agreed that Iain Slorach would confirm to the Forum the position around when cash payments are permitted.

(b) Western Ferries

Alistair McLundie, Western Ferries, confirmed to the Forum that carrying figures were in line with 2019 figures, with 15 callouts for out of hour sailings to assist ambulance callouts at night in last few months plus an early morning request from the fire service this morning to aid transporting additional appliances to deal with the Argyll Street fire. He advised that clarity was still required from SPT around concessionary fare increases before deciding how they will implement it; they had offered to pay for the fireworks display once approved by the council; they are having to crack down on misuse of disabled parking spaces at the terminal; and requested that when the replacement bus service is in use that Calmac communicate with their customers how the reimbursement scheme works.

Discussion focused on the impact on customers of an office closure due to essential staff training; that plans for self-cleaning toilets to be installed at Hunters Quay which had been postponed due to covid-19; and how there were difficulties with replacement bus services dropping people off at undesignated stoops between ferry terminals.

Discussion followed on options available to safely control and reduce traffic queuing along Marine Parade waiting to access the ferry, including the options of how to notify road users of queuing traffic through the use of VMS.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the update;
2. noted that Stewart Wohlgemuth would look to refine communication to Calmac customers when they need to use Western Ferries; and
3. agreed that the Chair would contact the Roads Department to see what options are available to ease the safety of queuing traffic along Marine Parade, potentially by use of VMS signage that could be managed remotely.

(c) Gourock to Dunoon Ferry Service

The Forum noted the update below from Ruairidh Campbell, Harbour and Engineering Liaison Manager, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) on the Dunoon Concept Vessel and Gourock Masterplan noting both of which would be subject of upcoming public consultations.

Dunoon Concept Vessel

The project team are currently carrying out additional scoping works associated with vessel hull form options to validate the outline vessel characteristics discussed with the Reference Group 28th May. Once this additional work is complete, the Working Group will progress with a two vessel hull form option and then make recommendations on a preferred platform. This work to be presented along with the supporting data to the Reference group in late September/October. This Reference Group session will also feature a Q&A session as before. Thereafter, Public Consultation will be scheduled for late Autumn this year.

Gourock Masterplan

The project team have updated and selected a preferred option in-line with Reference Group feedback received on 28th May. The team are currently finalising their presentation and aim to go out for Public Consultation end of August.

Kilcreggan Concept Vessel

This became part of this programme of works a year after the Gourock-Dunoon project was initiated. Policy and scoping works are on-going. The Kilcreggan concept vessel design will follow on after the Dunoon Concept Vessel design has been completed.

Kilcreggan Infrastructure

Outline options have been worked up for Kilcreggan and presented to the Working

Group. This has allowed for interoperability and vessel and infrastructure operational aspects to be considered. Further development will be taken forward once the Gourock Public Consultation has been completed and the Kilcreggan concept vessel progressed.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

(d) Shore Side Infrastructure at Dunoon

The Forum noted the update from Ruairidh Campbell, CMAL, stating that outline options had been worked up for Dunoon and presented to the Working Group which are currently awaiting further development once the Gourock Public Consultation had been completed and the Dunoon concept vessel determined. This would allow the Dunoon options to benefit from the consultation exercises and further detail on the Dunoon Concept vessel.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

(e) Concessionary Fare Increases

Allan Comrie, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), updated the Forum on the decision of the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee (SCTSJC) to increase fares. The Forum noted minutes of SCTSJC were publicly available on their website. Mr Comrie stated that whilst fully aware of the importance of the elder population, reserves held were not sufficient to sustain the scheme in its current form and there was a duty to retain reserves at a sustainable level. He commented that fares had been suppressed for many years and that the concessionary fares, although not subject to RET, would still be half the cost of a full fare.

Discussion focused on the discrepancies between fares on routes where RET is available and those where it is not and what options might be available to have a discretionary payment to offset these discrepancies.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the position; and
2. agreed that the Chair would write to SCTSJC to ask them to re-visit the decision on routes where passengers are at a double disadvantage given they do not have the benefit of reduced fares from RET and are paying an increase on already higher fare.

Having set a meeting date for the February meeting of the Forum (9 February 2022), the Ferries representatives and Mr Comrie left the meeting at this point.

5. POLICE SCOTLAND

No officers present due to operational matters taking precedence.

Outcome

The Forum noted the position.

6. TRANSPORT SCOTLAND

(a) VMS and Manual Signs

Neil MacFarlane, Transport Scotland, updated the Forum in relation to VMS and manual signs and advised the Forum that BEAR Scotland was due to complete a health check before winter on all apparatus including installed and temporary signs and would confirm the situation to the Forum in due course.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the position; and
2. noted that Neil MacFarlane would report back to the Forum regarding the working order of the signage.

(b) A83

Neil MacFarlane advised the Forum there was no programmed works along the A82 and A83 that would specifically impact Cowal at present although some resurfacing works would need to take place from Cairndow to Campbeltown which would involve lane occupations rather than closures. He also advised that Transport Scotland would update the A83 Taskforce on 9 September 2021 on proposals and that he would report back to the Forum on this in due course.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

7. PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(a) Reduced Bus Services

Jeff McCormick, West Coast Motors, advised the Forum that additional services had been added to the 478 and 489 routes and in terms of mileage they were operating at 87% of pre-covid levels and with the flexibility of the Pingo service this was seeing mileage at approximately 93% whereas patronage was still down by 38%. Mr McCormick stated that enhanced cleaning of vehicles was continuing to be done by drivers which reduced the hours they were available to drive, this coupled with the nationwide shortage of bus and HGV trainers and the back-log at DVLA in processing licences for trainees, meant there was no option to return to full service levels at present.

The Forum noted that a mid-day service had resumed on the Dunoon to Carrick Castle route (484) on Tuesday and Thursday schooldays and the timetable would be

circulated in due course along with the times of connecting services between Rothesay and Dunoon/Portavadie.

Discussion focused on the reasons for the cessation of the bus service to North Campbell Road in Innellan (489) and the issue of parked vehicles along the road. It was suggested that the Pingo service is available to be booked for this area for bookings between 8.30am and 5.30pm although noted that the 489 bus was already in position anyway and with a small adjustment to timetabling to omit the 15 minute wait, could tie in with the ferry departure.

Outcome

The Forum noted that South Cowal Community Council had offered to work with WCM to alleviate parking concerns by leafleting in the area if the service was reinstated and that Elected Members for the ward had been in contact with the Executive Director regarding consultation on service amendments.

Michael Breslin left the meeting at this point.

(b) Bus Stop at Rest and Be Thankful

Discussion focussed on the removal of the bus stop use from November due to bad weather in winter making the turning circle unsafe and how a desktop exercise had been promised to see what options were available to prevent the bus service being suspended.

Outcome

The Forum agreed that the Chair would contact the Roads Department to ask them to start progressing the desktop exercise discussed at the site meeting held just before the first Covid lockdown now restrictions allowed non-essential work to be undertaken, noting that the options available may be impacted by the TRO.

Murray Rogers and Jeff McCormick left the meeting at this point.

8. TIMBER TRANSPORT GROUP

(a) Update from Timber Transport Group

Iain Catterwell, Timber Transport Group, updated the Forum on recent activities which included that the South Cowal investment was confirmed at £684,000 for three major projects at Millhouse to Kames (widening and strengthening), Millhouse to Otter Ferry (resurfacing and installation of 5 HGV capacity passing places) and A8003 (widening, improvements and associated works).

Confirmation was sought and received that the ditches in Hells Glen would be cleared in the next four weeks when Roads had completed the capital works.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the update; and

2. agreed that Iain Catterwell would confirm to the Forum the position around third party use of Forestry and Land Scotland's timber haulage roads.

Iain MacInnes left the meeting at this point.

(b) Debris from Timber Lorries in Sandbank

William Sinclair, Sandbank Community Council advised the Forum there had been issues regarding debris from timber lorries in the area.

Iain Catterwell was sympathetic with the situation but stated that in the bigger picture, as discussed with industry bodies, 11 million cubic tonnes equating to 500,000 loads per year were moved and there had been not one incident reported of injury due to debris, and that it was not practical to have curtained vehicles due to the size and nature of the logs.

Outcome

The Forum;

1. noted the position;
2. agreed that Iain Catterwell would remind hauliers of their obligation to sweep debris off empty trailers;
3. agreed that Iain Catterwell would contact the port to ensure, where possible, no debris is stuck to the wheels/underneath the trailers when leaving the area;
4. agreed that the Chair would contact Police Scotland to see what the law is around responsibility for debris falling off lorries onto the roads; and
5. agreed that the Chair, along with local Members, would contact the Roads Department to request that they devote more resources to street cleaning which may alleviate the issue.

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 and agreed to continue the item.

(b) Road Closures and Temporary Works

The Forum noted the update from the Council in relation to Council policy regarding informing community councils about road closures and/or temporary traffic lights.

Outcome

The Forum noted the update.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

No issues were raised.

11. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that future meetings of the Cowal Transport Forum would be held on;

- Tuesday 16 November 2021; and
- Wednesday 9 February 2022.