
NOTE

**Shetland External Transport Forum
Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams
Wednesday 16 September 2020 at 2.15 p.m.**

Present:

D Sandison
C Marsland
R Thomson, ZetTrans
R McGregor, ZetTrans
R Hunter, ZetTrans

In attendance (Officers):

M Craigie, Lead Officer
M Hodgson, Solicitor
C Anderson, Senior Communications Officer
B Kerr, Communications Officer
Leisel Malcolmson, Committee Officer

Also In attendance:

P Linhart-McAskill, Transport Scotland
C Wilcock, Transport Scotland
P Flynn, Transport Scotland
J Kalinauskaite, Transport Scotland
J Hinkles, Loganair Limited
S Garrett, NorthLink Ferries
C Bevan, NorthLink Ferries
J Dow, Northlink Ferries
C Hughson, Councillor
M Lyall, Councillor
S Mathieson, VistScotland
C Grains, Lerwick Port Authority
A Farquhar, HIAL
G McDonald, Streamline Shipping Group
E Miller, Shetland Tourism Association
N Leslie, Northwards
J Dorrat, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament
D Neil, JBT
L Coutts, Team Leader – Marine Engineering

Apologies:

A Cooper, Councillor
T Smith, Councillor
R Henderson, Seafood Shetland
M Duncan, Association of Shetland Community Councils
Mr Gordon, JBT

Chairperson

Mr R Thomson presided as Chair.

Circular

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

The Chair explained that under Standing Order 5.8, ZetTrans ruled that meetings would be held by remote participation due to the current restrictions on public gatherings and its impact therefore on meetings of public bodies. He said that whilst the meetings were not accessible to the public, media were present which maintains a level of public accountability and scrutiny to these proceedings. The minutes from this meeting will be publicly available after the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2019 were confirmed.

01/20 **Matters Arising**
None.

02/20 **Presentation by Transport Scotland**
Mr Linhart-McAskill, Transport Scotland, gave a slide presentation and reported that Mr Chris Wilcock had replaced Mr Laidlaw and was present at the meeting. During his presentation Mr Linhart-McAskill advised on the following:

- North Isles Contract
- Reduced Fares on the North Isles Route
- Covid-19 – Maintaining Connections
- North Isles Freight Service

During the presentation concern was expressed that the slides were not visible to everyone and it was agreed that the slides would be circulated to the forum following the meeting.

Mr Linhart-McAskill was asked whether there was a timescale for RET. Mr Linhart-McAskill advised that there had been hurdles to progressing this fully including the latest delays as a result of Covid-19. Mr Flynn advised that there will be a full review of the general fares policy through the activity plan which is a successor to the ferry plan and would give a holistic view across all networks. He said that Transport Scotland now have an additional specific team who will work closely with the Lead Officer, and will look at specific policy issues including RET. He said that there had been a number of challenges for Ministers including the judicial review and EU Compliance but there was now a better starting point to take matters forward and there is a return to business as usual.

Reference was made to the freight vessel capacity and the timeline given the significant development. Mr Wilcock advised that the initiative came from C-Mal to get ahead of the game and they are looking to replace the vessel in due course. He said that this was at an early stage and there needed to be detailed discussion with C-Mal and Serco on what can be realistically achieved. Mr Wilcock said that options were being worked up into a meaningful proposition to bring forward. He said that Transport Scotland were keen to establish a forum that covers Orkney

and Shetland to see what the vessel will look like and they were keen to start these conversations before the end of the calendar year.

In terms of flexibility and the options being considered, Transport Scotland representatives were asked if chartering a different vessel could be an option. It was suggested that as a new freight vessel would come in due course it may be that an older vessel may be a preferred option and chartering would give greater control and could be financially value for money. Mr Linhart-McAskill said that the flexibility in the contract would allow for short term or longer term charters if needed, and if finances allow charters would be considered.

The Chair said that considering the capacity on vessels, now would be a good time to give these options more thought particularly if there is to be progress with the fares review. He said that it was good to see some progress. The Chair said that this has been a testing time for Transport Scotland and he appreciated the time taken by Transport Scotland representatives to answer questions.

03/20 **Presentation by Loganair**

Mr Hinkles, Managing Director of Loganair, gave a slide presentation, and reported on a number of matters including:

- Bookings
- Our Shetland Services
- FlySafe
- Refunds and rebookings
- Next Steps

During his presentation Mr Hinkles provided an overview of the impact on services as a result of Covid-19 during April and May. He said that recovery had not been possible across the industry with trends still at only 40% of where bookings were last year. He said that this had been a very difficult time for everyone, however Shetland services had continued throughout and the team had done an excellent job. Mr Hinkles reported on other scheduled routes and advised that Loganair continued to work with Royal Mail and additional capacity would be put in place over Christmas using the larger ATR aircraft on the mail run given the increase in internet shopping. In terms of the oil and gas industry, he said that a slimmed down version of services previously supported at Scatsta were in place at Sumburgh. He said that on time performance continued to be a high level, notwithstanding bad weather. Mr Hinkles advised that given local lockdowns there were fewer onward bookings taking place. Given this background position the decision was taken to slow the reintroduction of the third daily flight to Edinburgh. He advised that Loganair had completed the introduction of the ATR fleet on most services to and from Sumburgh. He said that the ATR aircraft were working well in and out of Sumburgh and there had been some windy runs that would also have been outwith the limits of other aircraft so performance had been good so far. Mr Hinkles also reported on the Flysafe measures in place to minimise the spread of the virus, including the use of masks, in an attempt to increase customer confidence. These measures had been put in place before it became a requirement, and the feedback from the public was that they feel safe to travel. Mr Hinkles advised that the service could run fully loaded but seating had been changed to spread passengers out.

Mr Hinkles reported that the initial backlog of refunds had been cleared. He said that there had been general understanding by customers but some customers had been asked not to travel with Loganair again due to the abuse towards staff. He highlighted an issue whereby some online travel agent bookings had been refunded and not passed on to the customers. He said that Loganair were working with the CIA with this online travel agent sector issue. Mr Hinkles explained the on-hold system and that customers can make changes to their bookings themselves and there would be no change fee and no difference in fare unless changing to a different route. Mr Hinkles advised on the next steps for Loganair, including the introduction of 2020/21 routes to Bergen and onestop flights to Manchester. He added that Loganair would continue to lobby the UK Government for support towards the aviation industry.

Mr Hinkles thanked that forum for its support and said that he hoped matters would improve over the weeks and months ahead.

The Chair thanked Mr Hinkles for his presentation and for his ongoing dialogue provided. He said that from a political perspective Loganair provided a lifeline service and Loganair should let him know if there is anything that the forum can do going forward.

During questions, comment was made that it was good to see that Loganair was still operating through the toughest of times for everyone. Mr Hinkles was asked how flight prices may be affected going forward. Mr Hinkles said that there were no changes planned. He said that the special offers had helped slightly and he was not seeing any cause to change pricing radically. He said that with the reintroduction of the Manchester connection it has been possible to add the fares together bringing costs down using technology. He said that there was no change to capacity levels and there are now more seats on Aberdeen and Edinburgh routes. He said that initiatives would be outlined for December 2020 but currently it was a case of “steady as she goes”. He said that to increase fares now would inflict more damage.

Mr Hinkles was asked if there was an increase in the number of passengers travelling to Shetland. Mr Hinkles advised that in July there was an 82% reduction in people travelling to Shetland, he said that by September that had been reduced to 59%. He said that there was a slow and steady recovery on this route and some was leisure travel.

Mr Hinkles was thanked again for his presentation.

04/20 **Presentation by Serco NorthLink**

Mr Garrett, Managing Director, NorthLink Ferries, gave a slide presentation reporting on a number of matters including:

- Volumes PCP – All Routes and Lerwick specific information
- Deck space Usage
- Daily Seafood Volumes
- Operational Updates
- Performance, Reliability and Punctuality

- COVID-19
- Community engagement and sponsorship
- Looking ahead.

During his presentation Mr Garrett reported on the significant reduction in passenger numbers on all routes, up to 31 August 2020, advising that freight had only reduce by 13%. He said that there had been a significant fall in deck space usage by week 14 after lockdown. He reported that by 5 April 2020 a revised timetable had been put in place, with one passenger ship under an alternative day schedule. He said that week 26 saw an increase at the start of the school holiday period. He advised that freight services have been maintained and contact has been kept with the key hauliers to ensure the needs of the Shetland economy were met. He reported on the fall in aquaculture volumes and mussel traffic and he had attended a Stewart Building Group meeting where analysis of this had been given. Mr Garret reported that there had been three delayed passenger sailing, due to weather and no cancellation and no freight cancellation.

Mr Garrett said that the first worrying information on COVID-19 came on 31 January and contingency routines were activated. He said that it was important that everyone downloads the NHS protect Scotland app and NorthLink were pushing that message through their website and twitter, asking passengers to ensure they have downloaded it. He said that NorthLink would follow the route map and framework for decision making. Mr Garrett advised that there was a rolling timetable updated on a 6 week basis and 10,004 bookings had been cancelled. He said that customers had been refunded £4.2m and 70 passengers had been refused travel for not meeting the essential criteria for travel. He reported on the measures in place during the different phases of Covid-10 and said that throughout these measures space had been held for key workers, and there had been an instance when bomb disposal unit had been accommodated. Mr Garrett reported that face coverings remained an issue with regular dialogue with passengers not wearing masks. Mr Garrett also reported on the control measures for both staff and passengers and the enhanced sanitation measures and use of PPE. He confirmed that the NorthLink website is also updated quickly to take account of the latest Scottish Government advice.

Looking ahead, Mr Garrett said that NorthLink would continue to monitor the current position and prepare for the livestock transport in September/October 2020 and he advised that the 2020/21 booking system was due to open in October. Finally Mr Garret said that the introduction of pet friendly cabins on both ships had been well received and use would be monitored. Consideration would be given to extending this further depending on demand.

The Chair said that it had been disappointing to hear that a minority of passengers refuse to comply with face coverings. He said that the vast majority of people pay heed to the NHS and Scottish Government advice on vessels and public transport. He also commented that pet friendly cabins were appreciated by many people as the kennels were not ideal when there was no alternative.

The Chair raised concern that meal times on board had been reduced to one hour, which has led to longer queues and the dining area being packed. He queried whether it would be possible to have an extended period with a colour coded system of perhaps 4 sittings of 50 people to allow for this. Mr Garrett said that this issue had not been raised with him but he would follow this up and noted that this was not an insurmountable matter.

Comment was made that freight volumes had held up well during this time which demonstrated further the significance of the economic importance for Shetland that this was sustained during the pandemic.

The Chair again thanked Mr Garrett for his presentation.

05/20 **Agenda Items for future meetings:**
None

06/20 **AOCB**
None.

07/20 **Date of Next and Future Meetings to be held at 2.15pm**

Wednesday, 9 December 2020
Thursday, 18 March 2021

It was noted that the December meeting was likely to be held remotely depending on the circumstances at that time.

The meeting concluded at 3.45pm.

Chairperson