

# **Highland Council Transport Programme**

## **Sutherland Area**

### **Consultation Feedback Report**

**June 2015**

# Contents

	Page Number
<b>Overall Consultation Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Public Meeting Feedback</b>	
<b>Durness</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Lochinver</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Golspie</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Bettyhill</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Questionnaire Feedback</b>	
<b>Supplier Questionnaire</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Community Group Questionnaire</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Public Questionnaire</b>	<b>44</b>

## Transport Programme – Sutherland Area

### Consultation Feedback Report

#### Overall Summary

The Council currently spends £15.003 million on providing mainstream home-to-school, public and dial a bus transport services across Highland. At a time of reducing budgets, the Council has agreed a target to reduce the budget spent on the provision of transport by 15%. The Transport Programme will consider the needs of communities across Highland in the preparation for re-tendering the current services offered. It will be important to understand the needs and views of communities to ensure that the services provided in the future best meet the needs of communities within the budget available.

This approach is first being rolled out in Sutherland where the savings target is £252,236 from a current budget of £1.678 million. A consultation took place across Sutherland between February and April 2015. This involved a series of public meetings and questionnaires; targeted at the general public, community groups and current and prospective suppliers.

The feedback from these meetings and questionnaires has been used to help identify the priorities for the routes going out to tender for future service provision in the Sutherland area.

#### **Questionnaire Feedback**

There were 3 separate questionnaires used as part of the consultation: a supplier questionnaire, a community group questionnaire and a questionnaire for the general public.

Below is a summary of the key points that were raised across the three questionnaires. A full report of the detailed feedback for each of these questionnaires is available.

#### ***Current use of services***

Feedback from the surveys indicated that current services were used for a range of purposes. The main focus was for leisure and social activities, for shopping and to attend appointments. Certain routes were used for ongoing connections, via trains or buses, particularly to Inverness.

### ***Concern about reduction or withdrawal of services***

Respondents were concerned about the reduction or withdrawal of services and outlined particular routes that were significant for them. In general it was highlighted that public transport is the only way for many people to access key services such as shops, doctors and the post office. Public transport is also important for social interaction and any reduction or withdrawal could affect the independence of some individuals and increase their isolation. There were particular concerns at the impact any reduction or withdrawal would have on the elderly and disabled. Some concerns were also expressed at the potential impact upon tourism should services be reduced or withdrawn.

### ***Current services need to be improved***

Respondents made suggestions about how to improve current services which in turn could lead to greater use of transport. Suggestions focussed on having better co-ordination between local transport and other public transport such as trains and longer distance bus routes. There was also some support for making school buses available to the wider public. Respondents reported that bus times should reflect when people want to use buses e.g. to get to work or to make longer return journeys in one day to access medical appointments. Other areas where service improvements were suggested were: to enable people to take part in evening or weekend activities; leisure activities, social activities but also adult learning.

### ***Accessibility***

Respondents to the community and public questionnaires noted some concern about the accessibility of public transport for disabled and elderly people. There are problems with getting to and from bus stops, getting on and off buses with steps and long waits for return journeys.

### ***Future service needs***

Suppliers identified that there was a need to focus on the times and routes people want to travel and that this in turn would make things more cost effective.

Some groups and individuals expressed concern that any reduction in service would result in a reduction in passenger numbers and increased inefficiency however others reported they would prefer to see a service reduced than withdrawn completely.

A number of suggestions were made to make transport services more cost effective. This included; raising fares, offering subsidised taxis or dial a bus services on low usage routes and better promotion of the range of services available in order to increase uptake of the services on offer.

## **Public meetings**

Four public meetings were held in March 2015 in Durness, Lochinver, Golspie and Bettyhill. These meetings were attended by members of the public, community group representatives, Community Councils, local transport suppliers and local Councillors.

Below is a summary of key points that were raised across the public meetings. A full note of each meeting is available separately.

### ***Consider the needs of the community***

Throughout the public meetings, the importance of understanding the needs of local residents was highlighted. It was reported there was a need to focus on key routes that were important for employment, shopping and accessing health care services. A further example was the importance of enabling young people to access extra-curricular activities.

### ***Limitations of current services***

There were some concerns highlighted about certain services that either are not operating as intended or not serving the needs of residents in an area. Concerns were also noted about the challenge of providing a daily service to Inverness, particularly to enable access to hospital appointments. It was suggested there needed to be better co-ordination of hospital appointments in line with the transport available.

### ***Better coordination of services***

There was a view from participants that services needed to be better joined up – in terms of linking with trains, bus providers providing journeys outwith the area but also between local services. Better linkages would improve the ability of individuals to move around the area.

### ***Reducing duplication***

A strong message from the consultation meetings was the importance of making best use of the services available. Suggestions were made on how to reduce duplication on some routes and combine other routes; for example, there was support for making school transport available to all within the community. There was also some support for current Highland Council operated routes to be put out to tender.

### ***Support for key services***

There was strong support for local community based services such as community transport and dial a bus services due to the flexibility these services provide locally.

## Public Consultation Meeting Feedback

**Durness 17 March 2015**

### ***In attendance:***

9 people in attendance. This included local operators – commercial and community transport providers – Community Council representatives, local residents and 2 local Councillors.

### ***Contract Considerations***

- Changes in fuel prices need to be factored into the contracts. If the balance of risk lies with Highland Council will this facilitate lower-priced tenders?
- It was noted that there was a need to consider what was in it for the providers, need to think beyond just cutting the service.
- Need to ensure that contractors do not price themselves too low. There will be checks on this built into the system to ensure sustainability of service.
- Ensure school services including subsidised taxis are open to the public.
- Some flexibility around services would be good in order for them to work for local people e.g. a subsidised taxi (Kinlochbervie) working past 5.30 to enable passengers from the community bus to get home.
- Contracts need to be flexible to enable blending but operators also need to be responsive. Should be going with contractors who offer the greatest flexibility e.g. could provide another driver/vehicle if it assists with fitting in with another service locally.
- Local Councillor – Contracts need to reflect health requirements, both medical and other health services – conversations with NHS are necessary.

### ***Comments on specific services***

#### ***The Bike Bus***

- If going to make cuts then should scrap the Bike Bus service.
- Could look at options for bikes on the train and then a local bus meeting the train in Lairg with a trailer or whether there are options to meet in Ullapool and for bikes to be brought up that way from Inverness.
- It was noted that when the Bike Bus (804) starts, passenger numbers on the Durness to Lairg service (806) fall considerably so there is clearly spare capacity on that route.
- Perhaps focus should be on Ullapool to Durness?
- One comment was the Bike Bus is more of a sight-seeing bus with few people staying in the local area but using it for a day trip from Inverness instead – therefore little economic benefit.

### *Durness to Lairg*

- Perhaps opportunities to put a bike trailer on that service?
- Need a bus to meet the evening train on this route – maybe not every day, perhaps an on-demand service. Current operator advised that there are not the numbers to make it a daily service. This could support the need to attend hospital appointments in one day. An evening service could be undertaken with a smaller vehicle, perhaps 6-8 passenger seats, particularly if it could be set up as an on-demand service.
- Friday night pick up from the Station could be helpful as could then take students home that wish to come back for the weekend.
- 80% of passengers currently using the Durness to Lairg service are catching the train. A smaller vehicle could potentially be used but probably need some sort of service daily.

### *Kinlochbervie Community Bus*

- No paid drivers
- Run 2 registered routes: Ullapool twice a month – first and third Thursdays – Dingwall once a month on 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday. Leaves KLB for Ullapool at 9am, returning for 3.45pm and leaves KLB for Dingwall at 8.15am, returning for 5.30pm.
- Had timed to pick up ferry traffic in Ullapool but not getting additional passengers.
- 8-9 passengers using the Dingwall route monthly.
- Rest of week doing section 19 or 22, school uses for shinty, shopping trips to Tain.
- Noted that Durness folk would like to use the service to Ullapool and Dingwall but no local links Durness to Kinlochbervie in the morning. There is also the issue about getting back again.
- Have bought a second smaller minibuss – 14 seats – as D1 licence is not required.
- Have recently sent out a questionnaire locally to ask for service ideas.

### *Kinlochbervie Subsidised taxi*

- Issues with Kinlochbervie subsidised taxi - doesn't take other passengers who could then make use of the community bus service, doesn't work after 5pm and also doesn't take school pupils who could use this service rather than a separate one.
- Would be good to be able to connect up the services locally including the Durness-Kinlochbervie link.
- Feel that the area covered is too small – should be whole Community Council area otherwise some people not getting a service.
- Look at the number of days dial-a-bus services are operating.

### *Durness to Thurso*

- How to get from Durness to Thurso – how can services be linked up and how to get information out about this?
- Transport for Tongue run a Monday-Friday service but if it could delay leaving by 15mins then could link up with passengers from Durness.
- Critical gap from Durness to Tongue.

### *Durness Dial a Bus*

- Well used, also operate in evening which is also well used.
- Only operate 3 days, Mondays tend to be the quieter day.
- Look at number of days dial-a-bus services are operating.

### *Durness to Inverness*

- The need to run this service during the week? Operator feeling no, as there is a train available. Probably not enough people to warrant it given the train is available.
- Would be helpful for the Saturday bus to leave Inverness later to accommodate those who wish to attend the football.
- A critical gap people getting to Inverness and back in one day for a hospital appointment.

### *School services*

- 2 minibuses running the same routes to Kinlochbervie High and Primary because the schools are starting at different times – need to look at better use of time to avoid this.
- Need to ensure best value, making the best out of the routes.

### ***Scottish Ambulance Service***

- Access to geographical seats very difficult – if don't answer the questions right then don't get access. Only those who have a medical need but they don't include medical appointments within this. People 'give up' trying to access geographical seats.
- Kinlochbervie Community Bus paid by the NHS to take someone to the train at Lairg for them to meet a train – going for a replacement hip operation but wouldn't be taken by Ambulance.
- Concern expressed by community bus – don't want to take hospital passengers as may then lose ambulance car.

### ***Accessibility issues***

- Nobody has come of the train with a wheelchair – would struggle due to the platform arrangements.
- Durness Buses – have an accessible bus but never taken a wheelchair user in 10 years operating the service.



- Have regular blind and deaf customers and accessibility not an issue.
- Anticipation is the need may grow as more people live here and as the population ages.
- Local Councillor noted that the concern is that because accessibility is poor within Sutherland – from hotels to restaurants to dropped pavements – people with additional needs won't come.
- Kinlochbervie community bus – feel being pushed into doing what adult services used to do e.g. taking people to and from hospital/doctors. The new mini-bus has an internal lift to accommodate wheelchair access but this in turn restricts the number of seats. Concerned at the additional responsibilities in terms of handling and supporting.
- Accessibility issues not something that is preventing people from using services – people who have mobility issues and use the services tend to be helped by the local drivers, for others their needs are met by friends and family.

### **General comments**

- It was suggested by a local Member that the majority of people would prefer to keep services but pay more. Would a 5% fares rise be helpful in supporting the continuance of services? Councillors would look at supporting ad-hoc 'needy' requests.
- A local B&B owner highlighted the importance of people being able to get to Durness – it's not about where the bus goes through, it's about the final destination. He is busy all year round – are people not coming because they can't get here? May be missing a trick?
- Perhaps the focus needs to be more on the west coast links. Tourists tend to come up the west and then go on up to Orkney. The route through Lairg is not the key route and the train is lengthy.
- Main problem in the area is the distance and that it costs more to run services here.
- The area is changing; more people coming in the winter need services, including transport, to be available.
- Not saying the area is unique but should there be an equal 15% cut across all the areas?
- Look at number of days dial-a-bus services are operating.
- No assistance from windfarms in this area so no additional funds to tap into for transport.
- Can provision of transport information be improved? Traveline is not easy to use and lots of leaflets aren't good either. Is there an aggregated/central source solution?

## Public Consultation Meeting Feedback

**Lochinver 17 March 2015**

### ***In attendance:***

14 people in attendance. This included local providers, Community Council representatives, Connect Assynt representative and local residents.

### ***General***

#### *Against the principle of reduction*

- There was a strong feeling that the starting premise was wrong and that there should be no reduction to current services which are already poor and limited.
- It was suggested that the community cannot manage with a reduced service.
- Given Government policy is to increase use of public transport, it seems strange to be considering reducing what is available.

#### *Lack of information*

- Concerns were expressed around the publicity for this evening's meeting and that not everybody had been informed about it. It was suggested that there would have been more people present if public transport had been available.
- There is a lack of information available about what transport services are available across the community and the timings for these. It was suggested that better promotion of service would lead to higher usage and use should be made of local mechanisms such as the local paper and Doctor's surgery.

#### *Needs of the community*

- It was reported that transport within the local area is not geared up for the needs of tourists.
- Although some individuals have access to cars, with increasing age people have difficulty in driving therefore buses are essential.
- It is very important to connect up the people in Assynt. It doesn't have to be a regular service but now and again is important.
- It was noted that it is difficult for people who want to live and work within their local area but have no local transport. A community taxi service is not able to provide regular transport of this type.
- There is a need for additional services within the community to meet local need e.g. children can't stay for extra-curricular activities or have to leave early because the last bus leaves Ullapool at 4.40pm.
- Connect Assynt has received funding from the Lottery to develop a hub idea to link up local transport options.

- It was noted that it was very important to understand what the journey purpose is.

### **Comments on specific services**

#### *Bike Bus*

- It is not just tourists who use the Bike Bus, local people do use it as they can go to Inverness in the afternoon.
- It would be better for locals if the bike bus ran the other way round – a view that it wouldn't matter for tourists which way round it ran.

#### *Lochinver - Ullapool*

- There was support for this service leaving later. The bus currently leaves Ullapool at 4.40pm which is too early for children wanting to take part in extra-curricular activities.
- There are 3 days when there is a late journey from Inverness into Ullapool; could there be a later link with the Translink to Lochinver? This would really help students wanting to get back from Inverness.

#### *Dial a Bus / Community taxi*

- The community taxi can't be used to go to Ullapool as would be sitting outside Tesco or the Doctors and would therefore be out of the area for too long. It can't meet that need.
- Need to get more information out about the Dial-a-bus service in Elphin – only found out about it by chance.
- Being used more and more for medical purposes both for Doctor's appointments and for picking up prescriptions as doctors will no longer send these out.
- Difficult to use the community taxi for people to access work as it ties up the taxi.
- It was reported that this service was very important to individuals and without it many would not be able to get out.
- The numbers using the service from Drumbeg has reduced over the recent period.

#### *Drumbeg to Lochinver*

- Very important service for linking the communities.

#### *School transport*

- A Cameron's of Brora bus is currently doing school transport (Drumbeg – Skiag Bridge to meet the bus out of Lochinver) but the public cannot use it. Could that be built into the contract in the future so that people can use?

- In the past the driver would inform the school if there were weather issues and come back to get the children – won't be able to do this if the bus is away doing another run such as the Stagecoach commercial Ullapool to Inverness run. This is something that needs to be considered.

### **Gaps in Provision**

#### *Sunday*

- No services on a Sunday. No way for some people to get to church.

#### *Evening services*

- There are no services in the evening. The last bus back from Ullapool is at 4.40pm so there is no access to evening activities. In Stornoway there is a service that goes right round the villages later in the evening. This could be done for taking people home from Ullapool.
- An alternative view expressed was that in the past groups would hire out the Assynt Centre bus to go to Ullapool in the evening. People don't seem to want to do that anymore, people don't seem to have the money.

#### *Achmelvich*

- There is no public transport to or from there. There is no way for people staying at the youth hostel there to get in to use the services in Lochinver.

#### *Dogs*

- Cannot take the dog to the vet in Dingwall during the week, only on a Saturday and very restricted in the times coming back as Citylink will not take dogs on the bus. All contracts should stipulate that dogs should be taken. Transport Unit would need to canvas opinion of bus operators but, as not all services (e.g. the Citylink service) are under contract to Highland Council, influence is constrained to some degree.

#### *Lochinver to the East Coast*

- There is no service from Lochinver to the East coast. People need to go to Inverness. There is no access to attend hospital appointments in Gospie – people having to cancel as there is no way to get there unless can get a lift from someone else.
- The former postbus route around Rosehall and getting to Lairg were really good but there isn't anything there now.

#### *Raigmore*

- If have someone in Raigmore then there is no way to visit them and return on the same day as visiting starts at 2.30pm and the bus leaves at 3pm.
- Often not able to attend a clinic at Raigmore and return home in one day.

- A local Councillor noted that with the growing elderly population, there will be greater need to access medical services.

### **Accessibility**

- Translink can take a wheelchair but haven't had any need to do so over the last eight years.
- The community taxi/dial-a-bus service has a couple of wheelchair clients.
- It was noted that a lot of physically disabled people feel that there isn't a public service that is available to them – there is a lack of information and awareness that they could be using these services. It was also noted that there was a lack of awareness of the entitlement cards and that individuals are entitled for someone to accompany them.
- There is a need for co-ordination between the NHS and care services and it would help individuals to get out.
- A lot of people will not be able to use public transport as will need an attendant and therefore a community transport service would be more appropriate. However, there will be those who could be using public transport but aren't because of a lack of awareness of what is available.
- Many folk who have moved here think the bus pass is for those over 65 or at pension age. There is a general lack of awareness.
- The Transport Unit to distribute information about the entitlement cards.

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## Public Consultation Meeting Feedback

**Golspie 24 March 2015**

### ***In attendance:***

14 people in attendance. This included local providers, Community Council representatives, Lairg development Officer, local residents and a local Councillor

### ***Key Users of the Service***

- Macleod's – people who have driven but no longer feel able to. Tend to use the Dial a Bus.
- Charlie's – for people who can't or won't drive now. Critical for accessing medical appointments.
- Young people who can't afford a car or the car insurance in order to get to work. Transport to employment – there is no way people could get to work without this. Most young people working in the hospitality trade with varied working hours– buses therefore not available. One resident highlighted that she drove her children to work as otherwise they couldn't get there.

### ***Key locations for Service Users***

- Tain – for work in Asda
- Inverness – onwards from Tain
- Golspie for hospital appointments
- Learning Centre in Brora
- Embo to Dornoch. Lot of people around tourist time as people don't realise there is no bus from Dornoch to *Grannie's Heilan' Hame*.
- Lot of work is back and fore to doctors and hospital.

### ***Comments on Specific Services***

- Community Council introduced a subsidised taxi service for people in Rosehall – only used for 2/3 people but nothing else available.
- Embo to Tain Service - when it started 16 people used it, down to 1 or 2 so had to stop as not viable, now people complaining as no service.
- Durness to Lairg bus – don't want it stopped. Very important to have tourists coming off the train and also for locals.

### **School Buses and Council Transport Service**

- Support for people being able to use school buses.
- People don't know that they can use the school buses.
- Lot of people don't like using school buses but not an issue here as it's the parents and grandparents of the kids.
- Dornoch – important location for the Dentist and College in Dornoch....could people not get there on the school buses? Dornoch College run their own buses and taxis for staff and students – are there opportunities for joint working?
- Rosehall to Lairg - could be useful to access the school bus.

### *Highland Council buses*

- Need to look at Highland Council run school buses. Could these be opened up for other contractors to provide the service?
- Should let contractors do school runs e.g. swimming/excursions. Could take costs down for the Council.
  - Could Skelbo to Dornoch dial a bus service and school run be merged? Has been operated temporarily in the past and very successful.
  - If could provide some of the mini-bus journeys for school transport could then provide a dial a bus service around the local area. Lots of communities around villages that don't get a service at the moment but because on a timetabled service can't get off the designated route too much as then not meeting the timetable.

### **Accessibility**

- Not aware of people not being able to travel.
- Lot of people don't want to go on 99 service but the 25 as it has a wider aisle.
- Most small companies have disability access.
- Lot of bigger buses with low floors wouldn't be able to get into the rural areas with the dial a bus.

### **Gaps in Service**

- Visitors to the hospital can have an issue getting to Migdale over lunch time but not something asked about a lot, there are other services available.
- Lack of service around Rosehall.
- Early morning service from Bonar – onwards to Inverness for work and work in Tain; Asda in particular. Preferable as bus fares cheaper than train fares.
- Gap in the afternoon very significant – if any hold-up on Stagecoach then could miss the bus but nothing earlier.

- Would be great to extend Lairg to Tain service to link with Inverness service. Currently have to leave Inverness at 5pm so can't go to anything in the evening.
- Stagecoach changing timetables regularly therefore difficult to fit in with the services to Inverness at times.

***Fares***

- Council a lot cheaper than Stagecoach.
- Could raise fares for transport to employment. Given the distances, they are getting it very cheap.
- Still take fares but most are concessionary fares – people get on the bus to pass the time. Always been the same.

***General Comments***

- Generally all have cars – only way can get to things.
  - Opportunities for further input prior to awarding?
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## Public Consultation Meeting Feedback

### Bettyhill 27 March 2015

#### ***In Attendance:***

8 people in attendance. This included local transport providers, Community Council representatives, Melness and Tongue Development Trust representative, local residents and a Highland Councillor.

#### ***Future Needs/Gaps***

##### *For Young People*

- Little or no transport to support the activities of young people.
- Could there be a monthly bus service running from Tongue to Bettyhill to Thurso, perhaps leaving at 3pm and departing Thurso around 10pm? This would allow visits to the cinema. There was enthusiasm for piloting this over a year and local discussions on potential sources of funding will be led by the local Councillors and Ward Manager.

##### *For the Older Population*

- Medical/nursing/care needs are high and will become ever more of a concern in the communities, and is likely to continue growing as a need.
- Transport for such needs should cover 7 days a week. It was noted there was a need to consult on this and develop transport support. NHS Highland and Highland Council need to take this forward and develop an impetus.
- The withdrawal of Red Cross cars was a big blow and SAS patient transport journey times are very long.

##### *General Requirement*

- The connection between Talmine and Lairg needs to be addressed; the area is not well served. There should be a 6-day per week connection – Transport for Tongue's (T4T) services have improved the situation.
- Would it be better to support the T4T Lairg service than pay to maintain the post bus? There is disgruntlement around the post bus service due to its operating and turnaround timings (it is only in Lairg for 15mins before leaving on the return journey).

#### ***Comments on Specific Services:***

##### *North Sutherland Dial-a-Bus*

- Currently operated by Ormlie Taxis – formerly operated by two local contractors. Seems strange to spend on a provider based outside the area (Thurso) – Melvich and Strathy taxis have given up as a result.

- The current service covers Melvich to Naver Bridge, and carried (2014) 1,356 public passengers.
- Often have to wait lengthy periods for the service as it is based outside the area and there is now only the single operator; feel little information is available about the service which is affecting confidence in its use.
- A particular problem is visiting the health centre – waiting times using dial-a-bus are far too long.
- Is it possible to split the contract into 2 at the retendering stage to alleviate the longer waits? It is unclear what the cost implications would be. Possible split: one covering Bettyhill and Armadale the other at Melvich?
- Could the dial-a-bus operational time periods be less fragmented throughout the day?

#### *Talmine to Thurso College*

- Operated by the community transport group Transport for Tongue (T4T). Has an add-on to Wick if needed by passengers. The service runs morning and afternoon and is not funded by Highland Council. It offers, for the first time, Melness to Thurso return in a single day which is very useful for students.
- The service works and is helpful for going to work too. There is a demand for this service. Other attendees at the meeting were keen to receive further information on this service from T4T to share with their communities.
- The service presently operates under an S19 licence – not a registered public bus route. Could the Council consider funding/have the capacity to consider funding this?

#### *Tongue School Service via Stagecoach*

- Large 40-seater is used – this is unsuitable for the physical route. But it is appropriate to cover the legitimate, maximum demand which the Council must cover in the area.
- It was noted that the local need has to be properly researched – the Stagecoach service is operating at un-consulted times and needs to be revisited. It was suggested that a thorough survey should be done.

#### *Thurso-Bettyhill-Tongue Evening Service*

- Claim that it won't go to Tongue unless there is already a passenger on the bus intending to go there. The Transport Unit will investigate. A possible explanation may be that there is an element of on-demand built into this contract.

#### *Thurso Buses – Halkirk Road End*

- Timing to meet the X99 isn't too good.
- This can be easily addressed by Highland Council with the operator, Stagecoach.

### *Public Access to Home-to-School Transport Services*

- The bus services serving Farr High School are fully open to the public but not all school routes in the local area are. It was suggested that all school runs operated by the Council should be open to the public.

### *Post Bus Service*

- This service would be more useful if it extended to Lairg train station more often.
- It was suggested that it is unlikely that further post bus services will be possible however the Council is willing to pose the question.

### **Community Transport Operator Grants**

- Will grants to Community Transport operators continue?
- A potential new community transport group may be related to the Senior Citizens' Lunch Club – they have a vehicle which Help the Aged used to fund but no longer; it is open to all who wish to use it.
- Are communities to run transport more? Is that what the Council wants via its grants system? Would the Council support growth through the CT sector, and help grow the necessary skills?

### **General Points**

- Concern that the questionnaires have not reached the right people. Community Councils don't meet often enough (bi-monthly usually) and how best to circulate hard copies. It was agreed to extend the consultation period to 3<sup>rd</sup> April and to resend questionnaires to Community Councils, community groups and to the local Councillors.
- Concern was expressed at the short timelines involved in retendering the services. It was felt it was going to be difficult to get the future mix of services right. The future service provision needs to be defined and improved via more extensive local consultation.
- Variable opinions on the accessibility of operator vehicles for those with disabilities. Stagecoach's accessible vehicle does not always operate in Sutherland.
- Ward Councillor mindful of need to create real jobs, and to have a balance of commercial and social enterprise activity.
- It was queried whether fuel price reductions would contribute to a fall in contract prices? It was suggested that fuel prices are unlikely to remain so low for too long and that this is realistically likely to be a temporary saving. Fuel price influence is better handled through the price index associated with contracts.
- It was questioned whether it is appropriate to take 15% off spend in Sutherland when it is so remote and rural – should other areas not have a bigger percentage reduction?

- Ward Councillor promoted the need, in full recognition of Sutherland's remoteness and very low population density, to make savings and efficiencies where it is appropriate to do so; but if cuts are too severe then the recommendations will need to be reviewed and taken back for further debate.
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## Supplier Consultation Questionnaire

### Summary

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a supplier specific questionnaire was circulated to 33 suppliers across the Sutherland and wider Highland area. This included existing suppliers within the area, suppliers of transport outwith Highland and community transport organisations.

13 suppliers responded to the questionnaire. 5 noted that they were existing suppliers and a further 4 were community transport providers.

The key messages from the supplier questionnaire are outlined below:

#### ***Improving transport provision***

- Just over half of all suppliers responding (13) noted that there was a need to change the way current transport services are provided.
- Suggestions for change included:
  - the need to combine school and public transport more efficiently;
  - to meet the needs of elderly residents such as the importance of transport to hospital appointments;
  - considering the key times and routes that people want to use; and
  - better links with other transport services to Inverness and Ullapool.
- The majority of suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that altering operating times, improving access and changing destinations would encourage greater use of transport services. All suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that better integration with services would encourage greater use.
- Suppliers noted the need for other public agencies to offer appointment times that fit in with the transport available.

#### ***Community Transport***

- There was a view expressed by community transport providers that there was a separate need to continue to grant fund community transport organisations to provide the services they do. It was felt this was a cost effective solution.
- There was concern expressed by some community transport providers that they would not be able to compete with commercial operators.

#### ***Fares***

- Suppliers were divided on the area of fare increase or decrease. Only one supplier was in favour of a fare decrease with concern expressed about the impact this could have on the viability of services. 4 respondents were in favour of a fare increase, noting this could be re-invested to improve services. However a further 4 were either not in favour or indicated they did not know.

***Accessibility***

- In relation to accessibility, the mini-buses of operators were found to be the most accessible and coaches and the cars of volunteers the least accessible.
- 3 suppliers indicated that their drivers have not had accessibility training.

***Ability to Tender***

- 7 of the 8 suppliers noted that they were registered on Public Contracts Scotland. The only supplier currently not registered is in the processing of setting up their business.
  - None of the suppliers believed there were any barriers to tendering electronically.
-

## Supplier Consultation Questionnaire

### Full Results

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a supplier specific questionnaire was circulated to 33 suppliers across the Sutherland and wider Highland area. This included existing suppliers within the area, suppliers of transport outwith Highland and community transport organisations.

13 suppliers responded to the questionnaire. 5 noted that they were existing suppliers and a further 4 were community transport providers.

The results to each question are provided below.

***Q1. In order to meet the future needs of the population in Sutherland do you think there is a need to change the nature of school, public and dial-a-bus transport services which are currently provided through contracts with Highland Council?***

Responses	Number	%
Yes	7	54%
No	2	15%
Not sure	4	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

Just over half of suppliers reported that there is a need to change the way transport services are currently provided.

***Q2. What do you think are the main transport changes which would better serve Sutherland's needs?***

5 suppliers responded to this question. There were suggestions about school transport, including that there should be an effort to combine school and public services more efficiently. It was highlighted there should be transport available to allow pupils to stay on for after school activities; this was specifically mentioned in relation to Ullapool. The needs of children out with the bus catchment area and possible needs of any future pupils with disabilities should also be considered. Suppliers also stated that transport services should meet the needs of elderly residents, such as guaranteed transport to hospitals for appointments.

Opinion was divided over how to cater to tourists: one supplier felt that it is a luxury to provide services for tourists who will only use the service once however another believed there should be support for private hire businesses to transport tourists. There should also be better links with other transport services in Ullapool and Inverness.

**Q3. Can you think of any ways that transport providers could reduce the costs of delivering services in Sutherland?**

7 suppliers responded to this question. Some suppliers were unable to make suggestions as they felt they did not have enough information to do so.

It was suggested that there needs to be a focus on the times and routes that people want to travel, so that services are better used and therefore more cost effective.

There were mixed opinions about allowing the public to use school buses: one supplier suggested all school services should be available for public use however another stated that the school runs are already at maximum capacity so it would not be possible to double up.

Specific suggestions were:

- Route 804 bike bus should run Durness-Ullapool and connect with an existing route to Inverness
- Route 806 could be made request only in winter, bookable 12 hours in advance
- Combine Durness Primary School route
- Combine KLB and Durness dial a bus/ subsidised taxi
- Rethinking the way the Highland region operates their own large coaches

**Q4: What could The Highland Council do to reduce the costs of transport services in Sutherland?**

6 suppliers responded to this question. Suppliers suggested that the Council should continue working with community transport providers through Service Level Agreements and providing grants as these groups cater for the needs of the community.

The Council should look at the services it commissions to ensure these are running efficiently and consider combining school routes and public routes. For example, one supplier suggested that the Council does not require three coaches to do two school runs.

Other suggestions included:



- Focus on times when groups of people will use services
- Increase fares
- Cap subsidies
- Put school runs out to tender rather than having Council coaches
- Increase efficiencies
- Stop Council employees using Council vehicles as personal vehicles e.g. taking vans home at night

**Q5. What could other public agencies do to reduce the costs of transport services in Sutherland?**

4 suppliers responded to this question. Suppliers thought that other public agencies should offer appointments that fit in with transport times, with one suggesting that people should be allowed to ask for appointments that fit in with public transport times.

It was highlighted that Transport for Tongue is a successful example of a public agency (Highland Council) working with a community transport organisation.

Other suggestions included:

- Smaller, cheaper transport options should be used for quieter routes
- Link with other bus and train providers to ensure no long waits for connections
- Make school transport available to the general public
- Put jobs out to tender with a pre-set cap on each job

**Q6: A consideration may be to offer packages of routes to be operated within specific areas, such as school catchment areas. Would you be willing and able to operate across an area of this type?**

Responses	Number	%
Yes	6	75%
No	2	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

4 suppliers commented on this question. Some concerns were noted that charities would be priced out of these contracts, as they cannot compete with commercial operators.

One supplier agreed in theory but felt more detail was needed, and another hoped to be involved in school transport once their business was up and running.

**Q7. What are you doing locally which is really helping your community?**

8 suppliers responded to this question. Commercial and community suppliers outlined that they are helping their community by offering services such as door to door transport to appointments, shops, Post Office and banks; linking the community to other transport services; delivering packages free of charge, for example from the chemist; offering private hires at reasonable rates; off road services for people that cannot meet the main bus route; transport to local education and leisure facilities, and; providing employment in a rural area.

One supplier that is in the process of starting their transport businesses is looking to offer similar services through a local private hire business.

**Q8. What would you like to do or do more of locally to assist your community?**

5 suppliers responded to this question. Some suppliers feel unable to do more due to money constraints. One supplier is looking to establish their business and then look into linking with other providers; another feels that they would be able to benefit their community if offered a Highland Council contract. One supplier would like to see transport for lunch clubs in their local area.

**Q9. Are you currently operating a Highland Council transport contract in Sutherland?**

5 of the 9 suppliers indicated that they were currently operating a Council transport contract.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	5	56%
No	4	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q10. Are you currently providing a community transport service in Sutherland?**

6 of the 9 suppliers indicated that they were currently operating a community transport service. Some suppliers interpreted this question as providing a transport service to the community rather than being a Community Transport provider.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	6	56%
No	3	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q11. What changes could be made by the transport sector in Sutherland to encourage greater use of public and dial-a-ride bus services?**

- 75% of suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that altering operating times would encourage greater use of services.
- 100% of suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that better integration with other services would encourage greater use.
- 75% of suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that improving access would encourage greater use of services.
- 38% of suppliers agree that changing routes would encourage greater use but 38% also had no opinion on this.
- 62% of suppliers agreed or strongly agreed that changing the destinations served would encourage greater use, although 25% had no opinion on this.

	Total	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		No opinion	
	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
a) Alter operating times	8	4	50%	2	25%	2	25%	0	0%	0	0%
b) Better integration/ link-up with other transport services	8	3	38%	5	62%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
c) Improve access to bus service for all passengers	8	4	50%	2	25%	1	12%	1	12%	0	0%
d) Changes to routing of services	8	0	0%	3	38%	2	25%	0	0%	3	38%
e) Changes to destinations served	8	1	12%	4	50%	1	12%	0	0%	2	25%

One supplier noted concern that accessible bus stops tend only to be found in built up areas. It was suggested that a dial-a-bus service is introduced in rural areas, although this will need to be supported by the Council.

Another supplier noted that there should be a direct route from Bonar Bridge to Dornoch.

It was also suggested that the Durness Dial-a-bus should be better advertised and should link in with the evening train in Lairg. It was highlighted that the Tongue to Durness bus leaves before the bus from Thurso arrives in Tongue. The supplier also suggested that wheelchair access is not needed on the majority of routes as they had never had a wheelchair on route 806.

**Q12. Do you think that there is scope to reduce fares to encourage greater use of public and dial-a-bus transport?**

Responses	Number	%
Yes	1	12%
No	6	75%
Don't know	1	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of suppliers were not supportive of reducing fares in order to encourage greater use of services.

**Q13. Do you think that there is a scope to increase fares to generate additional income?**

Responses	Number	%
Yes	4	50%
No	2	25%
Don't know	2	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

Suppliers were divided on whether fares should be increased in order to generate additional income.

**Q14. Further comment on reducing fares to encourage use or increasing fares to generate income**

As demonstrated in question 13 there was little support for reducing fares as it was suggested this could affect the viability of services and was unlikely to encourage greater use as buses are not operating at times that suit people.

There was some support for increasing fares as it was highlighted that this could be re-invested in the service and improve the sustainability of services. One supplier highlighted that as a large number of people using services in Sutherland are using bus passes, fares have to be at a level to ensure a return from Transport Scotland.

One supplier felt that OAPs should pay a token amount when using the bus and that checks need to be made to ensure operators are not keeping a stack of bus passes and scanning them through on each trip.

**Q15. Can the vehicles your organisation uses accommodate passengers with mobility, learning or sensory impairments?**

For most vehicles, suppliers chose ‘not applicable’.

Minibuses seemed to be most accessible and coaches and volunteers cars were least accessible.

	Total	Yes, all can		Yes, some can		None		NA	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
a) Cars	8	2	25%	0	0%	1	12%	5	62%
b) Multi-purpose vehicle (MPV)	8	1	12%	1	12%	0	0%	5	62%
c) Minibuses	8	3	37%	3	37%	0	0%	2	25%
d) Coaches	8	0	0%	1	12%	1	12%	6	75%
e) Bus	8	1	12%	1	12%	0	0%	6	75%
f) Volunteers using their own vehicles	8	0	0%	1	12%	1	12%	6	75%

**Q16. Which accessibility features where appropriate do your vehicles have?**

The two suppliers who operate buses indicated that they had all of the accessibility features detailed. Minibuses also had many accessibility features.

Volunteer cars and cars appeared to be less accessible.

	Cars	MPVs	Minibuses	Coaches	Buses	Volunteer cars
	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
a) Space for a wheelchair with secure fixings to keep passenger safe	1	2	6	1	2	0
b) Space for prams and buggies	1	1	5	1	2	0
c) A boarding device to enable wheelchair users to get on/off your vehicle	0	1	6	1	2	0
d) Priority seats for elderly and disabled passengers	0	1	3	1	2	0
e) Handrails to assist access	2	0	6	2	2	0
f) Visual contrast of features such as steps and handrails to help partially sighted people	1	0	6	1	2	0
g) Easy-to-use bell pushes throughout the vehicle	0	0	1	1	2	0
h) Low-floor access	1	1	2	1	2	0

**Q17. Other accessibility features**

Only one supplier answered this question, saying they have a “*driver or passenger assistance on most CT vehicles*”.

**Q18. Do your drivers receive disability awareness training?**

Just under two thirds of all suppliers indicated their drivers receive disability training.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	5	63%
No	3	37%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q19. Are you registered on Public Contracts Scotland (PCS)?**

All bar one supplier noted they were registered on Public Contract Scotland.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	7	88%
No	1	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q20. Are you registered on Public Contracts Scotland Tender?**

6 of the 8 suppliers indicated they were registered on Public Contracts Scotland Tender.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	6	75%
No	2	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q21. Are there any barriers that will prevent you from tendering electronically?**

None of the suppliers identified any barriers to electronic tendering.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	0	0%
No	8	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q22. What are these barriers?**

No response

**Q23. Are you a current Framework provider?**

The majority of the suppliers noted that they were a current framework provider.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	3	38%
No	5	63%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q24. What works well with the Framework approach?**

There was only one response to this question, with a supplier asking “*has it ever been used?*”

**Q25. What do you think could make the Framework approach work better?**

No response

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## Community Group Consultation Questionnaire

### Summary

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a questionnaire for community groups was circulated to organisations across Sutherland.

23 groups responded to the questionnaire. Groups responding included 8 Community Councils, 3 trusts or development companies, 4 community transport groups and the Sutherland Access Panel.

The key messages from the community group questionnaire are outlined below:

#### ***Impact of reduction/withdrawal***

- Groups noted concern at the potential impact a reduction or withdrawal of service would have on communities and their ability to access key amenities such as the Post Office, shops and health centre. Concern was particularly expressed about the impact upon vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled and the potential loss of independence.

#### ***Views on existing services***

- 61% of groups responding reported that there were existing barriers preventing people from utilising current services.
- Solutions suggested included better linkages between public and community transport, better co-ordination with working hours and hospital appointment times, more services, more frequent services and consideration given to return trip times. Need to be better information about what services are available.
- 87% of groups reported that their members are prevented from doing certain activities or accessing particular services because of a lack of transport. In particular it was noted that individuals have difficulty accessing hospital and other health care appointments and often have a long wait for transport home following appointments. A further area of note was people being unable to access leisure or educational opportunities in the evening.

#### ***Accessibility***

- Two thirds of groups reported they were not aware of any services that are difficult to use for individuals with mobility or sensory impairments. The groups who indicated that there were, outlined difficulties with buses being too old, the long wait for a return journey, the difficulty in accessing train platforms and the challenge for some getting to and from the bus stop.

***Future needs***

- Half of groups were unsure whether current services would meet Sutherland's transport needs over the next 5 years and a further 41% believed they would not be met.
  - Groups provided a range of suggestions with regards what and how services should be provided in the future. This included:
    - Better co-ordination of services and connections – local, community and out of area services
    - School buses should be available for public access
    - Concerns were noted about the operation of certain dial-a-bus services
    - Concerns about the impact on rural communities should key link services be withdrawn
    - The importance of the Lairg to Helmsdale service was noted by a number of groups
  - Groups also provided detailed comments on a range of current routes. These can be found in the full consultation report.
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## Community Group Consultation Questionnaire

### Full Results

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a questionnaire for community groups was circulated to organisations across the Sutherland.

23 groups responded to the questionnaire. Groups responding included 8 Community Councils, 3 trusts or development companies, 4 community transport groups and the Sutherland Access Panel.

The full results to each question are outlined below.

#### ***Q1. Impact of a reduction in the frequency of services***

All groups responded to this question. Community groups highlighted that these services are the only way for many people to access local amenities, such as the local health centre, Post Office and shops, and so a reduction in the bus service would reduce access. This could be a particular problem for elderly residents. There could also be an economic impact for areas as there may be a reduction in the number of tourists visiting an area.

Groups noted that services are already quite poor and that any reduction would have an impact on people that cannot drive. This could lead to increased isolation, particularly for vulnerable groups, as taxis are not affordable for everyone. There could also be an impact on people travelling to work and school, and could result in overnight trips for appointments if there is no return service available.

One community group noted that a reduction in frequency could possibly be managed however another suggested that services should be expanded rather than reduced.

#### ***Q2. Impact of a withdrawal of a service***

All groups responded to this question. Community groups reiterated points made in the above question: it would mean no access to town centre and local amenities for people who do not drive. It was suggested this would impact most on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled and isolated. Some groups of people may lose their independence and one group suggested there would be an increase in the need for home care services.

Some groups also highlighted that there would be a detrimental impact upon tourism.

**Q3. The Highland Council also supports a number of school bus services in Sutherland. These cost Highland Council £1.3million per year to provide (two-thirds of the £1.3m is spent on school-only bus services and the other one-third is for mixed school-public use). Does your organisation have views on how these school transport services might be delivered for a lower cost?**

22 groups responded to this question. Many community groups suggested making more school services mixed use. Some groups felt there is no way to save money, other than reducing routes.

Other suggestions on how to make savings were: buy own school buses and maintain them properly; look at community transport options which may be cheaper; have parents run a car share system; charge school children to use the school bus, and be more efficient in organising the primary school buses in Rogart.

**Q4: Does your organisation consider that there is anything that prevents or discourages members of your community from using the bus services available in Sutherland?**

61% of groups indicated that there were barriers that prevented their community from using current bus services.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	14	61%
No	9	39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q5. What does your organisation think would therefore encourage members of your community to use these bus services more?**

14 groups responded to that question. Community groups thought that local transport needed to link up better with other public transport services. Groups also suggested that services need to better meet the needs of communities e.g. co-ordinate better with working hours and main hospital appointment times. It was also suggested that there should be more services, and more frequent services, noting that return trips should also be factored in.

Groups felt there needed to be better information about local services and easy to access timetable information. One group suggested the use of real time electronic displays at bus stops.

Some groups also suggested that services would be more accessible if there were more bus shelters. A decrease in fares was also suggested.

**Q6. Is there any activity that members of your community are prevented from doing or service you cannot access because of a lack of community transport?**

87% of groups indicated that their community are prevented from accessing activities due to the lack of transport.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	20	87%
No	3	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q7. Please provide further details**

Many groups reported that their members already have difficulty in accessing hospital and other health care appointments. Some groups stated that many people have to wait a long time for transport home after appointments.

Groups also highlighted that people without cars cannot take part in leisure and educational opportunities, especially in the evening. One group noted that people will wait a long time for a return journey for a medical appointment but will not do the same for leisure activities.

One group also noted that elderly people are most affected as they cannot visit relatives in care homes, which may be many miles away. They may also not be able to attend lunch clubs, or only be able to spend limited time at them due to transport constraints.

**Q8. Does your organisation know of any bus services which are difficult to use for disabled or elderly passengers who may have, for example, mobility difficulties, sensory impairments or learning difficulties?**

Just over two thirds of groups reported that they were not aware of any services that were difficult to access for disabled or elderly passengers.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	7	32%
No	15	68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q9. Which services are these and why is it difficult for people to use them? (**

A minority of respondents reported:

- Stagecoach buses are too old
- Helmsdale to Inverness and Helmsdale to Lairg buses are not fit for those with mobility problems
- North coast transport services are difficult to use
- Community transport offers accessible vehicles and a personal service
- The long wait for a return journey is a barrier to some
- The train platform at Ardgay is only accessible from the north side
- There can be difficulties for some people in getting to and from the bus stop

**Q10. Will the current services meet the needs of Sutherland over the next 5 years?**

Half of respondents did not know if Sutherland’s transport needs will be met over the next 5 years, and 41% do not think needs will be met.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	2	9%
No	9	41%
Don't know	11	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q11. Does your organisation have any views on how they can be delivered more cost effectively?**

9 groups responded to this question. Some groups did not have any suggestions, with one noting that they cannot answer the question without more data or expertise. Some groups felt that services are already squeezed and need to be protected.

Suggestions were:

- Contractors must be made to comply fully with Service Level Agreements then usage will increase
- Invite bids to tender for the services from a wider area
- Subsidies could be adjusted (but not removed)

**Q12. In that case, and bearing in mind that the Highland Council has a lower budget for expending on transport services over the next 5 years, what does your organisation think should change- in terms of what should be provided and how it should be provided?**

17 groups responded to this question. Groups made many suggestions about what needs to be provided. The Council should encourage local providers to start up, for example by provided 50% of funding with the other 50% coming from the community. There also needs to be better co-ordination of services and connections. One group stated “*Service connections between Stage Coach and MacLeod’s are not satisfactory as there is 1 1/2 hour wait for those returning from Inverness, and other bus services are not connecting*”.

In terms of school travel, some groups felt that all school buses should be mixed use and one suggested that pupils within walking distance to school should be charged for school transport. One group stated “*Some school services are sub-contracted to individual car owners. It might be possible to reorganise the school run to reduce or eliminate the need for this*”.

Some groups also felt there should be an in-depth study of all transport in Sutherland before any decisions are made. Concerns were noted about the operation of the Dornoch, Ardgay and Assynt Dial-a-bus services. There were also a number of comments from different groups about the importance of the Lairg-Helmsdale service.

Other comments and suggestions were:

- Start a car-share scheme
- Look at what other parts of the UK and Europe are doing and learn from them
- Re-introduce the Post Bus
- Get rid of the Dial-a-bus and have a regular service bus instead
- Reliability of services needs to be improved
- Rural areas need to be protected and services in towns should be reduced instead
- Improve hospital transport

Specific comments were:

- “A change in the perceived central hub for transport from Durness to Inverness would help. At this time our link to Inverness is through a bus linking with the train in Lairg. A change to link with other bus services and [the] ferry in Ullapool would help tourism in the area and provide a faster link to Inverness. This would also help link the whole west coast from Lochinver north with Inverness. A bus running from Durness to Ullapool early in the morning to meet the ferry and bus to Inverness and possibly a bus running in the evening during the summer from Ullapool to Durness and a reduced

service in winter (the bus running only if booked). A reduction on the services to Lairg could help fund this.”

- “Provide a service from Scourie to Ullapool with a pick up at Skiag Bridge”
- “The current monopoly of provision by 2 local firms should be examined for best value.”
- “For the East Sutherland area, and in particular, Helmsdale, that there could be an alignment of services using the A9 corridor and as far as Lairg in the West. We believe that community transport options should be explored further.”

Comments were also made relating to specific routes. These are captured below:

### ***Dornoch Dial-a-bus***

“Dornoch area dial a bus service provides the only means of public transport from the outlying areas Embo, Birichen, Clashmore”

“The Dornoch dial - a bus service is abysmal. Initially it was advertised as a door to door service which was ideal for elderly folk without transport. Instead even 95 year olds were asked to wait at the road ends. There is no service frequency. Whether or not someone can be picked up depends on the availability of the 'bus'. Few people now consider this as a service.”

### ***Arday/Lairg Dial-a-bus***

“The dial a bus route you list does not operate effectively. This needs to work more like a taxi and less like a bus following a schedule. This needs looked at.”

### ***Inverness - Durness bike bus***

“[A reduction in service] would have a significant impact. It's limited as it is a reduction in service would be unthinkable.”

### ***Assynt Dial-a-bus***

“This is a joke but it's not funny. We desperately need a reliable working taxi service for guests out with Lochinver that want to eat locally and have a glass of wine or two with their dinner. Let someone that wants to run a Taxi do this.”

“If the Lochinver Taxi was withdrawn no one would notice.”

### ***Lairg - Helmsdale***

“Lairg - Helmsdale will have a significant impact on the ability of people to travel to work on the east coast. There are a significant number of people who use the service to attend doctors' appointments, Bradbury Centre etc.”



“The main general service utilised by members of the Rogart community is Lairg-Helmsdale. Some people use the service on a daily basis, others up to 3 times a week. Given that Rogart has limited facilities, being very much a rural community, any reduction in general services would have a serious impact on the ability of those of our residents who do not or cannot drive, particularly the elderly, to access facilities in nearby towns, such as the medical Centre in Golspie, the Lawson Memorial Hospital, as well as basic necessities. The cost of a taxi would be unaffordable by many, particularly regular users, or those who use the service to get to work.”

“[Many people in Brora have cars or relatives that can drive them places] This leaves a minority of vulnerable people who depend on public transport to reach essential services outwith Brora e.g. poor, ill, older, disabled people needing to reach hospital, dental and optician services in Golspie/Helmsdale/Inverness. There are a significant group of such people in Brora and beyond who would severely suffer the consequences of a reduction in the frequency of the Lairg to Helmsdale bus service.”

“The service from Lairg to Helmsdale and return would have an impact on the community as a whole, however, Helmsdale Community Transport would be able to support part of this service, if the current service was reduced or withdrawn.”

“Withdrawing the Lairg to Helmsdale bus service is effectively Highland Council saying to such people ‘Sorry, Sutherland is not a suitable place for you to live. Perhaps you should go to live in Inverness instead.’ The ‘Sutherland Consultation Report’ prepared by the highly respected ‘East Sutherland Community Care Forum (ESCCF)’ prepared in November 2014 has already expressed its deep concerns about the gross inadequacy of the existing public transport services. “The survey investigated accessibility to services and activities experienced by older, disabled or isolated service users throughout Sutherland and which additional low-level services would contribute to their well-being. The limiting factor in attending medical appointments, going shopping, or accessing computer classes proved to be lack of a sufficiently frequent or flexible transport service.”

“There is currently no feeder service from upper reaches of Rogart to the village of Pittentrail on the A839, which carries the Lairg-Helmsdale service.”

### ***North Sutherland Dial-a-bus***

“Last year’s data shows reasonable use of North Sutherland Dial-A-Bus (1356 passengers excluding school runs). It can be assumed therefore that any reduction in these services would have something approaching a significant effect on the Melvich community council area.”

### ***Tongue – Thurso***

“Likewise data for Tongue-Thurso (Stagecoach) run shows fairly steady increase in passengers since start of data collection (2012?). It can be assumed therefore that any reduction in these services would have something approaching a significant effect on the Melvich community council area.”

“It is difficult to see how there could be a reduction in the Stagecoach service - this service is already not fit for purpose.”

“The withdrawal of the Stagecoach service as it currently stands would have little impact but the community would expect our community transport organisation to be given the opportunity ( i.e. funding) to provide an alternative service. If it was withdrawn and not replaced with anything this would seriously undermine confidence in the community as a whole. This area has historically been very poorly served by public transport and has sought to address this inequity through a currently thriving voluntary organisation.”

### ***Durness generally***

“To withdraw any of the Durness routes to Thurso, Lairg, or Inverness will leave them with no way of getting out to shop or services. Try getting to Inverness and back in a day, it cannot be done without an overnight stay in Inverness or Lairg!”

“The impact of a reduction in service in regard to the regional services, services linking Durness with other towns and transport hubs, would be to severely isolate this village. The external transport links at this time are regarded by us as the minimum level acceptable to support the local inhabitants and tourism, the economic back bone of Durness”

“Withdrawal of the Durness bus would have the effect of increasing the isolation of this area. This would increase the challenges faced by our organisation which works to reduce social isolation and improve health and well-being.”

### ***Durness – Thurso***

“A reduction in frequency of the Durness Bus service would adversely affect our area and therefore impact on our organisation.”

### ***Durness – Lairg***

“The Durness Bus servicing Scourie to Lairg (pick up 9.30am) and returning to Scourie from Lairg at 13.35pm, is an essential lifeline for passengers wishing to travel south, or travel north, as it connects with both coach and rail transport. This service is also used by locals for shopping and other services. There is no Dial-A-Bus provision for Scourie. The impact of reducing this daily return service (not Sundays) would mean that locals were effectively trapped without choice of travel in this area, and tourists would be unable to reach here at all. SCDC Ltd are committed

to improving the quality of life of residents in this area and developing the tourist trade, so effectively, our main aims would be undermined,”

“If the Scourie-Lairg service was withdrawn, this would have serious repercussions on the independent travel of residents, summer staff and tourists.”

### ***Durness Dial-a-bus***

“A reduction in the local services in Durness, the dial a bus, would most likely lead to the isolation of vulnerable pensioners and persons with disabilities and mobility issues. Care would have to be taken with changes or reduction of this service to ensure that it continued to meet the needs of these groups.”

### ***Other comments about routes***

Lairg to Tain: “Firstly, the list of services is incomplete. There is a Macleod’s Coaches service from Lairg to Tain via Ardgay which has been omitted from the list. [Our group] considers it absolutely shocking and unacceptable that a document such as this can be issued which does not even contain the correct information... This service, the one you have omitted, from Lairg to Tain is heavily used by residents in Ardgay. It links Ardgay with Bonar Bridge.”

Rosehall: “[The area in which our group operates] includes a large area of Sutherland within which public transport services are already at an all-time low. In particular the village of Rosehall has no bus service since the withdrawal of the Post Bus nearly two years ago. At present the only transport available to residents or visitors, other than by private car, is through a pilot scheme being run by Creich Community Council which helps fund a taxi service. Users of this service also pay towards each trip which they book and arrange themselves. At least this means it is possible to reach Lairg or Bonar Bridge for essential services such as medical and dental care, and to connect with onward transport as and when that is available. Rosehall deserves a regular service even if only on a couple of days each week. Creich Community Council can in no way guarantee how long it will be able to support the Community Transport Taxi Scheme.”

“The main reason why the majority of local people for the majority of the time do not use public transport services that pass through Brora is because they are rich enough to be able to afford their own cars and using their own (‘door to door’) cars offers additional benefits compared with the infrequent, and expensive for many, existing public transport services.”

“Routes that are needed: Ardgay -Bonar; Ardgay- Tain; Ardgay -Golspie; -Ardgay – Inverness”

“There appears to be a perception that the Dornoch to Golspie run is for the purposes of hospital users only and some of the users are reluctant to use the

service for other purposes. I understand that the purpose of the run should be for general destinations within Golspie. Maybe that should be made clear to the drivers.”

“It is good that day care centres, such as the Helmsdale Hub or the Bradbury Centre provide transport so that people from many different directions may attend.”

“SCDC Ltd has long considered that a public transport link from Scourie to Ullapool would be beneficial to this community, for both locals and tourists wishing to visit the area.”

“Access to the X98/X99 bus services is generally inaccessible for many of our aging population.”

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## Public Consultation Questionnaire

### Summary

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a questionnaire for the general public was published on the Council's website and was made available through Highland Council Service Points and Libraries throughout Sutherland.

118 individuals responded to the consultation. 73% of all respondents had lived in the Sutherland area for over 10 years. Just under half indicated that they were retired and 38% that they were disabled. 71% of all respondents were female.

The key messages from the public questionnaire are outlined below:

#### ***Use of current services***

- Based upon respondent feedback the most used current transport services are the Lairg to Tain service and Lairg to Helmsdale service. The quietest routes were the Kinlochbervie and Durness Dial-a-bus services.
- The most common reasons for using bus services were for leisure and social activities, shopping and to attend appointments. Routes tended to be used for multiple activities.

#### ***Impact of reducing or withdrawing services***

- Concerns were expressed that the reduction in frequency of services or withdrawal would impact upon people's ability to access key local services such as shops, doctors, post office and social activities. It was also noted that it would likely increase the isolation of elderly and disabled people and reduce the independence of these particular groups.
- A small number of people reported that it would impact on their ability to get to work whilst concern was also expressed at the impact upon tourism. Concerns were also expressed at the potential loss of services to connect up with train and bus services out-with the area, in particular to Inverness.

#### ***Barriers to accessing current services***

- Respondents were divided on whether there were things that prevent them from using existing bus services. 54% of respondents indicated that there were no barriers but 46% that there were.
- Of those who indicated barriers exist, they identified a number of suggestions which would encourage greater use of services. These included:
  - More frequent services and improved connections with other bus and train services.

- Improved reliability and easier accessible information about the services available
- More low level buses to improve accessibility and door to door services for those who struggle to get to a bus stop.
- 46% of respondents indicated that they were prevented from taking part in certain activities due to the lack of transport. This included evening and weekend activities, accessing sports centres and swimming pools and visiting the theatre or cinema. Some respondents also noted they found it difficult to attend hospital appointments, particularly in Golspie or Raigmore.

### **Accessibility**

- 28% of respondents reported that they were aware of services which were difficult to access for elderly or disabled passengers. Respondents with a disability or over the age of 65 were more likely to report this.
- The most common issue highlighted was steps in buses and coaches. Further concerns included getting to the bus stop and the long waits in between services. The awareness and understanding of drivers about disability issues was highlighted by some as a concern.

### **Future services**

- 45% of respondents did not know whether current services would meet the needs of Sutherland in the future. A further 24% believed they would not.
- It was noted that reducing services would lead to a reduction in passenger numbers and not achieve in making the service more efficient. However, there was an alternative view that it was better to reduce a service than withdraw it completely.
- A number of suggestions were made for improving efficiency. These included:
  - Using smaller buses and minibuses on quieter routes would be more efficient.
  - Better awareness of the services available and improved information about how they link together.
  - A small rise in fares.
  - Reducing overlap in services, including school and public services.
  - Support to make school services available for the public and that there were opportunities to combine certain services and reduce costs.

## Public Consultation Questionnaire

### Full Results

As one strand of the Sutherland Transport Programme Consultation, a questionnaire for the general public was published on the Council's website and was made available through Highland Council Service Points and Libraries throughout Sutherland.

118 individuals responded to the consultation.

The profile of respondents is as follows:

- 73% of all respondents had lived in the Sutherland area for over 10 years. **46% of respondents live in the Central Sutherland area** (Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Lairg), **29% live on the East coast** (Edderton, Dornoch, Golspie, Brora and Helmsdale), **16% live in the South West/ Assynt area** (Drumbeg, Lochinver and Elphin) and **8% live on the North West coast** (Melvich, Bettyhill, Tongue, Durness, Kinlochbervie, Scourie, Altnaharra and Forsinard)
- **43%** of respondents are **65 years or older**, **40%** are aged between **45 and 64 years** and **17%** are aged **16-44 years**
- Just under half indicated that they were retired.
- 71% of all respondents were female.
- **38%** of respondents reported that they **have a disability**: this is a high response rate as only around 22% of residents in Sutherland overall report having a disability
- **58%** of respondents **own their home or have a mortgage**. **28%** of respondents **live in social rented housing**: this is a high response rate as only around 17% of people in Sutherland live in social rented housing
- **13%** of respondents have **school aged children living in their household**
- **91%** of respondents described their **ethnicity as white**

The full results of the questionnaire are outlined below:

**Q1: Which of these bus services do you and your family make use of in Sutherland and how frequently?**

The most popular service was the Lairg to Tain (MacLeod’s Coaches), followed by the Lairg to Helmsdale route (MacLeod’s Coaches). The quietest routes were the Kinlochbervie (Allan Bruce) and Durness (DJ Mackay) Dial-a-bus routes. The table below has been ordered by the number of people using the service at least once a week.

	Total using service	Daily		2-3 times per week		Once per week		2-3 times per month		Once per month		Less than once per month		Do not use this service	
		Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents
Lairg-Tain (MacLeod's Coaches)	43	8	7%	10	8%	9	8%	5	4%	8	7%	3	3%	26	22%
Lairg-Helmsdale (MacLeod's Coaches)	29	2	2%	9	8%	4	3%	3	3%	2	2%	9	8%	31	26%
Ardgay/Lairg Dial-A-Bus (MacLeod's Coaches)	13	4	3%	3	3%	4	3%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	33	28%
Dornoch Area Dial-A-Bus (MacKay's Taxis)	8	0	0%	3	3%	5	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	36	31%
Drumbeg-Ullapool (Highland Translink)	15	1	1%	3	3%	1	1%	2	2%	3	3%	5	4%	33	28%
Drumbeg-Lochinver (Highland Translink)	12	1	1%	1	1%	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%	6	5%	33	28%



Transport Programme – Sutherland  
Public Consultation Questionnaire

	Total using service	Daily		2-3 times per week		Once per week		2-3 times per month		Once per month		Less than once per month		Do not use this service	
		Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents	Number	% of total respondents
Assynt Dial-A-Bus (Lochinver Taxi)	12	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%	1	1%	0	0%	7	6%	34	29%
North Sutherland Dial-A-Bus (Ormlie Taxis)	4	1	1%	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	37	31%
Durness- Lairg (The Durness Bus)	10	0	0%	2	2%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	7	6%	36	31%
Durness-Inverness (The Durness Bus)	8	0	0%	1	1%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	5	4%	34	29%
Durness-Thurso (The Durness Bus)	5	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	37	31%
Tongue-Thurso (Stagecoach)	13	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	2	2%	4	3%	5	4%	34	29%
Inverness-Durness bike bus (D&E Coaches)	16	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%	12	10%	33	28%
Durness Area Dial-A-Bus (D.J. Mackay)	2	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	36	31%
Kinlochbervie Dial-A-Bus (Allan Bruce)	2	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	37	31%

**Q2: For those bus services you/ your family make use of, what do you use them for?**

The most common reasons for using bus services were for leisure and social activities, for shopping and to attend appointments. Across most routes there tend to be at least three activities that are popular which implies that services are used for multiple activities.

Across all routes there is low usage for school and further / higher education.

For the Lairg – Tain route, 77% of people use this service for shopping and 51% use it to attend appointments. For the Lairg – Helmsdale route, 55% of people use this service to attend appointments and 45% use it for leisure and social activities.

The Drumbeg – Ullapool route is particularly popular for onward connections (67%). Lairg – Tain (44%) and Ardgay/Lairg Dial-a-bus (31%) are also popular for onward connections.

Dial-a-bus routes tend to be used most for 'other' activities.

Table below: \*Percentage of people that use this service

Transport Programme – Sutherland  
Public Consultation Questionnaire

	Work		School/ Nursery		Further/ Higher Education		Extra- curricular activities		Leisure and social		Shopping		To attend appointments		Onward connections (train/bus/ ferry)		Other		Do not use this service	
	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	
Lairg-Tain (MacLeod's Coaches)	4	9%	1	2%	0	0%	1	2%	10	23%	33	77%	22	51%	19	44%	4	9%	26	
Lairg- Helmsdale (MacLeod's Coaches)	3	10%	0	0%	2	7%	1	3%	13	45%	12	41%	16	55%	6	21%	3	10%	30	
Ardgay/Lairg Dial-A-Bus (MacLeod's Coaches)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	8%	6	46%	5	38%	6	46%	4	31%	4	31%	34	
Dornoch Area Dial-A-Bus (MacKay's Taxis)	0	0%	2	25%	0	0%	0	0%	5	63%	4	50%	4	50%	2	25%	1	13%	35	
Drumbeg- Ullapool (Highland Translink)	2	13%	0	0%	3	20%	1	7%	8	53%	6	40%	6	40%	10	67%	3	20%	31	
Drumbeg- Lochinver (Highland Translink)	3	25%	0	0%	2	17%	0	0%	7	58%	3	25%	5	42%	1	8%	3	25%	31	
Assynt Dial-A- Bus (Lochinver Taxi)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	8%	5	42%	2	17%	4	33%	0	0%	2	17%	35	

Transport Programme – Sutherland  
Public Consultation Questionnaire

	Work		School/ Nursery		Further/ Higher Education		Extra- curricular activities		Leisure and social		Shopping		To attend appointments		Onward connections (train/bus/ ferry)		Other		Do not use this service	
	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	
North Sutherland Dial-A-Bus (Ormlie Taxis)	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	3	75%	2	50%	1	25%	2	50%	36	
Durness- Lairg (The Durness Bus)	0	0%	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%	5	50%	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%	2	20%	35	
Durness- Inverness (The Durness Bus)	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%	0	0%	4	50%	4	50%	1	13%	1	13%	1	13%	33	
Durness- Thurso (The Durness Bus)	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	80%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	1	20%	35	
Tongue- Thurso (Stagecoach)	1	8%	1	8%	1	8%	3	23%	8	62%	7	54%	4	31%	2	15%	2	15%	32	
Inverness- Durness bike bus (D&E Coaches)	1	6%	0	0%	2	13%	0	0%	7	44%	4	25%	4	25%	3	19%	4	25%	32	
Durness Area Dial-A-Bus (D.J. Mackay)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	35	
Kinlochbervie Dial-A-Bus (Allan Bruce)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	38	

**Q3: Impact of a reduction in the frequency of services**

74 people responded to this question. Respondents were concerned that a reduction in the frequency of services would affect their ability to access amenities. This included health care appointments, shops and leisure facilities.

Respondents also highlighted a reduction in services could result in increased isolation, particularly for older people as they tend to rely more on public transport. A reduction could also limit the mobility of people with disabilities who use public transport.

There were concerns that a reduction in local services would make it more difficult to make use of other connections, such as buses to Inverness or train services. One respondent commented that it is already difficult enough to make connections.

A small number of respondents noted that they use these bus services to get to work and so service reduction would impact on them. Some others noted that if services were reduced they would be more likely to use their car, with one stating that this would make travelling more expensive.

It was also noted that tourists use public bus services, with one respondent noting that boat owners may leave their boats at Lochinver Harbour and use public transport for various reasons, such as exploring the local area or travelling south for work meetings.

For these reasons, some respondents felt that the service cannot be reduced further and that even a slight reduction would have an impact on their community. However some respondents noted that they did not believe there would be an impact, or that it would depend on which services were to be reduced.

Other comments made were: there would need to be more local services, such as a hairdresser; younger people will be cut off from local amenities if evening and weekend services are reduced; there are already long waits between buses, and; there needs to be more information about services.

Respondents were asked to specify which route they were referring to. Comments relating to specific routes are outlined below.

***Dornoch Dial-a-bus***

“Dial-a-Bus takes me to Bonar Bridge for lunch and social activities otherwise I could not get there. As there is not a bus service from Dornoch to Bonar Bridge.”

“My only option would be to use car for shopping and medical appointments. Walk 3 miles from Embo to Dornoch when travelling further often would be in dark. Some

people in village would be unable to attend medical appointments or have any social life.”

“I would miss the bus for shopping, access to the post office, transport to the health centre and appointments at the Lawson Memorial Hospital, and the Golspie Health Centre for diabetic eye examinations.”

### ***Arday/Lairg Dial-a-bus***

“I have used the dial a bus services to get to Lairg station which is nearly 2 miles from the village - despite this, the train service is widely used from Lairg and serves the whole of NW Sutherland. Access to the station is essential for locals and visitors and should be included in any consideration of local services and how people get to them.”

“Depending on which day/s if any a reduction might affect my being able to attend the local day care centre as I use the wonderful dial a bus service on offer by MacLeod’s Coaches weekly.”

“Dial a bus withdrawal would mean unable to attend doctor in Bonar Bridge. Due to disability and health I cannot walk miles to the doctor. Withdrawal would cut me off from family, shopping and hospital and Dentist appointments as I’d be unable to get connections to Inverness.”

“Very necessary for myself should I wish to travel south - I can get a connection from MacLeod’s Dial-a-Bus in early morning to connect with Stagecoach to Inverness.”

### ***Assynt Dial-a-bus***

“The service for Assynt is already dire. The lack of a Sunday bus means that it is effectively impossible to go away for a weekend by public transport. The impact of losing even the few buses we have would make it impossible to go away by train or bus without driving to Ullapool or Inverness to make a connection. The lack of buses already damages my efforts to run courses in Assynt, as people cannot easily get here to take part, and a reduction in services would make this even worse.”

### ***Lairg – Helmsdale***

“Devastating as I attend Brora A.L. Centre 4 days per week - Galehouse L.H.H. (Mental Health) 2 days weekly.”

“The loss of the Lairg-Helmsdale link bus would certainly affect myself and others. I use the bus for Doctors/Dentists appointments, shopping, church, socialising, visiting Golspie, visiting Lawson Hospital to see Consultant, and its withdrawal would affect me and others greatly.”

“Would not be able to travel outside Lairg if the Lairg-Helmsdale service was to be reduced, also the Dial a Bus service which I use every Tuesday to take me to Bradbury, Bonar Bridge and home again to Lairg.”

***Lairg – Tain***

“Depending on the changes in timetable, I would find it difficult to get to Lairg for the connecting bus to Helmsdale. If the Lairg-Tain service was reduced, I would find it difficult to get to work.”

“I also use the Lairg - Tain service for shopping”

“Lairg - Tain - shopping. Both my husband and I depend on those services from our home in Rogart. We are both disabled and would be housebound if service is removed or altered. No social interaction.”

“A reduction in the service would limit the connection options from Tain to Inverness. This is an important link for any journey south and for shopping and entertainment trips. The Lairg-Tain service is our link for any supermarket shopping.”

“The existing time table of MacLeod’s Coaches both Lairg to Tain and Lairg to Helmsdale is ideal for me. I can get to hospital appointments in Golspie - Raigmore easily. I am able to visit care homes - Golspie, Tain, Dornoch and especially Invergordon where my sister is being looked after. I rely on this service for shopping and connecting southbound buses from Inverness. If services had to be reduced particular attention would have to be given to connection timetables.”

“The Lairg - Tain bus, although this comment would probably be relevant for most routes. The frequency of the service is already low. Making the service even less frequent would at times make it unusable. To make public transport work, it needs to be more frequent, reliable & integrated.”

“The services I refer to are the Lairg/Tain and Lairg/Helmsdale bus routes both operated by MacLeod’s Coaches. I do not have a driving licence due to health issues and if there were a reduction in the frequency of the running of the service I would find myself extremely limited in my travel possibilities, especially on the Lairg/Tain route. I use both morning and evening runs on a regular basis.”

“Too long between buses for return journey - wait on the street in cold weather not good for elderly. Buses to Lairg from Bonar already poor service. Tain no shelter when waiting.”

“The bus service I would least like to lose is the one from Lairg to Lairg station as I do not drive and it would be difficult for me to use train services if this bus was cancelled. Since this is the same bus that I use to go to Tain for shopping any

reduction in its timetabling might make it impossible for me to use to get to Tain and back with sufficient time to do some shopping in between. It might also mean I will no longer be able to attend appointments at Raigmore Hospital which I need to attend fairly regularly as an out-patient for my eye problems.”

***North Sutherland Dial-a-bus***

“Any reduction in the Dial a ride in Sutherland (Ormlie) may result in being unable to get to my work...attend the medical practice at Armadale, get to a train or rail journey commencing at Thurso, myself and my teenage daughter would miss out on attending a social function in Sutherland or Thurso.”

***Tongue – Thurso***

“If the Tongue to Thurso (Stagecoach) bus was reduced any further I would be unable to travel to Thurso at present there is only one bus daily during school hours.”

“Reduction in the service from Tongue/ Bettyhill to Thurso and return would entail tailoring appointments round the service, rather than every weekday, as at present. This would be possible for many activities.”

“There is so little public transport running along the north coast (Durness - Thurso) (Thurso-Tongue) that these buses running regularly make it possible to plan and rely on the buses.”

***Drumbeg – Lochinver***

“Any reduction in the Highland Translink, Lochinver service would seriously impact the flexibility of local service not only to me but also many members of the local community and tourists.”

***Drumbeg – Ullapool***

“This service is currently twice daily. This is necessary in order to make a day return with a reasonably gap between outward and return journeys. The morning journey is necessary to be able to connect to onward services - rail and long distance buses. The early evening return journey is necessary to make a return home from an away trip by rail or long distance bus. A reduction in the number of days a twice daily service operates would be inconvenient but preferable to reduction in the twice daily service”

“My daughter attends college in Inverness (her nearest further education college). She travels from Lochinver to Ullapool to connect with the bus to Inverness every Sunday evening and for the return journey at the end of the week. This is her only means of getting to and from Inverness. If the service is reduced she will have difficulty getting home during term time. I use the service to travel to connect to services to Inverness from Ullapool. I often need to do this for onward travel to visit



family. Without the service I would have to drive to Inverness, incurring extra cost in long term parking and making trips difficult and expensive.”

**Other comments on specific areas**

“Embo to Dornoch any more reductions and there would be no service. Tuesday and Friday morning no connection if you want to go to Inverness after you return.”

“Brora Learning Centre - working on greatly reduced hours, thanks to your cuts - uses this bus for its students; so too does Beachview Day Centre. These students and clients are amongst the most vulnerable in our society and have already been hit badly by the UK-wide austerity cuts. I am sure that there are lots of older people who use the service who would otherwise not get out and about: no point in having a bus pass, if there is no bus!!”

“Connections from Tain and to Tain are not always certain.”

“I use the buses on the western and northern sides of Sutherland for social and recreational purposes, and would be very sorry to see a reduction in the frequency of services, although I understand the difficulties faced by the Council. It seems unfair that the most rural areas apparently have to bear the brunt of reduced or withdrawn services when for many people, particularly the elderly, there is no alternative transport to hospital, for example.”

“Impact on my attending Brora Adult Learning Centre. Depend so much on this for my Mental Health, Socialisation, and Improving my Learning. Need qualifications to get a job.”

“We use the school bus 5 days a week to get my kids to Dornoch primary school and also very soon my eldest to the high school”

“X99 and 25X- It would mean having to wait longer for a return bus. I cannot stand. It would mean waiting extra hours. It would mean missing hospital appointments, or, perhaps having got to an appointment not being able to get home.”

“The 809 service bus leaving Lochinver in the mornings gives passengers the option of having a daytrip to Ullapool or Inverness (and other stops in between) and returning on the afternoon bus, or to travel further afield...With the afternoon 809 service bus leaving Lochinver at 1322hrs this allows a good 2-hour shop/ visit to Ullapool...traveling back with passengers from further afield along with any Ullapool High School pupils after their extra-curricular activities”

**Q4: Impact of a withdrawal of a service**

78 people responded to this question. Many respondents answered this by referring back to their previous response. Some used words such as ‘catastrophic’ and ‘devastating’ to describe the impact on them and their community. Other respondents thought the withdrawal of services would impact on the quality of life of people living in affected areas.

Similar responses were given to this question as to the one above: removal would lead to isolation, there would be no way of accessing services and appointments and the impact would be greater for older and vulnerable people.

However, respondents also highlighted that there would be a loss of independence for many groups, including older and younger people, as they can no longer get about as easily.

Respondents stated that there would be more cars on the road, which could cause problems such as an increased need for road maintenance and an increase in carbon emissions. Some respondents stated they would have to use the train but that this is not always as suitable.

It was also highlighted that some households, particularly families with children, have one car and supplement this by using public transport. Without public transport, two cars would be needed but this may not be affordable.

Other comments were: mental health would suffer if people cannot access services; would be unable to get to and from Inverness; withdrawal of services would be an extra struggle for rural areas; taxis are not feasible as they are expensive and often unavailable; there will be an increased use of health and social services; the Stagecoach bus is too expensive; it would make life very difficult; may need to move to Inverness; may need to give up job, and; there would be no impact.

Respondents were asked to specify which route they were referring to. Comments relating to specific routes are outlined below.

***Inverness – Durness bike bus***

“The D&E Inverness-Durness bike bus is particularly useful, as is the Drumbeg-Ullapool Highland Translink service”

***Assynt Dial-a-bus***

“The dial a bus in Assynt would have a huge impact on people from the wider community as this bus is widely used by the older community to go to the doctor, dentist, physiotherapist etc. which are all located in the village. This service is also used for these same people for shopping. This is obviously mainly used in the daytime and not evenings as evening use would be more for social purposes.

Withdrawal of the daytime service would make it impossible for most of these people to ever get out of their homes and I really don't know how they would manage”

**Lairg – Helmsdale**

“If the Lairg train or Lairg-Helmsdale Services were withdrawn I would not be able to get to work.”

**Lairg – Tain**

“Bonar Bridge to Tain - MacLeod's Coaches. Sometimes very difficult to get to Inverness and back (i.e. long walks and waits for trains) - just a short Raigmore appointment could mean a whole day with a 1 mile walk each way to the station.”

“I think it would make a huge impact if there was any withdrawal of Services. MacLeod coaches are the best service Lairg to Tain have had in years. So many people rely on it for going shopping etc. most of the passengers are old age pensioners. People with no transport, so it is very popular.”

“Inability to shop competitively”

“The withdrawal of this service would mean financial hardship for us. We would no longer have access to the Tain supermarkets or the buses to Inverness or the south of the U.K.”

“Not having a driving licence I would find the withdrawal of either service to be extremely limiting on my travel capabilities especially the Lairg/Tain route which I need to use regularly. As the above I use both morning and evening runs on a regular basis and would find any withdrawal would cause considerable transport difficulties.”

“If I travel down to Edinburgh as they stopped the 6.25 am I cannot get a bus until later and I could not get home the same day if the Tain-Lairg 18.47 was stopped. I also use it to visit family.”

**North Sutherland Dial-a-bus**

“If the dial a bus in Sutherland was withdrawn (Ormlie) I would not be able to get to and from work. I travel from Bettyhill to Wick and would not get to and from Thurso and home without the dial a bus which supports a very isolated community to its utmost.”

“The Dial a Bus/Taxi (Ormlie) service has proved impractical and is often unavailable.”

### **Tongue – Thurso**

“If the Tongue to Thurso bus was withdrawn I would be totally isolated being a non-driver for all the reason listed above. I have no family in the immediate area”

“The withdrawal of the Tongue/ Bettyhill service would impact greatly on travel to Thurso and beyond, for those with no transport of their own, or who do not drive”

### **Drumbeg – Lochinver**

“Withdrawing the service would isolate the villages in Assynt even more than they already are. Last summer my husband and I both had operations that left us unable to drive for 6 weeks. Some of this time overlapped so without the bus we would have been stranded with no means of getting to the shops in Lochinver (We live 4 miles from the village). Obviously this would have been an unacceptable position and I cannot believe the withdrawal of the service is even being mentioned, yet alone seriously considered!”

### **Drumbeg – Ullapool**

“A withdrawal of this service would highly inconvenient to those without access to private transport and would increase carbon emissions through the increase in car traffic on this route.”

“Withdrawal of the bus service from Drumbeg to Ullapool would mean my daughter would be unable to travel home from college unless someone was able to drive to Ullapool to pick her up. Similarly it would make it very difficult for my son to come home from university in Edinburgh for visits.”

**Q5: The Highland Council also supports a number of school bus services in Sutherland. These cost Highland Council £1.3million per year to provide (two-thirds of the £1.3m is spent on school-only bus services and the other one-third is for mixed school-public use). Do you have views on how these school transport services might be delivered for a lower cost?**

52 people responded to this question. The most common suggestion was to make more or all services mixed use. Some respondents did note that this should only happen on services where there are extra seats and where it is safe and practical to do so. One respondent noted that there is already a mixed use service to take pupils from Drumbeg to Ullapool, but maybe the early afternoon service could be cut to save money. Another respondent noted Stagecoach and Highland Translink both run buses from Lochinver to Ullapool, with one a school service and one a public service. These services should be combined so that fares can be decreased.

Some respondents felt that free transport should only be available to families that cannot pay. Some also thought that there needed to be stricter rules on who can use the school service.

Some respondents suggested that parents should be more involved so that that need for school buses is reduced. One respondent thought there should be more pick up points whereas another thought there should be fewer, more central pick up points.

There was also the suggestion of using smaller buses, such as minibuses. Some respondents felt that the Council should not reduce spending on school transport as it is essential that we ensure pupils get to school easily and safely, particularly pupils with disabilities.

There was some reference to transport to Gaelic schools, with one respondent stating this should be offered on the same mileage as English medium schools and should be charged the same.

Other comments were: use electric or fuel efficient buses; reduce the cost of fuel; co-ordinate school transport with community transport; have more publicity about services, and; make them walk.

One respondent commented: *“Use the £1.3m figure to calculate the per family cost across all Highland schools. Reduce school spend by the calculated average. Continue to fund school buses where these are necessary. Doing otherwise to deliberately, and selectively reduce family's standard of living. The reduction should be uniform.”*

**Q6: Do you or your family make use of any other forms of transport?**

87% of respondents indicated they also make use of other forms of transport.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	90	87%
No	14	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q7: Please select what other forms of transport you use and the purposes for doing so.**

Stagecoach long distance routes are the most common other method of transport and are used mainly for leisure and social activities and for onward connections. Across all methods of transport the most common purpose is for leisure and social activities.

Respondents were asked to specify what other method of transport they use. The most common answer was the train. Other answers were by car, bicycle, hospital transport, the Bradbury Bus and Crossroads Care.

	Community Transport	Taxi	Stagecoach long distance routes	Friends and family	Car sharing	Volunteer transport e.g. lunch clubs	Other
<b>Number of individuals using this service*</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>
Work	1	3	8	6	8	0	7
School/nursery	0	1	1	3	9	0	1
Further/Higher education	0	1	3	2	1	0	0
Extra-curricular activities	2	1	4	4	2	0	1
Leisure and social	9	10	30	23	10	9	11
Shopping	7	5	17	22	9	2	10
To attend appointments	7	5	21	20	9	0	13
Onward connections	6	5	29	13	7	0	10
Other	0	2	3	1	3	0	3

\*Individuals may use the method of transport for more than one reason

**Q8: Is there anything that prevents you or discourages you from using the bus services available in Sutherland?**

46% of respondents said that something discouraged or prevented them from using the bus. Respondents with a disability and respondents aged between 16 and 44 were more likely to be prevented or discouraged from using the bus.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	43	46%
No	51	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q9: What would enable or encourage you to use these services more?**

44 people responded to this question. The most common suggestion was a more frequent service. This was followed by better connections with other buses and trains, as long waiting times for a return journey or between connections was seen as a barrier to some.

Respondents felt that services need to be more reliable and it should be easier to access timetable and bus stop information. Some respondents also thought that services needed to be more affordable.

Some respondents noted that coaches are not accessible to many, especially if they have shopping bags and so more low level buses should be introduced. Some respondents also stated that they can find it difficult to get to the bus stop so there should be more door to door services, such as the dial-a-bus.

Other things that could encourage people to use buses more were: if the services were faster; Sunday buses; better links between the east and west coast; use of dial-a-buses to extend the current service; if there was a route nearer me, and; if the bus came round the housing scheme.

Some respondents outlined routes and services they would like to see:

- Assynt to Lairg train station
- Achmelvich to Lochinver
- Afternoon bus from Ullapool to Inverness
- Afternoon bus from Tain
- Later bus from Inverness to Ullapool
- Services that arrive in Inverness before 9am
- Better services out of Embo
- Early morning and early evening services so that people can take day trips
- Assynt bus that coordinates with the Sleeper train

Some respondents also took this opportunity to highlight examples of poor planning in relation to connections:

- Bus to Lairg departs 5 minutes before a train arrives at Ardgay station
- Bus to Assynt departs 10 minutes before the Sleeper train gets into Inverness station
- There is a 30-40 minutes wait for a connection from Tain to Inverness (using the Lairg to Tain Macleod's service)
- Bus from Inverness gets into Golspie at 4pm but the Dial-a-bus to Rogart leaves Golspie at 4pm

**Q10: Is there any activity that you are prevented from doing or service you cannot access because of a lack of public transport?**

44% of respondents felt there are things they cannot do due to a lack of public transport. Respondents with a disability and aged 65 and over were more likely to say they were unable to do things due to a lack of public transport.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	44	46%
No	52	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q11: Please provide details**

Generally respondents felt current services prevented them from taking part in evening and weekend activities. Respondents stated that they are unable to visit sports centres and swimming pools in neighbouring towns. They are also unable to visit the theatre and cinema, and would like to be able to go out for an evening meal or to the local pub without taking the car.

Some respondents also noted that they find it difficult to attend hospital and other healthcare appointments- some specifically mentioned having trouble reaching Golspie and Raigmore.

Some respondents stated that they cannot take advantage of educational opportunities, such as evening classes or courses that take place in other towns. One respondent highlighted that many services are being centralised, such as health services and Council Service Points, but transport services are not being improved. This respondent stated that the Council needs to think of the cumulative effect of the changes being made.

Other details provided were: I always need to take my car; buses are not co-ordinated with trains so I can't make use of trains either; buses are not frequent enough; guests cannot check in as frequently; mobility issues affect how I get about, and; I cannot get to work on Sundays.

Some respondents made comments about specific services or areas:

- Cannot access the health centre in Golspie, including maternity services
- Must keep the Lairg-Helmsdale dial-a-bus
- There is no evening service in Bonar Bridge
- The 25X Tain to Dornoch service leaves too early
- The last bus into Tain from Inverness misses the 18:55 Tain –Lairg service
- The last bus from Thurso to the west coast is at 14:25- too early



- Stagecoach services to Golspie are two hours apart- I cannot wait outside for that long in cold weather due to my health
- For a one day course in Inverness I have to stay for two nights
- Buses from Brora to Lairg are infrequent
- There is no Sunday service in Assynt- I run a weekend training course and people can only attend if they have a car
- No late bus from Lairg- Helmsdale
- Ardgay Dial-a-bus seems to run to a timetable which is not useful
- No public transport after 15:30
- No Sunday service in Bonar Bridge / Lairg / Tain
- Cannot connect with Lairg train from Lochinver

**Q12: Do you know of any bus services which are difficult to use for disabled or elderly passengers who may have for example, mobility difficulties, sensory impairments or learning difficulties?**

28% of respondents knew of services that are difficult to access. Respondents with a disability and those aged 65 and over were more likely to know about these services.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	27	28%
No	68	72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q13: Which services are these and why is it difficult for people to use them?**

26 people responded to this question. The most common complaint was that it is difficult to use the steps in buses and coaches, particularly for elderly people with shopping. Steps were seen to be a particular issue on the following services:

- Lairg to Tain
- Thurso to Tongue
- X97 Wick – one respondent highlighted that at the Thrumster bus stop going South there is no pavement and the road slopes backwards away from the bus, making it even more difficult to board.
- X99

Some respondents also stated that it can be difficult for elderly people or people with mobility problems to actually get to the bus stop. One respondent mentioned that the long waits in between services also limit the accessibility for elderly and vulnerable people.

Other comments received noted that it is difficult to use the luggage berth on the coach, Dial a bus drivers are more understanding about disabilities than regular bus drivers and train platforms are not accessible.

One respondent highlighted that people with mental health problems are also sometimes unable to use services.

**Q14: Will the current services meet the needs of Sutherland over the next 5 years?**

45% of respondents did not know if current services would meet the needs of Sutherland in the future. Respondents living on the East Sutherland coast were more likely to think their needs would not be met.

Responses	Number	%
Yes	29	31%
No	23	24%
Don't know	42	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q15: What are your views on how they can be delivered more cost effectively?**

42 people responded to this question. The most common answer to this question was to put on more services. Some respondents pointed out that reducing services will lead to reduced passenger numbers rather than the service becoming more efficient. However, some respondents felt that it would be better to reduce a service than to lose it completely.

Instead some suggested using smaller buses and minibuses on quieter routes as these should be cheaper to run. One respondent stated that north and west services seem to use minibuses but Macleod's do not.

It was suggested that better route maps and timetables are available to encourage people to use services. Some respondents also suggested that there needs to be an overhaul of the current system, and a more comprehensive system put in place. This fits in with other suggestions to run services when people need them, for example by fitting in with local working patterns and targeting areas that need services. One respondent suggested that communities should be allowed to run local services to meet the need of local people.

Some respondents felt more information was needed before they could make realistic recommendations about improving services.

Other suggestions were: offer subsidised taxis or Dial-a-bus services on routes with low usage; X99 service is always full and a better service is needed as 300 new houses are being built in Dornoch; link bus services with tourist attractions to increase the number of tourists using services; cancel Dial-a-bus services in areas where a regular service is offered; increase taxation to pay for services; increase Dial-a-bus services; introduce a franchise system so that operators pay the Council to be allowed to run certain routes; the Council should not be reducing spending on transport; advertise that people need to 'use them or lose them' in relation to local bus services, and; families who can pay for school transport should pay for it.

**Q16: In that case and bearing in mind that Highland Council has a lower budget for expending on transport services over the next 5 years, what should change - in terms of what should be provided and how it should be provided?**

19 people responded to this question. Some respondents stated that there should be no reduction in spending or services. However some made suggestions about how services should be provided:

- Raise fares- this could be a small rise, such as 20p, but people would know if was going towards sustaining the local service.
- Have a daytime taxi to allow elderly people to visit local services
- Have a direct service to Inverness
- More afternoon services
- Reduce top wages at the Council and spend more on services
- Elderly should pay a reduced charge rather than receiving free travel
- Use smaller buses

Some respondents referred to specific areas or services:

- Morning service from Tain to Inverness is essential but return journeys should be better organised to allow longer for shopping. This could be balanced by a reduced afternoon service
- Should be a better service between Bonar Bridge and Tain
- Continue with Dornoch and Macleod's Dial-a-bus services
- School transport to Farr High School needs to be maintained but there could be a reduced service in summer (as long as this was well advertised)
- Services in north west Sutherland cannot be further reduced- a certain level of service must be maintained
- There are 5 buses to Reay but only one that goes further west- this service could be cut
- There are some services that overlap. For example, Lairg to Helmsdale overlaps with Stagecoach Golspie to Helmsdale. Could the Lairg to Tain route be extended to Golspie to Tain via Lairg and cut out the Lairg to Helmsdale route?
- Better coordination between Stagecoach and other services

## Respondent Profile

### Q17: How long have you lived in the Highland Council area?

Length of time	Number	%
Less than one year	1	1%
1-2 years	2	2%
3-5 years	12	13%
6-10 years	7	7%
Over 10 years	72	77%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Q18: How long have you lived in the Sutherland area?

Length of time	Number	%
Less than one year	2	2%
1-2 years	3	3%
3-5 years	11	12%
6-10 years	5	5%
Over 10 years	69	73%
Do not live in Sutherland	4	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Q19: If you live in Sutherland which settlement do you live in or closest to?

Area	Number	%	Area	Number	%
Melvich	1	1%	Ardgay	10	11%
Bettyhill	3	3%	Bonar Bridge	14	16%
Tongue	4	4%	Lairg	17	19%
Durness	0	0%	Dornoch	10	11%
Kinlochbervie	0	0%	Golspie	8	9%
Scourie	0	0%	Brora	5	6%
Drumbeg	2	2%	Helmsdale	3	3%
Lochinver	12	13%	Altnaharra	0	0%
Elphin	1	1%	Forsinard	0	0%
Edderton	0	0%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>			

**Q20: Which of these best applies to you?**

Employment Status	Number	%
Working for a single employer full-time	14	15%
Working for a single employer part-time	7	7%
Working for more than one employer	2	2%
Self-employed	4	4%
Unable to work - long-term sickness or disability	12	13%
Unemployed	2	2%
Retired	46	49%
Looking after the home or family	4	4%
In full-time education	2	2%
Carer	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q21: Which of the following best describes your current housing situation?**

Housing situation	Number	%
Own home/ mortgage	54	58%
Rent from a housing association	7	8%
Rent from the Council	19	20%
House comes with job	2	2%
Private rented	8	9%
Living with parents	3	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q22: Are there any school aged children in your household?**

Children in household	Number	%
Yes	12	13%
No	80	87%
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q23: Gender**

Gender	Number	%
Male	27	29%
Female	65	71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q24: Age**

Age	Number	%
16-17	1	1%
18-24	4	4%
25-34	5	5%
35-44	6	7%
45-54	16	17%
55-64	21	23%
65-74	21	23%
75 and over	18	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q25: Disability**

Disability	Number	%
Yes	35	38%
No	57	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Q26: How would you describe your ethnicity?**

Ethnicity	Number	%
White- Scottish	52	56%
White- Other British	32	34%
White- Irish	1	1%
White- Polish	1	1%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2	2%
Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British	1	1%
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	1	1%
African, African Scottish or African British	1	1%
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	1	1%
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>