

BANFF & BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2017

ROOM 5, TOWN HALL, MACDUFF

In Attendance

Councillor J. Cox (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor M. Findlater (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor M. Roy (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor B. A. Topping (Aberdeenshire Council)

Judith Taylor (Fraserburgh and District Older People's Forum)

Mary Regan (Fraserburgh and District Older People's Forum)

Therine Henderson (Rosehearty Community Council)

Elly Morrice (Rosehearty Community Council)

Bruce Taylor (Enable - Scotland)

Janet Molloy (King Edward and Gamrie Community Council & Gardenstown Resident)

Andy Sturdy (King Edward and Gamrie Community Council)

Sam Clarke (Banff Resident)

Kenneth Smith (Banff Resident)

Dougie Thomson (Macduff Resident)

Beth Smith (Macduff Bus User)

Monica Sorrell (Macduff Resident)

Rosemary Westover (Macduff Resident)

Alexander Sievwright (Bus User)

Lynn Menard (Deveron Coaches)

Richard Menard (Macduff Resident)

Graeme Leslie (Operations Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Neil Stewart (Principal Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

Susan Watt (Senior Transport Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

Apologies

Margaret-Jane Cardno (Banff & Buchan Area Manager, Aberdeenshire Council)

Roma Brookes (Banff Resident)

Gemma Coldwell (Bus User)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Cox welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.

2. Minutes of Meeting on 15th September 2016

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Neil Stewart provided the following update on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council:

- 3.1 In response to the claim that the publicity in the timetable case at the Macduff Medical Practice on Duff Street is incorrect, he confirmed that this has now been rectified.

- 3.2 In response to the request for the damaged shelter on Strichen Road, Fraserburgh, to be repaired, he confirmed that this has now been actioned.
- 3.3 In response to the query as to whether the bus shelter at Macduff Town Hall will get a replacement Real-Time display unit, he confirmed that the Council is currently waiting for contractors to undertake installation.
- 3.4 In response to the claim regarding no timetable information being provided at the bus stop on Low Street, Banff, for buses travelling to Elgin, he reported that recent checks have confirmed that there is now accurate information.
- 3.5 In response to the query as to whether parking/waiting restrictions could be installed at the bus stop and layby on Broad Street (Fraserburgh), he confirmed that there are already bus clearways markings at the site and these are more stringent than double yellow lines as they prohibit all vehicles other than buses to stop there. He also advised that Police Scotland should be contacted if other vehicles are ignoring the restrictions.
- 3.6 In response to the request for an update on the provision of new bus shelters and a layby at Kirkton Heights, Fraserburgh, he confirmed that this is currently being pursued with the developers and an update will be provided at the next meeting.

Graeme Leslie provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.7 In response to the request for Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff – Elgin) to be re-routed via Banff Academy in the evenings, he confirmed that there is sufficient time to re-route buses in the evenings, but no requests have been received by the Company.

Councillor Roy confirmed that opening of the facility is imminent and, whilst Stagecoach may not have received direct requests, the matter has been raised at previous Forum meetings and requests have been received by Councillors and Council officers, therefore there is a need for public transport to/from the facility in the evenings.

Graeme Leslie agreed to arrange for an assessment of the roads concerned and, if approved for coach operation, a proposed timetable would be provided to the Council.

- 3.8 In response to the complaint regarding the electronic screens at Fraserburgh Bus Station showing Ellon as the final destination instead of Aberdeen, he confirmed that the screens now display “Ellon for Aberdeen”.
- 3.9 In response to the request for the warning sign on the *Buchan Express* vehicles, (“Do not use stairs when bus in motion”), to be in a larger font size and relocated to the top of the stairway, he confirmed that replacement signs have been ordered.

(Subsequent to the meeting, Graeme Leslie has confirmed that the signs are now in place.)

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Graeme Leslie provided the following update:

- 4.1 Mark Whitelocks has now taken over as Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland, following Steve Walker’s departure to North East England.

- 4.2 A new Engineer Manager and additional engineering staff have been recruited in the Moray area, with the aim of addressing operational issues on services such as 35 (Elgin – Banff – Aberdeen).
- 4.3 There are some budgetary pressure on the company's commercial bus services due to the continuing fall in passenger usage, and reductions in both the reimbursement rate for participation in the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled people and also in the Bus Service Operators' Grant (funding based on the eligible kilometres they operate on registered local bus service).
- 4.4 Five additional vehicles have been allocated to the company's North Scotland operating area to maintain timetable reliability due to the challenges of traffic congestion in City of Aberdeen, including one for Service 10 (Aberdeen – Huntly – Inverness).
- 4.5 With effect from next week, the vehicles allocated to the Buchan Express corridor will each be removed from service for 1 week, on a rolling basis, to carry out the modifications as discussed at previous Forum meetings.

Councillor Topping thanked Stagecoach for this and expressed the view that it was good to see the bus company respond to public pressure, such as that exerted at the meeting in Mintlaw last year.

It was raised from "the floor" that the modifications to the steps will not fully address the access issues and that the provision of only 2 seats downstairs is not sufficient to cater for those with mobility impairments.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that the company is taking on board the passenger comments expressed since the coaches were introduced but it is impossible to provide additional seating on the lower level.

(Subsequent to the meeting, Graeme Leslie has confirmed that the first of the modified buses has now returned to service operation).

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 Confirmation of the Revenue Budget for Local Bus Services for the financial year 2017/2018 is awaited. It is unlikely that the cost of the current service provision will be contained within this budget, therefore the supported network is currently being reviewed.

6. Bus Service Requests / Development

Neil Stewart referred to the papers circulated, detailing pending and fulfilled service requests in the Banff and Buchan Area. In addition to the requests which are currently being considered by Stagecoach Bluebird in their review, he advised the following:

- 6.1 The request for Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff – Elgin) to be re-routed via Banff Academy in the evenings is currently being investigated by Stagecoach Bluebird (See page 2 Item 3.7).

- 6.2 There was a request from Councillor Topping for the housing development on the Fraserburgh by-pass at Buchan Road to be served by public transport.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be considered in Stagecoach's review of the network in the Buchan area.

7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

- 7.1 Request for the bus shelter situated on A98, at Ladysbridge road end to be relocated further back from the main road. This was coupled with a request for a footpath to be installed and the surrounding hedge and overgrowth to be pruned back.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated in conjunction with colleagues from Roads and Landscape Services.

- 7.2 Request for the bus stop located on Skene Street (Macduff) for northbound travel, to be relocated to a safer location due to the proximity of other road signs and the restricted width of the footpath.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 7.3 Request for the road signs located near the Shore Street Interchange, opposite Macduff Town Hall to be relocated, as people have to walk on the road to pass the facility.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated in conjunction with Local Roads colleagues.

- 7.4 Councillor Topping expressed his thanks for the provision of a new bus shelter at Kirkton Cemetery, Fraserburgh.

- 7.5 Request for the bus stop on Main Street at Harbour Road (Gardenstown) to be re-located, on safety grounds, to the opposite side of the road to allow passengers to board or alight when the vehicle is heading back up the hill.

Neil Stewart confirmed his understanding that this proposal was included in the Traffic Management Review of the village, which had been subject to delay, so the matter will be pursued in liaison with Local Roads colleagues.

- 7.6 Request for bus stops/shelters to be "bagged" when out of use due to temporary road works as the public notices can be damaged quite quickly, resulting in intending passengers not being aware of the situation.

Susan Watt confirmed that this would be investigated and that she did not envisage any issues with this being carried out as a routine procedure.

- 7.7 Councillor Findlater expressed his thanks for the improvements to the bus shelter on Shore Street Interchange (Macduff) outside the Town Hall.

8. Buchan Corridor

- 8.1 Request for a low floor vehicle to be allocated to one return journey per day, or even per week, between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen (Service 67/68), to allowing travel for people with mobility difficulties.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that it would not be desirable to allocate a low floor vehicle to a service corridor of this the length and, crucially, a replacement vehicle of the same type could not be guaranteed in cases breakdowns.

9. Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff – Elgin)

- 9.1 Complaints regarding the frequency of breakdowns and non-operation of journeys, “poor quality” vehicles being allocated to the corridor, and faulty door mechanisms.

Graeme Leslie accepted that there have been operational issues on the corridor, including problems with some doors. He referred to the aforementioned additional engineering staff resources and confirmed that the revised vehicle inspection regime, whilst being reduced from every 3 weeks to every 4 weeks, is considerably more robust than before and has been trialled successfully in other operating areas.

He also confirmed that 3 newer vehicles have been allocated to the corridor and a further one will follow in the next few months.

Councillor Findlater welcomed the recruitment of additional engineering staff, whilst requesting that as many new buses as possible are allocated to the corridor.

- 9.2 Query as to whether there are engineers based in Macduff to deal with local issues.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that one engineer is based in Macduff between 0500 hours and 1700 hours, but the vehicles on the corridor are maintained in Elgin.

- 9.3 Query as to how many breakdowns have occurred on the corridor over the last year.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that 99.7% of the service mileage, equating to 370,000 miles, was operated.

Councillor Cox requested that the breakdown figures be provided at the next meeting.

- 9.4 Repeated request for the service to revert to operation via Union Terrace (Aberdeen) in the evenings, for those travelling home from HM Theatre (HMT).

Susan Watt confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird and HMT operated a scheme which allowed passengers to request travel from the theatre to travel home, but this was withdrawn due to lack of usage.

Graeme Leslie echoed this and confirmed that any usage was limited to travel over short distances.

- 9.5 Query as to why there has been a reduction in the number of journeys between Elgin and Banff.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this was due to decrease passenger usage to/from this section of route.

- 9.6 Claim regarding insufficient seating capacity, on a regular basis, on the 1605 hours ex Elgin – Aberdeen (Monday to Friday).

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 9.7 Claim regarding insufficient seating capacity, on a regular basis, on p.m. peak journeys from Aberdeen, with the assertion that buses are often full to capacity on departing Union Square Bus Station, resulting in passengers intending to travel to destinations such as Macduff and Banff, being left at bus stops within the City, particularly at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Councillor Cox confirmed that this had been raised at previous meetings.

Graeme Leslie confirmed his understanding that capacity problems during the p.m. peak period had been addressed when the service was last reviewed, but he would arrange for further monitoring. He stressed that larger capacity coaches cannot be allocated to the corridor due to road capacity on some sections (e.g. Fyvie) not being able to accommodate longer vehicles.

10. Services 78/79 (Fraserburgh Town Service)

Bruce Taylor enquired as to progress in replacing the coach allocated to the services, with a more accessible vehicle.

Graeme Leslie explained that a coach is currently allocated to Service 271 (Banff – Fraserburgh (Banff and Buchan Technical College) to cater for passenger demand and the same vehicle is used during the daytime to cover Services 78/79, as this maximises the use of resources.

He agreed to have another look at vehicle allocations to see if he could fulfil this request.

(Subsequent to the meeting, Graeme Leslie has advised that a more accessible type of vehicle has been allocated to the above services on a trial basis. The bus is called a "commuter", and whilst there are still a couple of steps they are far less daunting than on a coach and there is level access for a wheelchair.)

11. A.O.B

- 11.1 Councillor Topping expressed his thanks to Councillor Cox for chairing the Bus Forum over the last five years.

12. Next Meeting

Councillor Cox confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Fraserburgh in autumn 2017.