

# **KINCARDINE AND MEARNS AREA BUS FORUM**

**MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

**STAFF ROOM, MACKIE ACADEMY, STONEHAVEN**

## **In Attendance**

### **Councillor W. Agnew (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor S. Dickson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor I. J. Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council)

Lindsey Wood (Stonehaven and District Community Council)

Michael Morgan (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Paul Melling (Portlethen Community Council and TRAK)

Janette Anderson (Mearns Community Council)

Ian Hunter (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Ainslie Thomson (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Dorothy Foreman (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Valentine Skinner (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Mary Wood (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Jim Gardner (Xplore Dundee)

Alan Roberston (Xplore Dundee)

Michelene Allan (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Patricia Morris (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Marina Pirie (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

May Riddle (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Nora Walker (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

David Walker (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Isabella Murray (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Nancy Grant (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Carrie Riddell (Portlethen Resident & Bus User)

Anna Findlater (Newtonhill Resident & Bus User)

John Ord (Muchalls Bus User)

Duncan Ross (Bus User)

Kathleen Baird (Bus User)

Christine Baird (Bus User)

Sandra Horsburgh ((Bus User)

E Williamson (Bus User)

Cecile Mackie (Bus User)

Bella Davidson (Bus User)

Audrey Bethune (Bus User)

Ann MacLeod (Bus User)

Lilian Mair (Bus User)

Jane Lawrie (Bus User)

John Shinnie (Bus User)

Dave Stewart (Bus User)

Mark Whitelocks (Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Kenny McWalter (Operations Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland)

Neil Stewart (Principal Officer, Public Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

Susan Watt (Senior Transport Officer, Public Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

## **Apologies**

Councillor G. Carr (Aberdeenshire Council)

Morag Andrew (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Susie Brown (Mearns Community Council)

### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

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

### **2. Minutes of the Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017**

The minutes were approved with one exception raised from the floor, that Item 3.8 should read 1355 hours - 1800 hours and not 1500 hours - 1800 hours. The minutes have been amended to reflect this.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

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

- 3.1 A review of Council supported Local Bus Services was required to ensure that expenditure on socially necessary bus services did not exceed the 2017/2018 Budget allocation. Economies had to be made and as a result, service changes were implemented on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
- 3.2 The 2245 hours and 2345 hours ex Aberdeen - Ballater via Drumoak (Monday to Saturday) were rationalised into one departure at 2315 hours.
- 3.3 Service 26 (Stonehaven – Laurencekirk/Luthermuir) was subject to a doubling in frequency on an experimental basis in August 2015, with 2 buses operating the service, but limited additional demand has materialised. The review resulted in the service reverting to an approximate two hourly frequency between Stonehaven and Laurencekirk, with additional return journeys to/from Luthermuir as from 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

He explained that it was imperative that the journeys carrying schoolchildren were maintained, as well as connections with Service X7 (Aberdeen – Stonehaven – Perth) at Stonehaven, and this resulted in the 1604 hours ex Laurencekirk – Luthermuir (Monday to Friday) not being retained. However, he pointed out that there are now 2 return journeys between Luthermuir and Laurencekirk (Monday to Saturday).

Councillor Mollison queried whether Service 103 (Cookney – Bridge of Dee) had been reprieved until March 2018.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the service will continue to operate until March 2018, but it may be one of the services at risk during next financial year.

Mark Whitelocks provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.4 In response to the complaint from former Councillor Graeme Clark, regarding a number of the on board clocks being at the wrong times, he confirmed that this was continuing to be monitored.

Kenny McWalter provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach East Scotland:

- 3.5 In response to the requests to consider additional bell pushes and grab rails on the vehicles operating Service X7, he confirmed that this had been investigated in conjunction with the manufacturers and it was concluded that that this would not be possible due to the interior design of the vehicle.

It was raised from the floor that the stairway to the upper saloon is dangerous.

- 3.6 In response to the claim that a wheelchair user was unable to board at Holburn junction on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2016, due to the driver being unable to secure the wheelchair in place, he confirmed that the driver was at fault and has been re-trained.

#### **4. Stagecoach Bus Service Update**

Mark Whitelocks provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach:

- 4.1 Since the service revisions in May 2017, Stagecoach Bluebird have been monitoring their performance, and further proposals are being considered for January 2018. They are currently reviewing the Aberdeen - Stonehaven corridor.

#### **5. Aberdeenshire Council Update**

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 The results of the autumn 2016 Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey (BPSS) have been compiled. The methodology has changed so it has not been very easy to make comparisons between the autumn 2016 and spring 2016 surveys. He confirmed that the main difference in execution was that 516 surveys were carried out on board services operated by Stagecoach Bluebird in Aberdeenshire (including those operating to/from Aberdeen), whilst in spring 2016, 300 surveys were carried out at bus stops on the 6 principal Aberdeenshire bus corridors, as well as 300 surveys at Union Square Bus Station.

Whilst positive satisfaction with the “Overall Journey Experience” has increased, it has only increased in four of the seventeen other categories.

Other than the methodology used and the time of year concerned, it is unclear as to why positive satisfaction levels have dropped in so many categories in Aberdeenshire, but the results will be discussed at the Local Authority Bus Operators Forum.

It was considered that a more representative comparison was undertaken with the results of an average across 7 English rural authorities in autumn 2016, as the same methodology was used as in Aberdeenshire. The results for the English authorities were also generally higher, with positive satisfaction in 10 of the 18 categories outscoring Aberdeenshire.

He explained that the original autumn 2016 survey covered the Nestrans area (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City) and it was the request for the results to be split between City and Shire which incurred the lengthy delay in informing the Area Bus Forums.

- 5.2 Transport Minister Humza Yousaf last month launched a Consultation on the future of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme. The Consultation is available online at <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/> until 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

## **6. Bus Service Requests/Development**

Neil Stewart welcomed requests from the floor, and referred to the papers circulated, detailing pending and fulfilled service requests in the Marr Area, and provided the following update:

- 6.1 The request for additional journeys to be extended to/from Luthermuir had been fulfilled by Aberdeenshire Council with 2 additional return journeys provided Monday to Saturday as from 17<sup>th</sup> July 2017, whilst he acknowledged that the late afternoon return journey had been withdrawn due to school transport demands.
- 6.2 The request for alternate journeys to operate in opposite directions to allow passengers to return from Robert Street (Stonehaven Medical Centre) had been fulfilled by Stagecoach Bluebird with an additional hourly anti-clockwise service (Monday to Saturday) as from 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017.
- 6.3 The request for additional inter peak journeys from Berrymuir Road (Portlethen) to/from Stonehaven, was fulfilled by Stagecoach Bluebird on 8 May 2017, with a 20 minute service during the day and an hourly service in the evenings (Monday to Saturday).
- 6.4 The request for additional northbound buses from Stonehaven to Portlethen to fill a gap from 1500 hours to 1800 hours (Monday to Friday) had been fulfilled by Stagecoach Bluebird, with journeys departing at 1612 hours and 1731 hours.
- 6.5 It is not possible to fulfil the request for the 0630 hours ex Laurencekirk – Stonehaven (Service 26) (Monday to Friday) to be advanced by over 30 minutes to connect with the 0635 hours ex Stonehaven (Barclay Street) to Aberdeen via Altens.

## **7. Public Transport Infrastructure/Information**

Neil Stewart welcomed requests for bus stops, bus shelters and related infrastructure to be considered for the next financial year.

- 7.1 Request for provision of a bus shelter on Kirkton Road (Stonehaven), opposite the entrance to Kincardine Community Hospital.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 7.2 Thanks were expressed from the floor for the provision of a bus shelter on Newtonhill Road (Newtonhill).

- 7.3 It was pointed out from the floor that there are a number of laybys on the A90 south of Laurencekirk, which have bus stop road markings in place but no poles/shields, and that confirmation is required as to whether these are official bus stops. It was added that some of these stops are not served by registered local bus services.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated by his colleagues in consultation with BEAR Scotland, given that the A90 is a trunk road.

- 7.4 Complaint that Union Square Bus Station is not fit for purpose, highlighting that there are insufficient stances and too many people boarding vehicles at the same time.

Neil Stewart confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird have had several meetings with the developers (Hammerson Ltd), with plans put forward for improved access and additional stances.

- 7.5 Complaint regarding the service times displayed at bus stops being difficult to read, as there is no composite information.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the publicity is produced through an automated system and that it is not currently possible to provide this in a composite format.

**8. Services X7/7A/7B (Aberdeen – Portlethen – Stonehaven) and 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town)**

- 8.1 Repeated request for the gap to be filled in the mornings from Stonehaven (Farrochie Road) to Aberdeen, highlighting that people travelling to the City, in particular those attending Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, have no direct journeys after 0718 hours, and the next journey from Farrochie Road is at 0929 hours on Service 4C (Stonehaven Town Service), involving a connection with a Service 7B departure, which does not arrive in Aberdeen until 1052 hours.

It was also raised from the floor that there are single-deckers observed during the above period, which display “not in service” and it was queried whether these could be re-routed to Farrochie Road.

Mark Whitelocks confirmed that with vehicles allocated to school contracts and the restraints due to the height of the railway bridge on Slug Road, there are insufficient vehicles available to bridge this gap. However, he acknowledged the frustration displayed at the meeting and confirmed that the matter would be re-investigated.

- 8.2 Request for an update from the Council on the railway bridge on Slug Road.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the maximum clearance at the bridge does not permit operation of Stagecoach Bluebird’s double deck buses and that the company had requested that consideration be given to increasing the operating height of the bridge through civil works (i.e. lowering the road) to facilitate the use of such vehicles.

He confirmed his understanding that funding for such a project was not available at the time but requested that Mark Whitelocks write to the Head of Transportation at Aberdeenshire Council to obtain an update on this matter.

- 8.3 Request for the 0915 hours ex Barclay Street – Forest Road – Barclay Street return journey (Service 4C) to be re-timed to connect with the 0937 hours ex Barclay Street – Aberdeen (Service X7: Perth – Stonehaven – Aberdeen). It was also raised that other journeys on Services 4A and 4C need to be retimed to connect with Service X7 or Service 7 (Aberdeen – Portlethen – Stonehaven).

Mark Whitelocks confirmed that this would be taken into account in the service review.

- 8.4 Further to the above, a complaint was raised that passengers travelling from the top of the town in Stonehaven, such as Farrochie Road, have to catch 3 buses in order to travel between Farrochie Road and Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that with the aforementioned restraints due to the railway bridge on Slug Road, the additional journeys on Stonehaven Town service (4A/4C) were introduced to serve the area.
- 8.5 Request for the following gaps to be filled between Newtonhill Park & Choose and Aberdeen:
- 0801 hours and 0850 hours ex Newtonhill to Aberdeen (Monday to Friday).
  - 1626 hours and 1722 hours ex Newtonhill to Aberdeen (Monday to Friday).
  - 0805 hours and 0905 hours ex Aberdeen to Newtonhill (Monday to Friday).
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that this would be considered at the next service change.
- 8.6 Request for Berrymuir Road (Portlethen) to be served in both directions.
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that this would be considered at the next service change.
- 8.7 Query as to why only some drivers pick up and drop off at the bus stop located on Forest Drive (at Holly Drive) in Stonehaven.
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that all drivers should be stopping at this bus stop and asked that dates and times be provided.
- (Following the meeting, he confirmed that some journeys operate as “not in service” to Forest Park, where they commence operation. With effect from 9<sup>th</sup> October, Stagecoach amended the starting point to the railway station, so that all stops on Forest Road are now observed).
- 8.8 Complaint that passengers are asked to pay 2 separate fares when travelling on Service 4A/4C to connect with a mainline service to Aberdeen.
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that there should be no fares penalties and that notices to this effect have been issued to all drivers affected.
- 8.9 Complaint regarding fares being too expensive on the corridor, highlighting that the fare between Stonehaven and Aberdeen was previously £6.50 return, but has increased to £9.50 return.
- (Following the meeting, Mark Whitelocks confirmed that the Aberdeen zone 3 adult dayrider ticket, which costs £8.20, allows unlimited journeys for one day within and across zones 1, 2 and 3).
- 8.10 Query as to why operators, other than Stagecoach Bluebird, are not serving the corridor.
- Neil Stewart confirmed that any suitably qualified operator (i.e. holds a valid PSV operator’s licence) can decide to provide a local bus service on a commercial basis.
- 8.11 Claim that drivers of Service 7B buses travelling into Aberdeen frequently wait at the Marywell Caravan Park bus stop for no apparent reason.
- Mark Whitelocks confirmed that this was probably due to arriving ahead of time but this would be investigated at the next service change.

- 8.12 Claim that Stagecoach did not adequately inform their passengers of service revisions whilst resurfacing works were being undertaken on the A90 at Muchalls on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017, resulting in passengers being dropped off some distance from their intended destinations.

Mark Whitelocks confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 8.13 Request for school opening and closing times to be revised to allow buses to be freed up for those travelling to/from work.

Neil Stewart agreed that this is an area which could be investigated, as it could lead to savings in the Council's various transport budgets.

## **9. Service 26 (Stonehaven – Laurencekirk / Luthermuir)**

- 9.1 Request to re-instate the extension of the 1520 hours ex Stonehaven – Laurencekirk (Mon - Fri) to serve Luthermuir.

Neil Stewart confirmed that there is insufficient time within the timetable to extend the journey to/from Luthermuir, without affecting journeys carrying schoolchildren from Mackie Academy and Mearns Academy, whilst highlighting that passenger numbers to/from Luthermuir at this time were extremely low.

- 9.2 Request for other School Transport journeys in the area to be registered as local bus services to carry fare paying passengers, with reference to a Council contract between Luthermuir and Mearns Academy.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 9.3 Repeated claim that Local Members and bus passengers had not been consulted prior to the original service change in 2015, coupled with a query as to how much money was saved due to the service revision in July 2017.

Neil Stewart re-affirmed that the 2015 proposals had been discussed at the Bus Forum, with the minutes being made available to everyone on the distribution list, including Local Members, Community Councils, and bus users. He also re-affirmed that Councillors had been consulted through the Council's Member/Officer Steering Group in August 2014 and that the proposals were approved at the Council's Infrastructure Services Committee in November 2014.

He also confirmed that savings of over £80,000 per annum were accrued from the July 2017 revision.

## **10. A.O.B**

- 10.1 Complaint that Findon, Old Portlethen and Downies are not served by a local bus service.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Council's North Kincardine A2B dial-a-bus service is available for residents in those areas. He also advised that a conventional local bus service had been trialled in these areas but had resulted in extremely limited usage.

10.2 Request for the provision a Portlethen Town Service.

Neil Stewart confirmed that Stagecoach have ruled this out as it would not be commercially viable and most parts of the town are already covered by mainline services.

10.3 Request for two Bus Forums to be held in the Kincardine and Mearns Area, split geographically between the Stonehaven and Laurencekirk/Luthermuir areas.

Neil Stewart confirmed that similar requests had been received in other Areas and that it would be considered.

10.4 Request for an update on the Chapelton – Chapelton Park & Choose shuttle service.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the developer was required to provide a service specified by the Council following the occupation of 80 houses, but he understood that there had been a disagreement over the type of service to be provided. He also confirmed that it was envisaged that the area will be served on a commercial basis in due course.

Councillor Mollison confirmed that an agreement had been reached between the developers and the Council, resulting in the provision of a demand responsive service, for which residents must book 24 hours in advance. He added that, to his knowledge, only one resident is currently using the service.

Mark Whitelocks confirmed that the provision of a local bus service is not commercially viable at this time but the company would keep it under consideration as the area develops.

10.5 Request for the Megabus services operating between Aberdeen and Edinburgh/Glasgow to stop just off the A90 to serve places such as Laurencekirk and Stonehaven.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this has been previously investigated and ruled out by the operator on the basis that, in order to remain competitive, they are always looking at ways of generally improving journey times rather than making additional stops.

Councillor Mollison suggested that as designs for a grade separated junction on the A90 at Laurencekirk were being discussed currently, there could be an opportunity now for an additional stop there to be incorporated into the plans.

10.6 Request for an update on the Portlethen Park and Ride at Schoolhill and adjacent lorry park.

Councillor Mollison confirmed that the £10 million required to build the facility was not available from the Scottish Government and that the plans had included a lorry park.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Agnew confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Stonehaven in spring 2018. Further details will be advised in due course.

## Appendix A

### Transport Focus: Autumn 2016 Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey

#### Size of Sample per Aberdeenshire Service Surveyed

Route Number	Service Description	Number of Passengers
7	Stonehaven - Newtonhill - Portlethen - Aberdeen	6
7B	Portlethen - Aberdeen	60
10	Inverness - Elgin - Huntly - Inverurie - Aberdeen	22
35	Elgin - Banff - Macduff - Oldmeldrum - Aberdeen	30
35A	Oldmeldrum - Aberdeen	14
37	Inverurie - Kintore - Blackburn - Aberdeen	51
41*	Insch - Inverurie	3
60	Peterhead - Hatton - Ellon - Aberdeen	36
63	Peterhead - Cruden Bay - Newburgh - Aberdeen	28
67	Fraserburgh - New Leeds - Mintlaw - Ellon - Aberdeen	68
68	Fraserburgh - Strichen - Mintlaw - Ellon - Aberdeen	13
69	Fraserburgh - St Fergus - Peterhead	17
82	Peterhead Town Service (Chapel Street - Meethill)	11
201*	Braemar - Ballater - Banchory - Aberdeen	32
202	Lumphanan - Banchory - Aberdeen	71
203	Braemar - Ballater - Hill of Banchory - Aberdeen	24
291*	Methlick - Tarves - Pitmedden - Belhelvie - Aberdeen	25
421	Alford / Kemnay - Inverurie	5

**NOTE:** Services 41 and 291 are wholly supported by Aberdeenshire Council  
Service 201 is partially supported by Aberdeenshire Council

## Appendix B

### Comparisons and Benchmarking

Indicator	% Positive Satisfaction		
	Aberdeenshire Spring 2016: AECOM	Aberdeenshire Autumn 2016: Transport Focus	Average Across 7 English Rural Authorities Autumn 2016: Transport Focus
Overall Experience	80%	85%	91%
Punctuality	81%	65%	78%
Frequency	75%	60%	n/a
Value for Money	68%	58%	61%
Information at Bus Stop	86%	71%	71%
Personal Safety at Bus Stop	94%	76%	80%
Condition of Bus Stop	83%	79%	72%
Cleanliness of Bus Stop	84%	83%	80%
Length of Time Waiting	73%	65%	76%
Ease of Finding a Seat	93%	98%	89%
Personal Safety on the Bus	92%	86%	88%
Information on the Bus	69%	64%	67%
Cleanliness of Bus	85%	86%	84%
Condition of Bus	79%	79%	82%
Level of Comfort	85%	83%	80%
Driver Behaviour	89%	80%	82%
Ease of Getting On and Off Bus	77%	78%	93%
Smoothness of Journey	86%	81%	80%

**NOTE:** n/a - Information was not available for this category