

BANFF & BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 21ST MARCH 2018

ROOM 2, DALRYMPLE HALL, FRASERBURGH

In Attendance

Councillor A. Kille (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor D. Mair (Aberdeenshire Council)

Bruce Taylor (Enable - Scotland)

Elly Morrice (Rosehearty Community Council)

Therine Henderson (Rosehearty Community Council)

Alison Wymes (Fraserburgh Community Council & Fraserburgh – Aberdeen Commuter)

Ewan Masson (Fraserburgh – Aberdeen Commuter)

Nan Williamson (Bus User)

Rita Marques (Bus User)

David Gibbins (Ban-Car Hotel)

Tina Gibbins (Ban-Car Hotel)

James Jackson (Bus User)

John Buchan (Bus User)

D. Lawrie (Bus User)

K. Lawrie (Bus User)

Martin Burnett (Bus User)

May Barclay (Bus User)

Margaret Anderson (Bus User)

Patsy Clark (Bus User)

Roger Mudie (Bus User)

Alastair Mudie (Bus User)

Trudy Nilson (Bus User)

Graeme Leslie (Operations Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

Claire Marshall (Transport Officer, Passenger Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

Apologies

Councillor B. Topping (Aberdeenshire Council)

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

Donna Stuart (Bus User)

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

2. Minutes of Meeting on 24th August 2017

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

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

- 3.1 Regarding the request for the relocation of a shelter on Main Street at Harbour Road (Gardenstown), he advised that there has been a misprint in the minutes and that the request actually related to a bus stop. He confirmed that the request will be considered once the works relating to the landslip have been completed.
- 3.2 In response to the request for the 0900 hours ex Banff – Fraserburgh (Service 272) to revert to its previous departure time of 0855 hours, he confirmed that this was implemented as of 8th January 2018.
- 3.3 In response to the request for the provision of a bus shelter opposite Kirkton Cemetery, Fraserburgh, he confirmed that this will be considered within the 2018-2019 financial year budget.
- 3.4 In regards to the vandalised electronic Real-Time screen at Broad Street (Fraserburgh), he confirmed that this is still inactive, with plans to replace the shelter in the 2018-2019 financial year, and provide a 28” screen which will hopefully be more vandal-proof.

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

- 3.5 In response to the request for Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff – Elgin) to be re-routed via Deveron Community and Sports Centre in the evenings, he confirmed that details of opening/closing times have been sought and, following completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), the whole A947 corridor will be revised and the request will be taken into account.
- 3.6 In response to the request for the 0816 hours ex St Combs (Service 69: previously Service 75) to be retimed to allow a connection with the 0830 hours ex Fraserburgh – Aberdeen (Service 67), he confirmed that this was not possible due to an earlier contracted school journey. He advised that there is a departure from Fraserburgh at 0857 hours.
- 3.7 In response to the request for the warning sign on *Buchan Xpress* vehicles to be in larger font and relocated to the top of the stairway, he confirmed that this had been fulfilled.

Bruce Taylor acknowledged this but suggested that the signs would be better located behind the seats, at the top of the stairs, instead of on the window.

- 3.8 In response to the list of complaints compiled by Councillor Cox regarding Service 35, Graeme Leslie confirmed that he did not dispute any of the claims and acknowledged that the breakdowns occurred. He confirmed that every effort is being made to improve reliability on the corridor with a number of improvements to the age profile of the fleet over the last year which has seen 13 coaches replaced with newer vehicles in this time. In response to concerns raised at the prior forum over air conditioning, a campaign has been undertaken on the Moray fleet to address this, over and above routine maintenance.

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Graeme Leslie provided the following update:

- 4.1 The first 3 months of the year have been very challenging for the company in the Buchan and Moray areas, with the worst winter he has seen since coming to the area in 2010. The build-up of salt on the roads had resulted in a rise in electrical faults on the vehicles. In addition, there had been a rise in suspension damage and broken windows due to the condition of the roads, however he praised the Council's reporting system for potholes.
- 4.2 Service 35A (Aberdeen – Oldmeldrum/Banff) was withdrawn, due to very low patronage, on 8th January 2018.
- 4.3 Stagecoach Bluebird is in the process of rolling out a contactless payment system for passengers. This means that drivers can carry less cash and it speeds up passenger boarding. Stagecoach Bluebird is the first in the Stagecoach Group in Scotland to roll this out, but other Stagecoach companies in the UK have benefitted from this upgrade.
- 4.4 Once the AWPR is completed, the network will need to be looked at in terms of running times and to investigate what opportunities are presented.
- 4.5 The results of the autumn 2017 Bus Passenger Survey, undertaken by Transport Focus, show a general increase in satisfaction from 86% in autumn 2016 to 89%, across approximately 800 bus users surveyed in north east Scotland.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the split between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City passengers will be known later this year and will be reported at the next round of Forum meetings.

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 Coinciding with commercial service changes on 8th January 2018, the Tuesday and Friday return journeys on Service 253 (Turrieff – New Deer – Fraserburgh) were rerouted via A90 (Rathen) instead of B9033 (St Combs) to provide faster journeys and additional time in Fraserburgh.
- 5.2 For the second consecutive year, a review of Council supported Local Bus Services was required to ensure that expenditure on socially necessary bus services did not exceed the Budget allocation for the forthcoming financial year, with a predicted shortfall in the 2018/19 Budget of approximately £200,000.

The review resulted in the withdrawal of Service 252 (New Deer – Mintlaw – Fraserburgh North East Scotland College) with effect from 7th May 2018, but measures have been taken to mitigate against this, with the Central Buchan A2B dial-a-bus service being extended to commence 30 minutes earlier at 0730 hours (Monday to Friday) to enable those travelling on the New Deer - Mintlaw leg of the journey to connect with the Stagecoach 0816 hours ex Mintlaw – Fraserburgh (Service 67). The Council will also be contacting the college to see if there are any spaces available on the dedicated transport which operates from Inverurie to the college via Mintlaw.

The withdrawal of Service 252 will result in net savings of approximately £40,000 per year.

6. Bus Service Requests / Development

- 6.1 Request for additional journeys between Albany Court (Dennyduff Road) and Broad Street, pointing out that the area only has a bus per hour, whilst Buchan Road has 3 buses per hour.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be considered.

7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

Neil Stewart welcomed any infrastructure or information requests/comments from the floor.

- 7.1 Claim that the timetable information on Union Grove, Fraserburgh, is displayed incorrectly with the inserts both on the wrong side of the street, requiring just to be swapped over.
- 7.2 Request for timetable information to be displayed in the cases at the bus stops in Lonmay.
- 7.3 Request for the re-instatement of a bus stop at Lonmay, highlighting that the shield has been missing for a number of years.
- 7.4 Complaint regarding incorrect information within Stagecoach Bluebird's Buchan Travel Guide (dated 8th January 2018) as listed below:
- The Fraserburgh map incorrectly displays Services 78A and 79A, instead of Services 78A and 78C.
 - The Service 272 timetable should have the route heading the other way round to correspond with the correct timetable.

8. Service 69/69B (Fraserburgh – St Combs/Lonmay/Peterhead)

- 8.1 Various requests/suggestions/complaints relating to the reduction in the level of service to/from Lonmay on 8th January 2018, as follows:

- Request for additional journeys between Fraserburgh and Lonmay, particularly during the peak periods, but also to bridge the gap between 1044 hours and 1424 hours.
- Request for additional journeys between Lonmay and Crimond/Peterhead, as there are no buses between 0852 hours/1647 hours ex Lonmay and no northbound buses between 0750 hours/2015 hours ex Peterhead. It was pointed out that the medical centre is in Crimond.

It was highlighted that some passengers alight at Cortes junction and face a 20 minute walk along an unlit pathway to Lonmay. Furthermore, the Ban-Car Hotel has lost 2 members of staff as they were unable to travel to/from facility following the revision.

- It was suggested from the floor that buses could double back from B9033 to A90 to serve Lonmay and it would only take approx. 5 minutes.
- Another suggestion from the floor was to operate alternate journeys via Lonmay or St Combs, to which Neil Stewart responded that the settlements of Cairnbulg/Inverallochy and St Combs are considerably larger than Lonmay.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that a service review was carried out in the Buchan Area and services were reduced or amalgamated where passenger demand was limited. Whilst agreeing to consider the various requests, he confirmed that he couldn't guarantee that any additional journeys could be added into the corridor.

8.2 Query as to whether consultation was undertaken prior to the 8th January 2018 changes.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that consultation started in line with registration guidelines 70 days prior to the implementation date, as is normal practice, and undertaken through the Stagecoach website and at various facilities, with over a hundred replies received. He confirmed that, on the basis of feedback received, some journeys were re-instated between Lonmay and Fraserburgh.

He advised that the services must be commercially viable for the company and this was the issue with the previous level of service due to low patronage. Following monitoring of the corridor, changes were introduced to suit the majority of those travelling and provide the most comprehensive routes possible.

He confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird is facing a number of challenges with the current economic climate, reduced concessionary fare reimbursement rates, less income from local authorities due to pressure on their budgets, on-going fleet replacement, and also uncertainty in the bus industry with the Scottish Government's Transport Bill.

8.3 Claim regarding insufficient seating capacity provided on peak journeys between Peterhead and St Combs, resulting in passengers having to stand.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be investigated.

9. Services 67/68 (Fraserburgh – Aberdeen)

9.1 Claim regarding frequent late running and insufficient seating capacity on the corridor during peak hours, in particular the 0510 hours and 0700 hours ex Fraserburgh – Aberdeen and 1710 hours ex Aberdeen - Fraserburgh, due to "unsuitable" vehicles, such as low floor buses, being allocated to the journeys, resulting in passengers having to stand from Mintlaw onwards on southbound journeys and from Aberdeen to Ellon northbound.

Councillor Mair confirmed that the 0700 hours ex Fraserburgh was full on arrival at Mintlaw on Monday 19th March 2018 and that she had received 6 emails on this issue.

The dates of the northbound issues were given as 13th March 2018 and 20th March 2018.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that there had been some mechanical issues with the "Buchan Xpress" coaches, resulting in substitute vehicles being allocated to ensure all journeys were covered but confirmed that he would investigate the current situation to ensure that smaller vehicles are not scheduled to the route.

There was a request from the floor that no "old" double deck buses be used either.

9.2 Claim regarding late running of the 0510 hours ex Fraserburgh – Aberdeen, due to a particular driver switching the engine off and restarting it at every bus stop and regularly walking up and down the bus checking passenger numbers.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that the driver would be identified and retrained accordingly.

- 9.3 Request for the 1710 hours ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh (Monday to Friday) to omit Ellon Park and Ride.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that a significant number of Ellon passengers prefer to travel on the longer distance coaches, due to increased comfort and shorter journey times, compared with the local Service 62, which operates via Balmedie. However, he agreed to consider the request.

- 9.4 Request for the 1710 hours ex Fraserburgh – Aberdeen to operate as a limited stop service within Aberdeen, as some passengers only travel short distances within the City, at the expense of people wishing to travel long distances.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that the services are registered to pick up and set down at all bus stops and there are no plans to implement such restrictions, as City passengers contribute to the commercial viability and level of service provided.

- 9.5 Councillor Mair referred to complaints received from constituents regarding some evening and Sunday journeys making diversions to operate via Foveran, resulting in additional journey time, and sometimes nobody boards or alights there.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the on-going AWPR works between Aberdeen and Ellon have resulted in Foveran being omitted from the route, so Service 62 and some evening and Sunday journeys on Services 67/68 are currently diverting via Foveran pending completion of the works, so the village is not abandoned.

- 9.6 Query as to whether drivers are trained to operate the heating systems on the buses, highlighting that the vehicles are very cold in the winter but can be too hot in the summer.

Graeme Leslie expressed disappointment, confirming that drivers have been trained on how to operate the heating systems and that this matter would be raised again.

- 9.7 Claim that, on a recent occasion, whilst passengers were boarding the 1805 hours ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh at Union Square Bus Station, they were asked to leave the vehicle as it was required to operate another service, resulting in passengers having to wait 25 minutes for another vehicle. A complaint had been lodged with Stagecoach but, as yet, no response has been received.

Graeme Leslie asked the passenger to provide him with full details after the meeting, whilst promising to investigate this matter.

10. Services 78/79 (Fraserburgh Town Service)

- 10.1 Query as to why the service has been reduced to every 2 hours with effect from 8 January 2018.

Graeme Leslie referred to the company's network review, confirming that patronage was low and it was not commercially viable to operate more frequently.

Neil Stewart confirmed that Fraserburgh is one of the few towns in Aberdeenshire where Stagecoach provide a commercial town service and this is appreciated by the Council, in view of its own financial constraints.

11. Service 272 (Banff – Fraserburgh)

- 11.1 Claim regarding poor quality vehicles, with particular reference to an “old” double decker, operating on the route, with the claim that the heating system does not work and there is excessive condensation.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this vehicle operates a school contract in the Banff area prior to Service 272, and pupil numbers warrant a double decker to meet capacity. He confirmed that the heating and condensation issues would be investigated, whilst advising that the oldest buses in the Buchan area are “57 plate” vehicles which have a typical lifespan of 16 years.

12. Next Meeting

Councillor Kille confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Fraserburgh in autumn 2018.