

KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 29TH MARCH 2018

MAIN HALL, STONEHAVEN TOWN HALL, STONEHAVEN

In Attendance

Councillor W. Agnew (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor G. Carr (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor S. Dickinson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor I. J. Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council)

Michael Bennett (Benholm & Johnshaven Community Council)

Chris Greene (Benholm & Johnshaven Community Council)

Michael Morgan (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Geo Ewing (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

A Cooper (Bus User)

Jane Findlater (KCA Deutag)

Sheena Adam (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Sandra Walker (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Irene Gray (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Mike Duncan (Bus User)

Duncan Ross (Bus User)

Cecile Mackie (Bus User)

Betty Murray (Bus User)

Roger Armstrong (Bus User)

Anna Findlater (Bus User)

John Shinnie (Bus User)

Séamas Ó Dálaigh (Bus User)

Marina Pirie (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Christina Herd (Bus User)

Hilda Herald (Bus User)

Catherine Bain (Bus User)

May Riddle (Stonehaven Resident & Bus User)

Paul Melling

Mary Wood (Transport Action Kincardine)

Ainslie Thomson (Transport Action Kincardine)

Dorothy Foreman (Transport Action Kincardine)

Bella Davidson (Bus User)

Janette Anderson (Mearns Community Council)

Ian Hunter (Transport Action Kincardine)

Lindsey Wood (Stonehaven and District Community Council)

Fiona Tavendale (Stonehaven and District Community Council)

Graeme Leslie (Operations Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Kenny McWalter (Operations Manager, Stagecoach East 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

Morag Andrew (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

2. Minutes of Meeting on 28th September 2017

- 2.1 There was a request from the floor for a response relating to Item 8.13 in the minutes i.e. suggestion that the Council look at other areas of the country to see how school times affect local bus services.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that it is common practice for local authorities to have varied school finishing times and this impacts on the cost of providing contracted transport.

(For information, the Council's Passenger Transport Unit does not determine school start and finish times, so it is advised that enquiries be submitted to Education and Children's Services)

- 2.2 It was pointed out that the list of fulfilled requests should state that with regard to the level of service between Berrymuir Road (Portlethen) and Stonehaven, there is currently an hourly service during the daytime and a 1-2 hourly service in the evening.

Susan Watt confirmed that the document would be updated accordingly.

- 2.3 The remainder of 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 request for the provision of a bus shelter on Kirkton Road (Stonehaven) opposite the entrance to Kincardine Community Hospital, he confirmed that the site has been assessed however there is an issue with trees in the vicinity of the preferred location. Colleagues are investigating this and it is still the intention to provide a facility during the 2018-19 financial year.
- 3.2 In response to the query regarding laybys on the A90 south of Laurencekirk which have bus stop markings in place but no poles/shields, he confirmed that three laybys have been identified which are not served by any bus services. He added that Transport Scotland will be informed that the bus stop markings are essentially redundant but he could not confirm whether any action will be taken. Likewise, where laybys on a bus route have been identified, bus stop markings will be requested, but again, no assurances can be made as this is also under the jurisdiction of Transport Scotland.
- 3.3 In regards to the issue with the railway bridge height on Slug Road, Stonehaven, he confirmed the civil works required to rectify the situation are currently being costed, however he is unable to confirm whether or not works will take place.

- 3.4 In response to the request for school transport journeys in the Luthermuir/Laurencekirk area to be registered as local bus services to carry fare paying passengers, he confirmed that the Council tries to minimise the registration of school transport journeys unless there is a clear passenger demand, but that this request will be investigated in August 2018 once pupil transport numbers are known for the 2018/2019 school year.
- 3.5 In response to the request for two Bus Forums to be held in the Kincardine and Mearns area, he confirmed that this had been ruled out. He confirmed that whilst he could consider alternating the meeting venues between the Stonehaven and Laurencekirk/Luthermuir areas, Stonehaven is centrally located to the area and transport can be provided for those attending if they have no access to public or private transport.

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

- 3.6 In response to the request for the 0915 hours ex Barclay St – Forest Road – Barclay St (Service 4A/4C) to be retimed, he confirmed that an additional journey was added at 0845 hours, however it requires re-timing to connect with services leaving Barclay Street for Aberdeen.
- 3.7 In response for certain gaps in the timetable between Newtonhill Park & Choose and Aberdeen to be filled, he confirmed that it had not been possible to fulfil the gap in the morning peak to Aberdeen due to no resources being available, however the situation from Aberdeen to Newtonhill has been improved with a Service 7B journey departing at 0835 hours, and the afternoon gap from Newtonhill to Aberdeen has been improved with a Service X6 journey departing at 1700 hours.
- 3.8 In response to the request for Berrymuir Road (Portlethen) to be served in both directions, he confirmed that there were no plans to undertake this, however the routes operated in Portlethen had been simplified in the January 2018 changes, as it was previously very confusing for passengers. He also confirmed that there are now improved links between Berrymuir Road and Stonehaven during the day.
- 3.9 In response to the claim that drivers of Service 7B buses travelling into Aberdeen frequently wait at the Marywell Caravan Park bus stop, he confirmed that investigations had shown that this was to avoid running ahead of schedule due to generous running times. However, changes implemented on 8th January 2018 have reduced the possibility of this happening, but care has to be taken due to reliability issues on the corridor.
- 3.10 In response to the claim that Stagecoach did not adequately inform their passengers of service revisions whilst resurfacing works were being undertaken on the A90 at Muchalls on 29th and 30th August 2017, he confirmed that it had been difficult to do this due to the works being rescheduled and apologised for any inconvenience.

The following additional points were raised from the floor in regards to the minutes from the 28th September 2017 meeting:

- 3.11 In regards to the request to consider additional bell pushes and grab rails on vehicles operating Service X7 (Aberdeen – Perth), and Kenny McWalter's response that the manufacturer had concluded that this would not be possible due to the interior design of the vehicle, it was queried from the floor as to whether this type of vehicle is suitable for the corridor.

The following additional comments were received from the floor with regard to the coaches used on Service X7:

- Only 2 bell pushes at the front of the bus;
- The two steps on the bus are of different sizes;
- The stairs are too sharp;
- The stairs are difficult to navigate if you are carrying a baby;
- Doorbells are wireless, so bell pushes should be too;
- Request for a technical reason to be provided as to why extra bell pushes can't be added.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that he would re-investigate the possibility of adding extra bell pushes, however he had been advised that it is not possible to add an additional step. He confirmed that the design of the coaches meets all legal standards.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that a similar issue occurred with *Buchan Xpress* vehicles north of Aberdeen and, at a significant cost to the company, they added in a 3rd step and extra bell pushes. He confirmed that these coaches are a year younger than those used on Service X7, so the specifications are different and it doesn't follow that similar modifications are possible.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that he would obtain technical information from the manufacturer.

4. Stagecoach Bus Update

Kenny McWalter confirmed that there was nothing new to report for Stagecoach East Scotland.

Graeme Leslie provided the following update for Stagecoach North Scotland:

- 4.1 Following a service review, changes were introduced on mainline corridors including the Aberdeen to Stonehaven corridor on 8th January 2018 with the intention of improving reliability and tailoring service levels with passenger demand.
- 4.2 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. He advised that this would provide better Real-Time information to the screens at bus stops and on the Stagecoach app, and that it is anticipated that this will be a great benefit to passengers and drivers by speeding up the boarding process.

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 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 following 5 services being affected in the Kincardine and Mearns area, with changes to be implemented on 7th May 2018 as follows:

- Service 105 (Banchory – Rickarton – Stonehaven): This service will be withdrawn. Surveys indicate that there is 1 regular passenger from Rickarton, with the remainder being occasional users or tourists. This withdrawal will save the Council approximately £24,000 per annum.
- Service 204 (Banchory – Aberdeen via South Deeside): The return shoppers' journey on Tuesdays and Fridays will be withdrawn. Excluding those who travel between Banchory and Aberdeen, there is an average of 3 passengers per day, originating in Durris, Blairs and Kirkton of Maryculter. Whilst there are no alternatives to/from Aberdeen, there are Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus services operating between Durris/Kirkton of Maryculter and Portlethen, and between Durris and Banchory. This amendment will save the Council approximately £6,000 per annum.
- Service 108 (Muchalls – Chapelton Park & Choose): This service will be withdrawn. There is an average of 1 passenger per journey and Muchalls has alternative Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus services to/from Newtonhill and Portlethen. This withdrawal will save the Council approximately £1,500 per annum.
- Service 103 (Cookney – Aberdeen): This service which was 'at risk' in 2017/2018 will now be withdrawn. There is an average of less than 2 passengers per journey, and unfortunately no alternative form of public transport. This withdrawal will save the Council approximately £20,000 per annum.
- Service 9 (Laurencekirk – Montrose): A Friday and Saturday evening journey will be withdrawn. There is an average of 1 Aberdeenshire based passenger per journey, travelling between Laurencekirk and Montrose. There are rail alternatives available. This amendment will save the Council approximately £1,500 per annum.

5.2 As from 11th April 2018, a Portlethen Town Service A2B dial-a-bus will commence on a trial basis on Wednesdays, operating between 0945 hours and 1445 hours. This free service is open to residents who have difficulty walking, other disabilities, or those who don't live near a regular bus service. This trial has been made possible by a reorganisation of resources and does not have additional cost implications.

It was raised from the floor that the A2B dial-a-bus services are very good in certain areas.

6. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

Neil Stewart welcomed any comments or requests relating to public transport infrastructure or information from the floor.

6.1 Request for the 'bum bars' on the bus shelters at Asda (Portlethen) to be replaced by seats, which are more comfortable.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

6.2 Query as to Aberdeenshire Council's policy regarding locations of bus stops on the A90.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the A90 is a trunk road, and therefore Transport Scotland has to be consulted and also makes the final decisions.

- 6.3 Request for a further update on the Portlethen Park and Ride at Schoolhill.

Councillor Mollison confirmed that this situation had not changed, with no budget being available for the project.

7. **Services X6/X7/7A/7B (Aberdeen – Portlethen – Stonehaven) and 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service)**

- 7.1 Repeated request for buses to serve the top of Stonehaven/Farrochie Road area after school transport has been completed, at around 0845 hours.

Graeme Leslie reaffirmed that there is a constraint due to the railway bridge issue discussed at various meetings in the past, but he had been able to add a journey departing Spurryhillock at 0718 hours, and a Service 4A departure at 0845 hours. He confirmed that Stagecoach *do* listen and try to fulfil requests where possible.

- 7.2 Claim regarding poor connections from Farrochie Road to Aberdeen, with a passenger being unable to travel to Aberdeen for “Jury Duty” commencing at 0915 hours.

Neil Stewart confirmed that there is a direct Service 7 bus from Farrochie Road at 0722 hours which arrives at Aberdeen Union Square at 0853 hours, which perhaps was a bit early for the passenger but most people would consider this acceptable.

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

Neil Stewart referred to his previous comment (Item 3.3 above) and reaffirmed that the maximum clearance at the bridge does not permit operation of Stagecoach Bluebird’s double deck buses. The civil works required to rectify the situation are currently being costed, however he is unable to confirm whether or not works will take place.

Graeme Leslie again referred to an accident involving a double-decker bus and a low bridge over a year ago, resulting in a review of all routes which could be operated by such vehicles. Due to the height restriction of the railway bridge on Slug Road, double deck vehicles cannot use this route and there is no alternative. As the double deck vehicles are required for school commitments, they cannot currently be replaced but additional journeys operated by smaller vehicles were introduced on Service 4A/4C to provide connecting services between the Farrochie Road area and Barclay Street.

- 7.4 Request for a 1000 hours departure from Mackie Academy on Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) on Saturdays, to allow people to attend social events such as coffee mornings in the town centre, as currently the first journey departs Mackie Academy at 1102 hours.

It was raised from the floor that there used to be a Service 7B bus at around 0940 hours which provide a link to the Town Centre but this was withdrawn in January 2018.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated by Aberdeenshire Council in conjunction with Stagecoach Bluebird.

- 7.5 Request for the Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) timings to be investigated to improve connections. This was coupled with a comment that the service is well operated and driven by pleasant drivers.

Graeme Leslie expressed thanks for the comments and confirmed that he would arrange for the timings to be looked at.

- 7.6 Request for the journeys on Service 7B to be speeded up, as currently they serve all areas including Portlethen and Marywell.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that it was very difficult to provide a service which caters for all passengers' needs and movements along the corridor, and such requests would require additional resources which are not commercially viable at present.

- 7.7 Claim regarding frequent late running of the 1616 hours ex Aberdeen – Stonehaven (Service X6).

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 7.8 Claim regarding insufficient capacity on northbound buses arriving at Newtonhill Park & Choose, resulting in passengers frequently being left stranded at Newtonhill Park & Choose.

Graeme Leslie and Kenny McWalter confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 7.9 Request for an additional journey at 1330 hours ex Aberdeen – St Michaels Road (Newtonhill).

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be considered.

- 7.10 It was raised from the floor that the bus drivers on the Aberdeen to Stonehaven corridor are generally excellent.

- 7.11 Request for low floor vehicles to be allocated to the Stonehaven - Aberdeen services for the benefit of those with mobility difficulties including passengers with shopping trolleys or with children in buggies. This was coupled with the comment that drivers are very good at assisting such people.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that he has seen more coaches allocated to these services since January 2018 and there will be changes to vehicle allocations in May, but he could not confirm what the outcome will be.

- 7.12 Claim regarding the frequent late running of the 0815 hours ex Aberdeen – Portlethen via Schoolhill, which serves the KCA Deutag office, resulting in a drop in usage from those employed at the company, due to this poor reliability (recently down from 10 to 7 passengers per day).

Graeme Leslie confirmed that additional time was added to journeys on 8th January 2018 to address reliability issues, however this is being assessed and it may be that further additional time is required. He acknowledged that extended journey times make the service less attractive and confirmed that the company is working with other bus companies and Aberdeen City Council to try and introduce bus priority in a number of areas to improve journey times.

- 7.13 Request for an additional journey between 1500 hours and 1600 hours ex Aberdeen to Portlethen/Newtonhill/Stonehaven.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird provide departures at 15:20 hours from Aberdeen to Portlethen and at 15:50 hours from Aberdeen to Stonehaven via Portlethen and Newtonhill and there are currently insufficient resources available to provide a further departure.

- 7.14 Repeated complaint 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.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this was as a result of the aforementioned situation with the railway bridge on Slug Road.

- 7.15 Claim that passengers have to pay two separate fares when travelling between Farrochie Road and Aberdeen on two different services.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that passengers should be able to purchase a transfer ticket on the first bus and not pay a second fare. He confirmed that this would be investigated and drivers instructed accordingly.

- 7.16 Request for a later evening bus from Stonehaven to Portlethen (Monday to Thursday), with the last bus currently at 2052 hours from Barclay Street. (Last bus from Barclay Street on Fridays and Saturdays is at 2336 hours).

Graeme Leslie confirmed that it may not be commercially viable to operate a later bus Monday to Thursday but this would be considered.

Neil Stewart asked Kenny McWalter if consideration could be given to diverting the Service X7 2200 hours ex Stonehaven to Aberdeen to serve Portlethen.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that this would also be considered.

8. Service X7 (Aberdeen – Stonehaven - Perth)

- 8.1 Query as to whether the timetable would be changing, including reduced journey times, following completion of the AWPR roadworks, with particular reference to the 1720 hours ex Aberdeen.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that this will be investigated once the completion date is known.

- 8.2 Request for the 1605 hours ex Aberdeen (Union Square) – Perth to be retarded to depart at 1620 hours to allow those leaving work at 1600 hours sufficient time to board the bus. This was coupled with a complaint that there is frequently insufficient seating capacity on this departure as the bus is full on arrival at Union Street.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that the capacity issue would be investigated.

In response to Graeme Leslie's advice that there is a Service X6 departing ten minutes later at 1615 hours, providing an additional travel opportunity, there was a claim that this particular journey frequently runs late.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be investigated

- 8.3 Repeated claim that there is insufficient seating capacity throughout the p.m. peak period on Service X7 from Aberdeen due to passengers boarding and alighting within the City, coupled with a request for a reduction in the number of bus stops served.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that whilst this would be investigated, passengers board at various Aberdeen City bus stops to travel into Aberdeenshire.

- 8.4 The drivers on Service X7 received praise for their patience and for helping passengers with shopping trolleys etc.

- 8.5 Request from the floor for the Wi-Fi limit of 100MB of internet data to be increased.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that this would be investigated.

9. Service 105 (Banchory – Stonehaven)

- 9.1 Query as to why the service has been withdrawn.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the service was reduced from 5 to 2 days per week a number of years ago, due to very low passenger usage, and the downward trend has continued with only one regular passenger travelling, although he acknowledged that there is irregular use in both directions for days out, but the service could not be sustained on this basis.

10. Laurencekirk/Luthermuir Area

- 10.1 Request for a direct service between Laurencekirk and Aberdeen, with a suggestion that journeys on Service X7 alternate between the A90 and A92.

Neil Stewart confirmed that Service 26 (Stonehaven – Laurencekirk/Luthermuir) provides a connecting service at Stonehaven with mainline services to and from Aberdeen but acknowledged that the journey time is longer. He advised that Service 26 does not extend to/from Aberdeen as there are a number of commercial services between Stonehaven and Aberdeen and it is both anti-competitive and a wasteful use of Council resources to financially support services running alongside commercial services.

Kenny McWalter confirmed that there are no plans to reroute commercial Service X7 away from the A92.

- 10.2 Repeated request to re-instate the extension of the 1520 hours ex Stonehaven – Laurencekirk (Service 26 Stonehaven – Laurencekirk/Luthermuir: Mon - Fri) to serve Luthermuir. Petition was handed over to Mr Neil Stewart.

Neil Stewart reaffirmed that it is not possible to extend the journey to/from Luthermuir, without affecting other journeys carrying schoolchildren. He again highlighted that there are currently 3 return journeys serving the village (Monday to Saturday).

It was raised from the floor that additional journeys on Saturday were not requested.

Neil Stewart confirmed that whilst consideration will be given to removing the journey extensions on Saturdays there would only be marginal savings to the Council.

- 10.3 Claim regarding inaccurate information being used by the Council to determine passenger usage on Service 26 (Stonehaven - Laurencekirk/Luthermuir) due to drivers, at times, not issuing tickets.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he had been made aware of this matter and it had been addressed. He added that on board passenger surveys have also been carried out by Council staff.

11. Other Matters

- 11.1 Request for consideration to be given to the possibility of a new service operating between Dyce and south of Aberdeen following completion of the AWPR.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that the completion of the AWPR could present unique opportunities on the assumption that in years to come there will be retail and housing developments appearing along the length of the AWPR. He confirmed that requests such as this will be given due consideration.

- 11.2 Request from the floor for an update on the plans put forward for improved access and additional stances at Union Square Bus Station.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that Stagecoach have made contact with the developers (Hammerson Ltd) on several occasions, to no avail, and that they would continue to push for improvements for the benefit of passengers.

- 11.3 Query as to where to get information regarding travel to/from ARI for health care appointments.

Neil Stewart confirmed that THInC (the Transport to Healthcare Information Centre) is a service that anyone can phone for advice on travel to/from healthcare appointments in the Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City areas. (<http://thinc-hub.org/>)

- 11.4 Request for Service N7 (Aberdeen – Newtonhill/Stonehaven) to be amended to allow for the 01:10 hours departure to extend from Newtonhill to Stonehaven, pointing out that Portlethen and Newtonhill have three departures after midnight but Stonehaven only has one departure at 03:10 hours. This request had already been submitted to Stagecoach and a response was still awaited.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he had been copied in on the request, whilst Graeme Leslie confirmed that he would chase up an investigation and a response.

[After the meeting, it was confirmed that a reply has been sent by Stagecoach].

11.5 Councillor Mollison queried when the next timetable revision would be.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be 7th May 2018.

11.6 Complaints from the floor regarding the timing of the lights at the entrances/exits to/from Union Square Bus Station, with buses have to wait for a long time, causing frustration for both passengers and drivers.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that Stagecoach have no control over this and he has been requesting action from Aberdeen City Council for 8 years, as buses can sit waiting for 5-6 minutes at a time. He confirmed that he would raise this matter again with that local authority.

11.7 It was raised from the floor that microphones are needed for the next meeting.

Neil Stewart apologised and agreed to arrange this, especially if the meeting is again held in the Town Hall.

11.8 Request that the Parent and Child (2 adults and 2 children) discount fare provided by Stagecoach Bluebird be better advertised.

Graeme Leslie confirmed that this would be arranged.

[After the meeting, it was confirmed that this is in reference to the Group Dayrider Ticket, which can be used for 3 adults, or 2 adults and 2 children, or 1 adult and 3 children].

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Agnew advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in Stonehaven in autumn 2018.