

# BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 26<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018

MINTLAW ACADEMY, MINTLAW

## In Attendance

### **Councillor N. Smith (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor J. Ingram (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor S. Calder (Aberdeenshire Council)

Myra McCredie (Mintlaw Community Council)

Rosie Robertson (Mintlaw Community Council)

Theresa Ritchie (Peterhead Community Council)

Alex Davidson (Peterhead Community Council)

Graham Lacey (Peterhead Community Council)

Anne Johnson (Cruden Bay Community Council)

Stuart Johnson (Cruden Bay Community Council)

Robert McGregor (Buchan Area Office, Aberdeenshire Council)

J Allan (Maud Museum)

Lesley Brown (Bus User)

Ruth Taylor (Bus User)

Gordon Burr (Bus User)

Fraser Anderson (Bus User)

Tom McGivern (Bus User)

William Mainus (Commercial Manager, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

## Apologies

Colin Simpson (Mintlaw Community Council)

Joan Whyte (Mintlaw Community Council)

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

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

### **2. Minutes of Meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

The Minutes were approved.

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

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

3.1 In regards to Ellon Park & Ride Phase 2, he confirmed that the land clearance has been completed and land surveys are ongoing, however it is still not possible to provide a completion date.

3.2 In response to Councillor Ingram's request for the Central Buchan A2B operating area to be extended southwards to serve the Ardallie/Toll of Birness area, he confirmed that the service is so busy, additional resources would be required in order to fulfil this request, and there is no funding available for this.

- 3.3 In response to Councillor Calder's request for the provision of bus stops at the Buchan Gateway Retail Park, he confirmed that, following consultation with Transport Scotland, it was confirmed that the cost of providing bus stops and bus shelters, as well as the necessary bus laybys would be in the region of £80,000 to £100,000. Therefore, with there being bus stops currently within 400 metres walking distance, it was considered to be a disproportionate cost to place on the developer.

He added, however, that further planned development of the site should allow for a scheme of developer contributions to provide the requested public transport infrastructure and this was also confirmed by Councillor Smith.

- 3.4 In response to Councillor Ingram's requested for the provision of a bus shelter on High Street (New Pitsligo), he apologised for the delay in progressing this, as there had been some confusion regarding the precise location, which is adjacent to the Chinese take away. The request is now being assessed.

Councillor Ingram expressed his thanks for this and that such a facility will be welcome in the village.

- 3.5 In response to the query whether the Real-Time screens can display information during bad weather to inform passengers whether the service/journeys are operating, he confirmed that the data processing is currently being reviewed as part of a work study, due to an increasing number of passenger queries regarding the system, and this request will be explored by the working group.

William Mainus confirmed that tracking has improved following the introduction of the new ticket machines.

- 3.6 He confirmed that a shelter has been installed outside Peterhead Prison Museum,  
It was confirmed from the floor that the shelter is being used and is very welcome.

William Mainus provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.7 In response to Councillor Smith's request for improved connections at Mintlaw Interchange between Service 66 (Maud/Stuartfield - Longside - Peterhead) and mainline services to/from Aberdeen, he confirmed that the proposed timetables are currently out to consultation.
- 3.8 In response to the request for the rerouting of the early a.m. peak journeys from Fraserburgh - Aberdeen (Service 67/68) to operate via Strichen instead of New Leeds, he confirmed that the proposed timetable incorporates an additional a.m. peak journey via Strichen.
- 3.9 In response to the repeated claim regarding "unsuitable" and older vehicles being allocated to the corridor, with particular reference to a bus which has a torn seat and holes in the door, he confirmed that older minibuses have been removed from the fleet, so passengers should see an improvement.
- 3.10 In response to the query as to why low floor buses, rather than *Buchan Xpress* coaches, are allocated to journeys such as the 0630 hours ex Peterhead - Aberdeen (Monday to Friday), he confirmed that such vehicles are only allocated to the corridor if there is a breakdown or routine maintenance required, as this ensures that the journey operates.

- 3.11 In response to Councillor Ingram's request for journeys on Service 67/68 (Aberdeen - Fraserburgh) to operate via New Pitsligo, he confirmed that this has been considered but is not commercially viable.
- 3.12 In response to the request for journeys operated by a low floor bus to be advertised on the company's publicity, to allow those unable to access the *Buchan Xpress* vehicles to access public transport, he referred to earlier comments and confirmed that low floor vehicles cannot be guaranteed on specific journeys.

#### **4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update**

William Mainus provided the following update:

- 4.1 Following a review, proposed revisions to a number of services in the area, with effect from 19 November 2018, are currently out to public consultation. These are to take account of reliability issues and completion of the A90 dualling between Balmedie and Tipperty.
- Service 60 (Aberdeen - Peterhead via Hatton road end and Ellon: peak and inter-peak Mon - Sat; daytime Sunday): will operate via A90 between Ellon and Aberdeen.
  - Service 63 (Aberdeen - Peterhead via Cruden Bay and Newburgh: peak and inter-peak Mon - Sat; daytime Sunday): will operate via Balmedie.
  - Service 61 (Aberdeen - Peterhead via Cruden Bay, Hatton road end, Ellon and Newburgh: early morning and evenings Mon - Sun): all journeys will operate via Balmedie.
  - Service 67 (Aberdeen - Fraserburgh via New Leeds, Mintlaw and Ellon: Mon to Sun) will operate via Foveran in order to provide a limited service to/from that area.
  - Service 68 (Aberdeen - Fraserburgh via Strichen, Mintlaw and Ellon: Mon to Sun) will operate via A90 between Ellon and Aberdeen.
  - Service 66 (Stuartfield/Maud – Mintlaw): re-timings to improve reliability and also connections in Mintlaw.
  - Service 69 (Peterhead - Fraserburgh) retimings to improve reliability.

Councillor Calder advised that the proposed changes to the Sunday timetable between Peterhead and Aberdeen result in buses no longer using the route between Cruden Bay and Hatton via Bridgend and this would mean that he could no longer fulfil his duties as church organist at Cruden Kirk.

William Mainus acknowledged this but confirmed that the Sunday daytime frequency between Peterhead and Aberdeen is being increased from hourly to half hourly, thus benefitting the majority of passengers.

## **5. Autumn 2017 Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey**

Neil Stewart referred to the handout (also provided separately) and gave the following update:

- 5.1 Transport Focus undertakes an annual Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) and, whilst the 2016 survey was funded by Transport Scotland, the Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) and operators, the 2017 survey was funded by the main national operators based upon their operational areas and not, as previously was the case, geographically based on the RTP regions.

For north east Scotland, this was therefore primarily a survey of Stagecoach Bluebird and First Aberdeen routes, but the former's City services were not included on this occasion. Supplementary funding from Nestrans enabled Transport Focus to extract the relevant results for Aberdeenshire and enhance the Aberdeenshire responses, with additional samples taken from further Stagecoach routes and a supported service route operated by MW Nicoll. The resultant survey was undertaken between 11 September and 17 December 2017, and comprised 649 users in Aberdeenshire.

The principal finding of the autumn 2017 BPS was that Aberdeenshire bus users showed an increased level of satisfaction with the overall service, and also in 25 of the 33 specific aspects of bus service delivery, compared with the spring 2016 BPS.

Overall positive satisfaction with Bus Service Delivery increased by 2%, with the most significant increases (i.e. > +5%) being recorded in the categories of Punctuality (+7%), Length of Time Waiting for a Bus (+7%), Personal Safety at Bus Stop (+9%), Ease of Getting On and Off Bus (+7%), Time Taken to Board the Bus (+8%) and Nearness to Kerb (+8%).

### Comparisons with the Nestrans area

The Aberdeenshire results compare favourably with the Nestrans area as a whole in most of the specific categories, the most significant differences in responses relating to driver behaviour, with positive satisfaction in Aberdeenshire outscoring that for the Nestrans area as a whole in the categories of Greeting/Welcome from Driver (+9%), Helpfulness of Driver (+7%) and Time Given to Get to Your Seat (+7%).

Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire also exceeded those in the Nestrans area as a whole by more than 5% in the categories of Information at Bus Stop (+6%), Personal Safety at Bus Stop (+6%), Smoothness of Journey (+6%) and Interior Cleanliness/Condition of Bus (+6%).

### Comparisons with the English rural authorities

Benchmarking of local satisfaction levels was undertaken for each service delivery category against seven comparable English rural authorities covered by the same 2017 Transport Focus BPS, namely Cornwall, County Durham, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire and Worcestershire.

Positive satisfaction levels for Aberdeenshire exceeded those for the benchmark English rural county authorities in the Transport Focus 2017 BPS in 25 of the 32 categories where like for like comparisons could be made.

Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire were more than 5% greater than the average across the seven English rural authorities in the categories of Personal Safety at Bus Stop (+8%), Freedom of Graffiti/Vandalism at Bus Stop (+6%), Freedom of Litter at Bus Stop (+6%), Overall Satisfaction with Bus Stop (+6%), Interior Cleanliness/Condition of Bus (+6%) and Comfort of the Seats (+6%).

The English rural authorities, on average, scored significantly higher than Aberdeenshire in only 3 categories, these being Value for Money (+7%), Ease of Getting On and Off Bus (+7%) and Provision of Grab Rails on Bus (+10%), the latter two results suggesting that buses are more accessible in other comparable areas of the UK.

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

Neil Stewart referred to the papers circulated, detailing pending and fulfilled service requests in the Buchan Area, and reaffirmed that the request to extend Central Buchan A2B to serve the Ardallie/Toll of Birness area has been ruled out, as has the request for Stagecoach to reroute Fraserburgh - Aberdeen journeys via New Pitsligo.

Regarding the request for Service 66/66A (Maud/Stuartfield) to serve the new Aldi store on Kirk Street/West Road (Peterhead), William Mainus confirmed that this is still to be considered.

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

7.1 Concern raised that the positioning of the bus stops and shelter, outside and opposite the entrance to the above new Aldi store, will create an issue for boarding and alighting passengers, due to the increase in volume of traffic once the store opens. Furthermore, it was commented that this is the only entrance for both shoppers and delivery vehicles, and additional housing is planned opposite the entrance.

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

7.2 Councillor Ingram requested the provision of a bus shelter on the southbound carriageway of A952 (New Leeds). Bus Stop number 20185.02.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

## **8. Service 67/68 (Fraserburgh - Aberdeen)**

8.1 Claim regarding frequent late running on the corridor, in particular peak hour departures from Aberdeen.

William Mainus confirmed that the proposed changes should rectify the reliability issues but this would be monitored.

8.2 Claim regarding frequent late running of the 0710 hours ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh when it reaches Mintlaw Interchange (Monday to Friday), in particular on schooldays.

William Mainus confirmed that this would be investigated.

## **9. Peterhead Town Services (Service 81/82/83)**

9.1 A number of complaints that the new “Sprinter” buses recently allocated to these services have insufficient seating capacity and very narrow aisles, resulting in passengers having to stand or struggle to get to the seating area. This was impacting on passengers with walking difficulties and parents/carers with pushchairs

Cllr Calder confirmed that he had received similar complaints since the introduction of these vehicles.

William Mainus explained that 3 of these vehicles are currently allocated to the Peterhead area and are being trailed on various services to establish whether they are suitable and can accommodate passenger demand. He confirmed that they will be removed if they are unsuitable and/or are not well received by the travelling public.

- 9.2 Query as to whether the “Sprinter” vehicles meet the Council’s specifications on the contracted elements of Peterhead Town Services.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this matter was currently being investigated and any instances of the Council’s vehicle specification being breached would result in action being taken. He confirmed that he would discuss the matter with William Mainus after the meeting.

- 9.3 Claim that some drivers operate “too fast” over the speed cushions within the Waterside development (Peterhead), with particular reference to at around 1100 hours on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2018).

William Mainus confirmed that this would be investigated.

## 10. **Buchan Xpress vehicles**

- 10.1 Request for an update on more accessible vehicles being allocated to the corridor to replace the *Buchan Xpress* vehicles.

William Mainus confirmed that there will be no change in the foreseeable future. He explained that the company had explored the possibility of bidding for Plaxton Panther LE coach model vehicles in the future (see below), however, with only 53 seats, they would not be able to accommodate passenger demand on the Buchan corridor at peak times.

<https://www.alexander-dennis.com/media/news/2018/june/plaxton-adds-to-coach-range-with-double-deck-panorama-and-low-entry-panther-le/>

- 10.2 Councillor Calder raised the matter of accessibility problems on the *Buchan Xpress* Coaches, with particular reference to those with a walking disability and mothers with young children. He also complained that the 2 seats in the downstairs area have insufficient leg room.

William Mainus confirmed that the coaches conform to Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations and, in response to feedback from the public, all the vehicles have been modified as far as is technically possible, with alterations to the steps to the upper salon and retrofitting of additional bell pushes and grab rails. He explained that it is not possible to change the layout of the seating area downstairs.

Councillor Ingram stated that the vehicles are not designed for operation of local bus services and advised that there is a pending court case regarding this matter, which he will be attending, and he will provide an update at the next meeting.

- 10.3 Complaint regarding the journeys taking longer between Peterhead and Aberdeen since the completion of the dual carriageway between Ellon and Aberdeen, coupled with the question as to why the services continue to serve Foveran, Balmedie and the Blackdog slip roads, adding further time onto journeys.

William Mainus confirmed that until mid-November 2018, when the proposals are to be implemented, the service has to adhere to the legally registered route as far as is feasibly possible, which is via the “old” A90 via Foveran. He referred to his earlier explanation of the revised routes with effect from 19 November 2018.

- 10.4 Councillor Calder requested a faster express service between Peterhead and Aberdeen.

William Mainus referred to the proposed changes which will provide a faster service into Aberdeen on Service 60, but he explained that it would continue to serve the bus stops on the Blackdog slip roads, as there is a legal requirement for registered local bus services to have specified timing points no more than 15 minutes apart.

- 10.5 Councillor Calder queried if information regarding satisfaction levels on accessibility of vehicles on the Buchan corridor could be provided.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would ask Transport Focus (independent transport user watchdog), who undertook the Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey, if they could provide this in future reports.

**11. A.O.B**

- 11.1 Councillor Ingram thanked the PTU for the additional column in the financial spreadsheet handout, displaying the average number of passengers per journey.

**12. Date and Venue of Next Meeting**

Councillor Smith confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum would take place in Mintlaw in spring 2019. Further details will be advised in due course.