

# KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018

MAIN HALL, STONEHAVEN TOWN HALL, STONEHAVEN

## In Attendance

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

Councillor S. Dickinson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Ian Hunter (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Lindsey Wood (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Sheena Adam (Stonehaven Bus User)

Sandra Walker (Bus User)

May Riddle (Bus User)

Marina Pirie (Bus User)

Cecile Mackie (Bus User)

Ian Bennett (Portlethen Bus User)

Ken Watson (Portlethen Bus User)

John Shinnie (Bus User)

Diane Strachan (Kincardine and Mearns Area Project Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

David Liston (Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

## Apologies

Councillor I. J. Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council)

Chris Greene (Benholm & Johnshaven Community Council)

Michael Morgan (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Kenny McWalter (Operations Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland)

Jane Findlater (KCA Deutag)

Paul Melling (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Mary Wood (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

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

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

### **2. Minutes of Meeting on 29<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 Regarding provision of a bus shelter on Kirkton Road (Stonehaven) opposite the entrance to Kincardine Community Hospital, he confirmed that following a site investigation, the bus stop would need to be re-located 15 metres west of the current location. However, the land required to install a shelter is owned by a developer, so discussions are ongoing, with an update to be provided at the next meeting.

- 3.2 In regards to the issue with the railway bridge height on Slug Road, Stonehaven, he confirmed that it is expected that the necessary feasibility works, in terms of utilities and the bridge foundations, will be undertaken in the next 6 weeks, subject to agreement with Network Rail.
- 3.3 In response to the request for school transport journeys in the Luthermuir/Laurencekirk area to be registered as local bus services to also carry fare paying passengers, he confirmed that this is not currently possible due to the high level of school children, entitled to free home to school transport, travelling during the 2018/2019 school year.

He also advised that there are views in some parts that fare paying adults should not be allowed to travel on School Transport services, but there are a small number of such "combined" contracts operating in Aberdeenshire.

- 3.4 In response to the request for the 'bum bars' on bus shelters on Muirend Road (Portlethen) to be replaced by seats, he confirmed that this will be fulfilled by the end of September, but this will only be possible within the shelter outside the Asda superstore.

David Liston provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird North Scotland, whilst Neil Stewart provided the update on behalf of Stagecoach East Scotland, with information provided from Kenny McWalter:

- 3.5 In regards to the request to consider additional bell pushes and grab rails on vehicles operating Service X7 (Aberdeen - Perth), Neil Stewart confirmed that he had been advised by Stagecoach East Scotland that, following discussions with the manufacturer, this would not be possible.
- 3.6 In response to the request for earlier departures on Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) on Saturdays, to allow people to attend social events such as coffee mornings in the town centre, David Liston confirmed that this is still to be considered in consultation with the Council, but a decision would be taken in the coming weeks. This was acknowledged by Neil Stewart.
- 3.7 In response to the request for the Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) timings to be amended to improve connections, David Liston confirmed that this would be part of the aforementioned discussions.

There was a comment from the floor that these services are well operated and driven by pleasant drivers.

- 3.8 In response to the claim regarding frequent late running of the 1616 hours ex Aberdeen – Stonehaven (Service X6), David Liston confirmed that an investigation over the last month showed 97% reliability and no further complaints have been received.
- 3.9 In response to the claim regarding insufficient capacity on northbound buses arriving at Newtonhill Park & Choose, resulting in passengers frequently being left stranded at Newtonhill Park & Choose, he confirmed that there have been no reports of insufficient capacity over the last 3 months. Neil Stewart confirmed that a similar response had been received from Stagecoach East Scotland.
- 3.10 In response to the request for an additional journey at 1330 hours ex Aberdeen - St Michaels Road (Newtonhill), David Liston confirmed that there are no plans to do this at present, but this would be considered in the next major review of the corridor.

- 3.11 In response to the 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, David Liston confirmed that all vehicles on the Stagecoach North services should be low floor but other vehicles are occasionally brought in to cover for breakdowns or routine vehicle maintenance.
- 3.12 In response to the 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), David Liston confirmed that this would not be commercially viable at this time. Neil Stewart confirmed that a similar response had been received from Stagecoach East Scotland.
- 3.13 In response to the query as to whether the Service X7 timetable would be changing, following completion of the AWPR roadworks, with particular reference to the 1720 hours ex Aberdeen, Neil Stewart confirmed that Stagecoach East Scotland have no plans to make changes at this time, especially with no firm deadlines relating to the AWPR.
- 3.14 In response to the 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, Neil Stewart reaffirmed Stagecoach East Scotland's current situation with no revisions in the pipeline.
- 3.15 In response to the 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, David Liston confirmed that this had been investigated, no capacity issues had been found, and there are no plans to place any restrictions on the service. Neil Stewart confirmed that a similar response had been received from Stagecoach East Scotland.
- 3.17 In response to the 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, David Liston confirmed that the company is investigating new opportunities, including proposed changes which are currently out to consultation (see 4.1 below).
- 3.18 Neil Stewart advised that Stagecoach East Scotland have no plans to increase the wi-fi data limit for passengers on Service X7.

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

David Liston confirmed the following:

- 4.1 Following a review, a number of services are currently out to public consultation, in line with statutory registration guidelines (70 days prior to the implementation date). This is being undertaken through the Stagecoach website and at various locations, where public consultation events are being held. He explained that the proposals take into account reliability issues on various routes, as well as pending completion of the AWPR, highlighting the following service:

Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon – Aberdeen Airport) to operate via the AWPR from Blackdog to the airport and on to Stonehaven, then Montrose via A92, on an approximate hourly basis.

Aberdeenshire Council is being consulted closely on this proposal as the local authority currently provides subsidy for parts of the proposed route, albeit on a much less frequent basis.

There was a request from the floor for the service to operate via Portlethen, Newtonhill and Kingswells Park and Ride.

David Liston confirmed that the service is planned to serve both Kingswells and Craibstone Park and Ride sites and confirmed that the request would be added to all others received, before a final decision is taken.

## **5. Aberdeenshire Council Update**

Neil Stewart provided 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. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information**

Neil Stewart welcomed any comments or requests relating to public transport infrastructure or information from the floor and referred to request forms, available on the night, which could be completed and handed to Susan Watt at the end of the meeting.

- 6.1 Request for the 'bum bars' on the bus shelters at Barclay Street Interchange (Stonehaven) to be replaced by seats, which are more comfortable.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be considered.

- 6.2 Comment that there is a "no smoking" sign missing from the bus shelter at Barclay Street Interchange (Stonehaven).

Neil Stewart confirmed that all bus shelters should display no-smoking stickers and he would relay this to colleagues.

- 6.3 Councillor Dickinson referred to recent correspondence with Neil Stewart regarding congestion problems on Barclay Street (Stonehaven) due to the volume of buses in the vicinity of the interchange at certain times of the day, in particular at around 1900 hours.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he had brought this to the attention of Stagecoach, whilst David Liston confirmed that it would be investigated.

- 6.4 Request for improved infrastructure at Barclay Street interchange, with better quality bus shelters to provide passengers with improved protection from the weather.

Neil Stewart advised that there may be limitations at this location, but the request would be relayed to colleagues.

- 6.5 Request for real time passenger information to be displayed in local facilities, such as libraries, cafes and shops, in the vicinity of principal bus stops, as these places are often widely used by bus users.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 6.6 Request for the Area Bus Forum to be better advertised at bus stops in Stonehaven, prior to the event.

Susan Watt confirmed that posters are displayed at Barclay Street Interchange and whilst other locations would be considered, it is not possible to display them at all bus stops.

- 6.7 Query as to who owns Union Square Bus Station, coupled with a complaint that there is confusion between passengers wishing to use the Megabus services to/from the south and Service 10 (Aberdeen – Inverness) as there are no designated separate queuing areas.

David Liston confirmed that the possibility of allocating additional stances at the front of the building (Guild Street), next to the Service 727 (Aberdeen Airport) stance, involving the removal of car parking spaces is being explored, but will require consent from the owners, Hammerson Ltd. He added that he was not aware of an issue with the queues, so this matter would be investigated.

- 6.8 Request for information to be displayed on the screens at Union Square Bus Station, informing passengers of connections to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. This was coupled with a request for improved waiting facilities at Union Square bus station and for high quality real time display screens within Union Square shopping centre.

David Liston confirmed that these requests would be considered in consultation with Hammerson Ltd.

- 6.9 Complaint that the no smoking signs had been removed at Union Square bus station.

David Liston confirmed that this would be investigated.

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

- 7.1 Claim that some drivers on Stonehaven Town Service are omitting Lily Loch Road (Stonehaven).

David Liston confirmed that buses are registered to operate a specified route unless there is a diversion in place, such as a road closure. He asked that times and dates be provided if this occurs again.

- 7.2 Repeated request for mainline services between Stonehaven and Aberdeen to serve the west side of Stonehaven and for single deck vehicles to be allocated to the corridor.

David Liston reaffirmed that there is still a constraint due to the Slug Road railway bridge issue, as already discussed, and that double deck vehicles are required for school commitments, before and after which they are allocated to local bus services.

7.3 Request for Service X6 to serve Portlethen.

David Liston confirmed that the service is designed to provide a limited stop fast link between Aberdeen and Stonehaven, but the request would be taken into consideration in future reviews.

7.4 Request for an earlier bus from Portlethen to Stonehaven for those travelling to work (currently 0640 hrs from Muirend Road)

David Liston confirmed that, at this time of day, buses are scheduled to travel northbound to Aberdeen to cater for the vast majority of passenger demand, so whilst this would be considered, there would likely be no resources available.

7.5 Request for more buses to be routed via Union Street (Aberdeen) early mornings.

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered in future reviews.

7.6 Request for buses departing Stonehaven (Barclay Street) "out of service" not to operate via Cameron Street and Ann Street or Arduthie Street, as these residential streets were not considered suitable for buses.

David Liston confirmed that there is usually a specified route for buses to operate "out of service", so this would be investigated.

7.7 Request for services to be re-routed via Kincardine Community Hospital (Stonehaven), following an upgrade in medical services, such as the new Renal Unit etc.

Neil Stewart confirmed that consideration would be given to rerouting the town service (4A/4C) in consultation with Stagecoach and the hospital, if there is sufficient time available within the current timetable and a suitable turning area is identified.

7.8 Query as to what type of vehicles should be operating on the Aberdeen - Stonehaven corridor, highlighting that Deeside or Buchan branded coaches are often seen on these routes.

David Liston confirmed that, with the exception of Services X6 and X7, there should be low floor single and double deck vehicles on the corridor, however other types can be allocated due to mechanical issues or breakdowns to ensure that the journey operates.

7.9 Claim regarding frequent late running of Service 7B in the p.m. peak period, with buses arriving up to 30 minutes late in Portlethen.

David Linton confirmed that this would be investigated.

7.10 Query as to when new vehicles will be allocated to the corridor.

David Liston confirmed that he couldn't advise any timescales for this, but bids are submitted to Stagecoach Group on an annual basis from each of the operating companies.

7.11 Repeated complaint that transfer tickets are still not being provided for travel on Services 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town services) to interchange with mainline services at Barclay Street.

David Liston apologised for this and confirmed that drivers would be reinstructed accordingly.

**8. Service 107 (Montrose – Stonehaven)**

- 8.1 Request for the service to be re-timed to provide connections with Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service)

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered, whilst Neil Stewart advised that connections with services to/from Aberdeen are more important, given passenger demand.

**9. Other Matters**

- 9.1 Query as to why bendy buses are not allocated to rural services.

David Liston confirmed that they are expensive to operate, with only 3 miles to a gallon of fuel, and are designed for urban operation.

- 9.2 Request for more integrated transport between bus and rail services for those travelling north and south, in particular with the increased hourly train service between Inverurie and Montrose.

David Linton confirmed that this would be investigated.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Agnew advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in Stonehaven in spring 2019.