

BANFF & MACDUFF AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 8TH NOVEMBER 2018

ROOM 5, MACDUFF TOWN HALL, MACDUFF

In Attendance

Councillor A. Kille (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor M. Roy (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor C. Buchan (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor R. Cassie (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor B. Topping (Aberdeenshire Council)

David Duguid (MP for Banff and Buchan)

May Barclay (Fraserburgh Resident)

K. Smith (Bus User)

G Watson (Bus User)

Monica Sorrell (Macduff Resident and Bus User)

Richard Menard (Macduff Resident)

Lynn Menard (Deveron Coaches)

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

Councillor M. Findlater (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor G. Reynolds (Aberdeenshire Council)

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

2. Minutes of Meeting on 19th April 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 response to the request for the provision of a bus shelter opposite Kirkton Cemetery, Fraserburgh, he confirmed that the shelter has now been installed.
- 3.2 In response to the request for the provision of a bus shelter at the northbound Barnhill Road (Macduff) bus stop, he advised that there is insufficient space on the footpath to accommodate a shelter facility.
- 3.3 In response to the request for Stagecoach Bluebird to purchase a smaller vehicle to ensure that Service 273 (Gardenstown - Banff) can operate to the bottom of Gardenstown, he confirmed that discussions have been held with Stagecoach Bluebird regarding the proposed allocation of a new "Sprinter" bus on the corridor, which can carry up to 16 passengers, along with a wheelchair passenger.

He advised that arrangements would be made for a “Sprinter” to be viewed by Councillors and prior to a final agreement and a date for this would be arranged soon. If approved, the revised vehicle allocation would be for an, as yet, undetermined trial period.

- 3.4 In response to the claim that the turning circle at Boyndie Visitor Centre is frequently not served, resulting in passengers having to board and alight some distance away from the building, Susan Watt confirmed that a site meeting was held with Graeme Leslie (Operations Director, Stagecoach Bluebird), Duncan Leece (Manager, Boyndie Centre) and Alistair Millar (Senior Roads Engineer) to discuss parking issues at the facility and the allocation of buses by Stagecoach. Since the meeting, no further issues have been raised.

William Mainus 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 evening journeys have now been re-routed via Sandyhill Road and Bellevue Road to serve the facility.

It was raised from the floor that the route taken by Stagecoach has resulted in some bus stops no longer being served and there was a request for Golden Knowes Road to be considered as an alternative route.

William Mainus confirmed that monitoring would be undertaken and the request considered.

- 3.6 In response to the complaint regarding an occasion on which a driver had not accepted a £50 note from a passenger, he confirmed that it is company policy throughout the Stagecoach Group that drivers do not accept £50 notes. He added that the roll out of contactless ticketing earlier in the year should have made such situations extremely rare.
- 3.7 In response to the claim regarding frequent breakdowns and late running of the 0751 hours ex Macduff - Elgin, affecting, amongst others, a young passenger who had previously purchased weekly tickets but was late for work so often that they been forced to resort to only buying tickets on a daily basis, he confirmed that the passenger had received a refund. He also confirmed that the reliability on the corridor has improved over the last 6 months.
- 3.8 In response to the claim that low floor “city” type buses are often allocated to the route, he confirmed that only coaches should be allocated to the corridor unless there are unforeseen circumstances, such as breakdowns.
- 3.9 In response to the claim that there is insufficient seating capacity during the afternoon peak journeys when they arrive at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI), due to passengers boarding and alighting within the City, he confirmed that additional journeys will be introduced as from 19 November 2018, resulting in a 20 minutes frequency from ARI to Banff in the p.m. peak period.

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

William Mainus provided the following update:

- 4.1 Following a review, proposed revisions to a number of services in Aberdeenshire recently went out to public consultation, with changes to be implemented on 19 November 2018.

He summarised Service 35 (Aberdeen - Banff - Elgin) changes as below:

- Proposals to address punctuality and reliability issues on the corridor.
- Additional journeys in the pm peak from Union Square Bus Station between 4pm and 5pm, serving Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.
- 1735 hours ex Aberdeen - Oldmeldrum (Monday to Friday) re-timed to 1745 hours and extended to Whitehills.
- Evening journeys have been re-routed to serve the Banff Deveron Community Sports Centre.
- 2215 hours ex Aberdeen - Banff via Union Terrace will be re-instated to allow passengers to travel home from His Majesty's Theatre.

Councillor Roy queried the frequency of timetables revisions, highlighting that passengers are often confused due to the number of changes.

William Mainus confirmed that it is anticipated that changes would only occur twice per year unless there are unforeseen circumstances.

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

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. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

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

- 6.1 Request for the bus shelter at Loch Street (Whitehills), in front of the public toilet block, to be replaced with an enclosed shelter as the current structure has no sides and offers very little protection from the changing weather elements.
- 6.2 Councillor Buchan enquired as to the cost involved due to vandalism to the bus shelter on Strichen Road, opposite Buchan Road, in Fraserburgh. He also enquired as to whether funding had been approved for CCTV to be installed at this location.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would arranged for colleagues to respond direct on this matter.

- 6.3 Request for a bus stop near Inverboyndie, as currently the service operates hail and ride in the area.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be assessed in the normal manner and reported back in due course.

- 6.4 Request for replacement of the bus stop shield on the bus shelter on Shore Street (Macduff) opposite the Town Hall.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 6.5 Complaint regarding buses not being able to serve the bus stop on Main Street (Aberchirder) due to parked vehicles.

Councillor Roy confirmed that officers in the Council's Roads and Landscape Services are undertaking a traffic management review of the village, regarding which the bus operators will be amongst the consultees.

7. Service 35 (Aberdeen - Turriff - Macduff - Banff - Elgin)

- 7.1 Claim that there has been no improvement in regards to late running and breakdowns on the corridor since the last meeting.

William Mainus confirmed that the frequency of breakdowns has decreased over the last 6 months and the changes being introduced on the 19 November 2018 should address reliability on the corridor.

8. Services 67/68 (Aberdeen - Fraserburgh)

- 8.1 Councillor Topping raised a complaint regarding journeys taking too long between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen since completion of the A90 dualling between Ellon and Aberdeen, and asked why all journeys continue to serve Foveran.

Councillor Buchan confirmed he had received numerous complaints regarding the length of time of travel between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen, and requests for the services to by-pass Foveran and Balmedie.

William Mainus confirmed that until 19 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 serving Foveran and Hatterseat, meaning buses also have to pass through Balmedie.

However, the changes to be implemented on 19 November 2018 will have Service 67 serving Foveran, but rejoining the A90 dual carriageway immediately, Service 68 will not deviate via any of the aforementioned villages, operating via the A90. He also highlighted that it is difficult to strike a balance between passenger travel needs along the entire corridor, whilst maintaining commercially viability.

- 8.2 David Duguid MP raised the issue of mobility impaired passengers struggling or being unable to access the double deck coaches allocated to the Buchan corridor. He also enquired as to whether audio announcements are provided on board to inform passengers of the next stop.

William Mainus confirmed that announcement systems are not installed on the Buchan corridor and when they were provided on the vehicles allocated to the Deeside corridor, they were often switched off as passengers were distracted by them.

- 8.3 David Duguid (MP) raised the issue of the location for passengers in wheelchairs being next to the driver, not only creating difficulties for other passengers boarding, but disconcerting for the wheelchair passengers themselves. He also enquired as to the company's procedure for catering for two or more wheelchair passengers wishing to travel on the same vehicle.

William Mainus confirmed that modifications have been undertaken on all the Buchan Xpress vehicles to try to make it easier for all passengers and the company requests those with wheelchairs to phone in advance of travel to ensure that they can be accommodated.

- 8.4 Claim that the Buchan Xpress vehicle which operated the 1030 hours ex Fraserburgh - Aberdeen on 11 January 2018 was potentially unsafe due to strong gusts of winds in the vicinity of the caravan site near Fetterangus.

William Mainus confirmed that this would be investigated and the company operates to strict guidelines in respect of the suitability of vehicles in such conditions.

Neil Stewart confirmed that double deck vehicle operation on the Council's School Transport contracts should be suspended in the event of forecast wind in excess of 45 mph. sustained or gusting.

9. Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown/Fraserburgh)

- 9.1 David Duguid requested that the service be re-routed via High Shore (Macduff), highlighting that there is an elderly and disabled community in the area that would benefit from the provision of a bus service. He also and queried whether a smaller vehicle could be allocated to the service.

Neil Stewart advised that 2 site investigations have been undertaken in this area, using an Optare Solo which currently meets the vehicle specification for the contract. It was concluded by all attending that the vehicle could not navigate the streets in the High Shore area safely. He also advised that Deveron Coaches had ruled out the rerouting of their commercial Service 300 (Banff- Macduff Town Service).

(Further to the meeting, it can be advised that if the "Sprinter" vehicle, referred to in paragraph 3.3 above, is approved for allocation to Service 273, the High Shore request will be reconsidered if the trial period of operation is successful)

10. A.O.B.

- 10.1 David Duguid MP confirmed that he had attended the meeting in Turriff on 7th November 2018, regarding the replacement of Service 257 (Turriff Town Service) and 258 (Turriff Circular) with an A2B Dial-A-Bus service. He praised the Council officials for their contribution but highlighted that there are local concerns regarding having to register and book in advance of travel and that limited information had been available at an early stage, given how radical the changes were going to be.

- 10.2 Complaint that the two commercial Monday to Friday early morning journeys from New Byth to Turriff have been withdrawn and are not covered by the A2B service, resulting in passengers not being able to connect with Service 35 (Aberdeen - Turriff - Elgin).

Neil Stewart confirmed that these journeys were subsidised by the Council until August 2015, but were not retendered that year due to an average usage of 1 passenger per journey per day. However after Stagecoach Bluebird were successful in their tender for the revised contract, the company decided to continuing operating the two am peak journeys commercially. Therefore, with the introduction of the A2B service, it is not commercially viable for Stagecoach Bluebird to operate the journeys in isolation.

- 10.3 Councillor Topping asked for an update on the request for buses to serve Denmark Street and Shore Street areas (Fraserburgh) to serve the Fraserburgh Lighthouse Museum, the Heritage Centre, and the harbour area.

William Mainus confirmed that this is still to be considered and will be assessed in the next service review.

- 10.4 Request for out of date notices informing of road closures to be removed from various bus stops in the Macduff area and for unserved bus stops to be “bagged” for the duration of the closure.

Susan Watt confirmed that these would be removed and that bus stops are normally “bagged” by the Council or the contractor. She confirmed that the concerns would be reported back to the relevant people.

11. Next Meeting

Councillor Roy confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Macduff in spring 2019.