

BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2015

ROOM G1, MINTLAW ACADEMY, MINTLAW

In Attendance

Councillor S.W. Pratt (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)
Councillor A. Allan (Aberdeenshire Council)
Councillor J. Ingram (Aberdeenshire Council)
Helen Young (New Deer Community Council)
Ursula Fullerton (Buchan East Community Council)
Moira Beattie (Mintlaw Community Council)
Myra McCredie (Mintlaw Community Council)
Elsie Walker (New Deer Friendship)
Ellen Massie (New Deer Friendship)
Ann Allan (New Leeds resident and bus user)
D Allan (New Leeds resident and bus user)
J Elphinstone (Maud resident and bus user)
J Gerrard (Mintlaw resident and bus user)
J Gordon (New Deer resident and bus user)
K Gill (New Deer resident and bus user)
Alan Brown (New Deer resident and bus user)
W Pirie (New Deer resident and bus user)
Isabel Lowe (New Deer resident and bus user)
Shelia Crighton (New Deer resident and bus user)
Edna Smith (New Deer resident and bus user)
H Bisset (Crimond resident and bus user)
Alistair Smith (New Deer resident and bus user)
Winifred Cowie (New Deer resident and bus user)
Alice Paterson (bus user)
S Laird (bus user)
Ruth Taylor (Mintlaw resident and bus user)
Greg Allan (Observer)
Steve Walker (Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Neil Stewart (Principal Officer, Public Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)
Susan Watt (Senior Transport Officer, Public Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

Apologies

Councillor S. Smith (Aberdeenshire Council)
Julie Pickering (Crimond Area Tenants and Residents Association)
Jim Pickering (Crimond Area Tenants and Residents Association)
John Temple (bus user)
Thomas Terry (bus user)

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

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

2. **Minutes of Meeting on 31st March 2015**

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 installation of a 200 yard footpath from Shannas Cottage to the bus stop situated on the southbound carriageway of the A90, to allow passengers to access the stop safely, he confirmed that no update has been received from his Local Roads colleagues. He advised that public enquiries should be made direct to roads@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Councillor Ingram confirmed that he has been in discussion with Local Roads on this issue and will provide an update at the next meeting.

4. **Bus Service Update**

Steve Walker provided the following update:

4.1 Buchan Corridor

The company has invested £5 ½ million in 17 new *Plaxton Elite i* coaches, which will be allocated to the Buchan corridor towards the end of November 2015, once the vehicles have been branded. He also confirmed that the service will be marketed as a 'premier' service.

Stagecoach Bluebird were praised for their investment on the corridor.

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

4.4 Passenger Transport Review and Procurement

Following the Aberdeenshire Council Passenger Transport Review, Local Bus service contracts were subject to tendering, with an implementation date of 17 August 2015. He highlighted the major changes as follows:

- i) Service 247 (New Byth – Inverurie)

Requests have been received for the Monday only shoppers' service to operate on a Thursday instead. This is currently being considered by the Council.

(Subsequent to the meeting, the service will operate on a Thursday with effect from 14 December 2015).

ii) Service 251 (Fraserburgh/New Pitsligo – Ellon/Aberdeen)

Following the tender process, Kineil Coaches made the decision to operate the service commercially. The Monday to Saturday service now operates between Fraserburgh/New Pitsligo and Ellon, connecting with frequent commercial services to/from Aberdeen at Ellon Park and Ride.

iii) Service 253 (Turriff - New Deer - Fraserburgh)

On the basis of passenger demand the Monday to Friday service was withdrawn with the exception of those journeys operating between Maud and Turriff Academy, and the twice weekly shoppers' service between Turriff and Fraserburgh.

iv) Service 270 (Fraserburgh - New Pitsligo Circular)

On the basis of passenger demand and alternative journeys on Service 272 (Banff - New Pitsligo - Fraserburgh), one weekday inter-peak journey and one Saturday early morning journey were withdrawn.

v) Service 271 (Banff – Fraserburgh (Banff and Buchan College))

The college day return journey now operates all year round.

vi) Service 272 (Banff - Fraserburgh)

Following the tender process, the option of introducing an additional early a.m. journey at 0500 hours ex Banff - Fraserburgh (Monday to Friday) was not pursued due to the associated additional cost (+£12k per annum).

vii) Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon – Dyce)

Following the tender process, Kineil Coaches made the decision to operate the service commercially.

4.5. Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey

Neil Stewart advised that the annual survey of bus users in Aberdeenshire was undertaken in spring 2015, comprising of 600 on-street surveys, where passengers were asked questions about various aspects of bus travel, including reliability, cost of travel, information, conditions of buses and shelters and also the conduct of staff.

He confirmed that the principal finding of this year's survey is that Aberdeenshire bus users showed increased levels of satisfaction with the overall service and the vast majority of specific aspects of bus service delivery.

The overall satisfaction was 91%, with positive satisfaction increasing by over 5% in 7 specific aspects of service delivery categories, namely Service reliability (11%); Frequency (9%); Length of time waited for a bus (9%); Information on bus (9%); Condition of vehicles (9%); Directness of route (9%), and Smoothness of ride (8%).

The only noteworthy decreases in satisfaction levels were relating to Value for money (8%) and Finding a ticket suited to the journey (7%). He expressed some surprise with these findings as bus fares had not increased above inflation and in some cases had even been reduced. In addition, Stagecoach Bluebird provide a comprehensive range of ticket types to suit various categories of passenger and full details are well publicised by the company.

When a comparison of the Aberdeenshire survey was made with a national survey carried out by Transport Scotland, Aberdeenshire scored higher than the national average in all 7 categories including satisfaction with bus fare levels (19% higher than that for Scotland as a whole).

A comparison was also undertaken with benchmark English rural County authorities (Northumberland, Devon, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire and Suffolk) covered by the 2015 Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey. Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire exceeded the average for the above rural County authorities in 13 of the 17 categories, the only notable exception being length of time waited for a bus (-7%). It is encouraging that Aberdeenshire levels were 10% higher or more in: value for money; information at bus stops; personal safety at bus stops; information inside the bus; comfort of seats; and, smoothness of ride, categories.

Should anyone wish to see a copy of the Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey report, please contact susan.m.watt@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

4.6 Grasshopper Ticketing

He reported that Grasshopper, the multi-operator bus pass for the North East of Scotland, is now generating over 5000 passenger trips per month and has been extended to cover all of the North East of Scotland. Additional zones have been incorporated, with both weekly and daily passes available in each area.

5. **Bus Service Requests / Development**

Neil Stewart referred to the papers circulated, detailing pending and fulfilled service requests in the Buchan Area, and summarised these as follows:

- 5.1 The requests for an increased frequency between New Pitsligo and Ellon (Service 251: Fraserburgh – Ellon/Aberdeen) and improved connections at Ellon Park and Ride, was fulfilled by the Council, with the inter-peak journey being extended to/from New Pitsligo. The changes were implemented commercially by Kineil Coaches as from 17 August 2015.

- 5.2 The request for improved connections between Service 66 (Stuartfield – Mintlaw – Peterhead) and Services 67/68 (Fraserburgh – Aberdeen) has been fulfilled by Stagecoach Bluebird.
- 5.3 The request for improved connections between Service 69 (Fraserburgh – Peterhead) and mainline services between Peterhead and Aberdeen (Services 60/61/63), for the benefit of passengers from Crimond and St Fergus has been fulfilled by Stagecoach Bluebird.

6. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

- 6.1 Complaint regarding the layout of service information on the publicity boards displayed at bus stops, as passengers need to look at several services to get a full picture of all journeys operating between two points.

Neil Stewart confirmed that Aberdeenshire bus service publicity is rated highly amongst other local authorities but conceded that it is not possible to provide composite information.

- 6.2 Request for the provision of a bus stop at Crimond on the A90, at Crimond Nursing Home.

Susan Watt confirmed that this would be considered.

- 6.3 Councillor Ingram requested the provision of a bus shelter on Mintlaw Road (Fetterangus), for southbound travel.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be considered.

7. Service 66/66A (Peterhead – Stuartfield)

- 7.1 Repeated request for the service to operate via Woodside Crescent (Mintlaw)

Councillor Ingram advised that the service had previously been re-routed via Woodside Crescent, but it was withdrawn due to considerable pressure from residents. He confirmed that once the house building resumes, Newlands Road will become a through road in both directions between Burnside Road and Station Road, passing the end of Woodside Crescent, and that would be an appropriate time for consideration to be given to service re-routing.

- 7.2 Request for the service to be extended to serve Morrison's supermarket (Queen Street, Peterhead), as the nearest bus stop observed by Service 66/66A is on King Street, which is a considerable distance away and too far to walk for many elderly and mobility impaired passengers.

Steve Walker confirmed that this would be considered.

8. Service 251 (Fraserburgh/New Pitsligo – Ellon)

8.1 Councillor Ingram expressed his thanks for the inter-peak journey extension to New Pitsligo.

8.2 Request for the 0925 hours ex New Pitsligo – Ellon to make an earlier connection with a commercial services at Ellon Park and Ride, so as to provide at least two hours' shopping time in Aberdeen (Monday to Friday).

Susan Watt confirmed that the request would be relayed to Kineil Coaches.

8.3 Request for an additional inter-peak journey around 1200 noon ex Ellon – New Pitsligo (Monday to Friday) for people shopping in Ellon.

Susan Watt confirmed that the request would be relayed to Kineil Coaches.

8.4 Request for the re-instatement of through journeys to/from Aberdeen.

Neil Stewart advised that there are frequent commercial journeys operating between Ellon and Aberdeen, so it is both wasteful and anti-competitive for the Council to subsidise journeys on this route.

9. Service 253 (Turriff – Maud/Fraserburgh)

9.1 Query as to why the service was withdrawn, coupled with a request to re-instate some of the inter-peak journeys between Turriff and Maud.

Neil Stewart confirmed that due to very low passenger usage, the Monday to Friday service was withdrawn with the exception of those journeys operating between Maud and Turriff Academy transporting school children, and the twice weekly shoppers' service between Turriff and Fraserburgh. He also confirmed that the journeys would not be re-instated at this point.

9.2 Query as to why a large vehicle was allocated to the corridor.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the service was operated in combination with a school contract to/from Turriff Academy. A larger bus is required to transport the schoolchildren, therefore no advantage would have been gained in substituting it for a smaller vehicle.

10. Central Buchan A2B

10.1 Complaint regarding the difficulty in contacting the call centre to make a booking and sometimes, when it is possible to get through, intending passengers are not able to book their preferred time and date.

Susan Watt confirmed that the Council is not aware of this being a major issue but advised that Monday mornings are very busy and requested that people keep trying.

- 10.2 Request for the service to be extended to serve a greater area, including the village of Auchnagatt.

Susan Watt confirmed that 3 vehicles are currently allocated to the service, which is well used, and whilst the request will be considered, if another vehicle is required the cost implications will be considerable.

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

Councillor Pratt confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum would take place in Mintlaw in spring 2016. Further details would be advised in due course.