

Scottish Local Transport Authority Of The Year

Keeping Aberdeenshire Moving

Background

The Aberdeenshire Council area covers 6,313 square kilometres and has a growing population, currently estimated at 257,740. Aberdeenshire is home to a local economy based on oil, fishing,

farming and tourism. The area is linked by some 3,300 miles of roads (over 10% of the national stock), around 100 supported bus services and 6 railway stations

The transport challenges faced by Aberdeenshire Council are

numerous and varied, however through clear strategies supported across political lines the Council is rising to these challenges and delivering high quality services to the residents and businesses of Aberdeenshire.



Strategic Studies:

1. Access to Laurencekirk

The junction between the A90 and the A937 south of Laurencekirk has been the subject of ongoing safety issues and a local campaign.

Following consideration of the matter by Scottish Parliament Committee a study was commissioned and as per Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) and Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 1 guidance, problems were defined with an extensive data collection and modelling exercise, and objectives and options developed through detailed stakeholder discussions and analysis of information.

Aberdeenshire Council Officers worked with Nestrans, Transport Scotland, Tactran and Angus Council to steer the direction of the study to ensure the most appropriate options were developed and preliminary outcomes were validated by further community engagement.

The study report was completed in June 2015 and recommended the upgrade of the A90/A937 junction. Aberdeenshire Council supported this recommendation

In January 2016 the Scottish Government announced allocation of £24 million of funding to take forward the upgrade works as part of the City Region Deal.

2. Fraserburgh and Peterhead to Aberdeen Strategic Transport Study

Aberdeenshire Council officers have supported Nestrans in a study considering the strategic transport corridor linking Aberdeen to Peterhead and Fraserburgh. The regional transport study contains a commitment to appraise the issues

relating to strategic transport movements, including the potential for rail or other mass transport options, issues relating to connectivity, and the limitations of existing roads. A consortium of consultants led by SIAS, including Peter Brett Associates and Energised Environments were commissioned in 2015, with officers from Aberdeenshire Council forming a key element of the steering group.

Through extensive stakeholder consultation and analysis of available data, the study has identified the problems associated with:

- Slow, unreliable and unpredictable journey times on the A90 and A952
- Road safety risk on the A90 and A952
- Lack of strategic travel choices.

Working through the different stages of STAG pre-appraisal and STAG 1, the work is anticipated to be reported to Elected Members during Spring 2016.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

Aberdeenshire is also working with partners to consider all of the current and future transport issues across the North East and to lock in the benefits of the impact of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route.

Bus Passenger Satisfaction Surveys

Aberdeenshire Council conducts annual satisfaction surveys of bus users, which are benchmarked against the indicators used by Transport Scotland for the nation as a whole and also against comparable rural County Authorities in England. Aberdeenshire has consistently exceeded these benchmarks.

Using the comparable indicators in the Transport Scotland survey, the percentage of users reporting either “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied” with the service were:

	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
2014	86%	79%
2015	87%	79%

Using the comparable indicators in the Passenger Focus Bus Passenger Survey (PFBSS):

2014	83%	78%
2015	87%	81%

Area Bus Forums

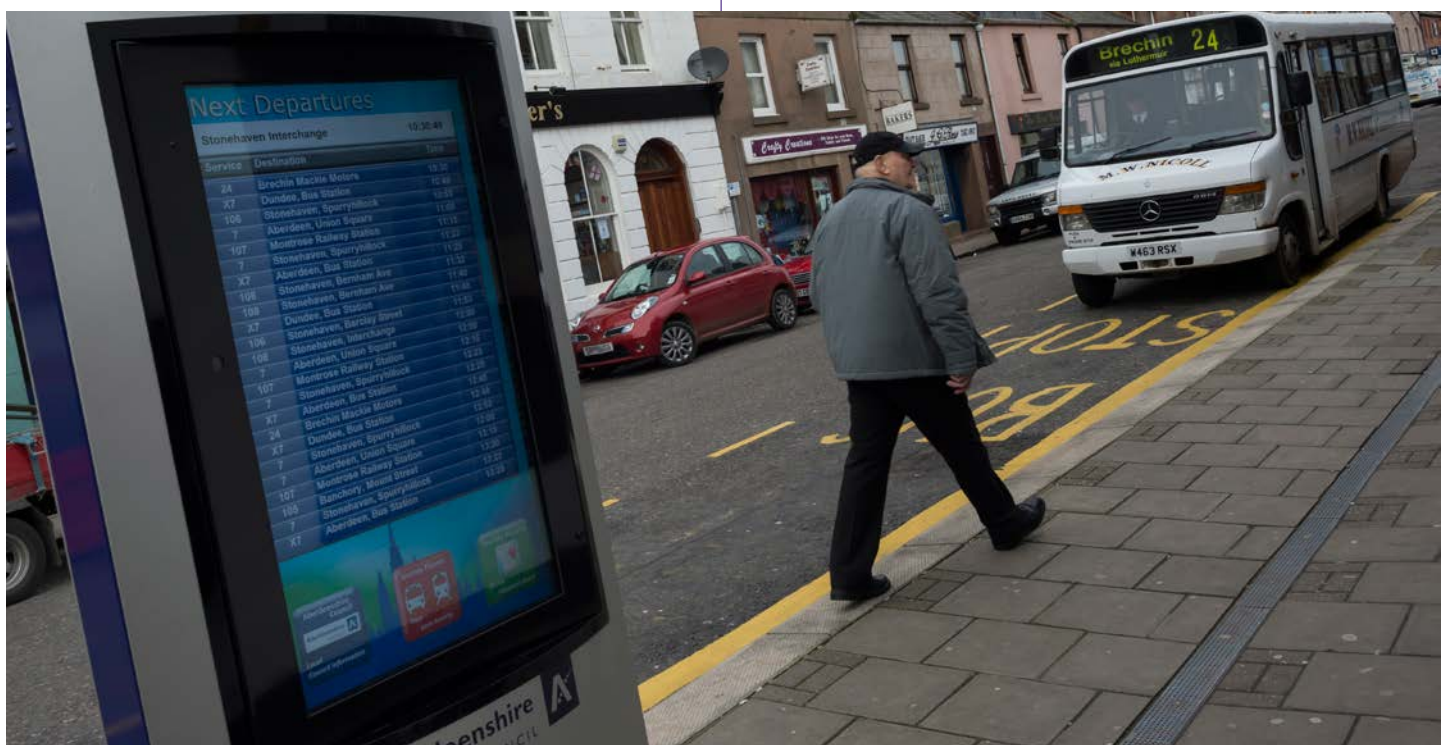
Area Bus Forums meet in each of Aberdeenshire Council’s six administrative Areas and are the principal focus for consultation on public transport matters. These are administered by the Council and their membership consists of Community Councils, local business representatives, youth groups, senior citizen groups, disabled interest groups, Councillors, community transport groups, operators of commercial and supported bus services and bus users.

Between February 2015 and February 2016, 73 amendments to local bus services were implemented in response to meeting discussions. During this same period, 27 requests relating to infrastructure and information resulted in action being taken.

Public Transport Information and Ticketing

In August 2015 Aberdeenshire Council formally launched a Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system.

Traditionally RTPI has been displayed on electronic screens at bus stops, however this is not a cost effective method for a rural Authority.



The increase in the use of smartphones over recent years has provided an opportunity to deliver information in an alternative and more efficient manner. Nearly all of Aberdeenshire's bus stops now include a Quick Read (QR) code which can be scanned by customers to show a virtual departure board providing RTPi.

This system is complemented by 60 electronic displays at principal stops in larger towns. RTPi can also be accessed via the web, either through Aberdeenshire Council's site or Traveline Scotland.

Grasshopper

Aberdeenshire Council's Public Transport Unit (PTU) is the administrator for the operator-led multi-operator bus ticketing agreement branded as Grasshopper. The scheme offers zonal day and weekly tickets, valid for travel on the buses of all Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire operators of local services. Aberdeenshire Council played the key role during negotiations when the initiative was originally being developed by the scheme's Management Committee which also comprises representatives of First, Stagecoach, other operators and Aberdeen City Council. Since the launch of the first ticket in December 2013 Aberdeenshire has been responsible for the reimbursement of Grasshopper sales income to all participating operators and for coordinating marketing including responsibility for the dedicated website www.grasshopperpass.com/. Aberdeenshire are currently working closely with First and Stagecoach on a project to replace the current paper tickets with smart products.

Electric Vehicle Charge Points

The roll-out of public Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points continues apace throughout Aberdeenshire. Supply and installation of the charging units has been fully grant funded by the UK Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV), which allocated the funding to Transport Scotland's Chargeplace Scotland Programme. A key aspiration of this programme is to provide rapid chargers at 35 mile intervals on strategic routes connecting Scotland's towns and cities.

Since March 2015 7 public charge units have been installed in Aboyne, Alford, Braemar, Ellon (2 x units), Fraserburgh and Stonehaven. In addition to those already installed, this brings the total publicly available EV charging points managed by Aberdeenshire Council to 18.

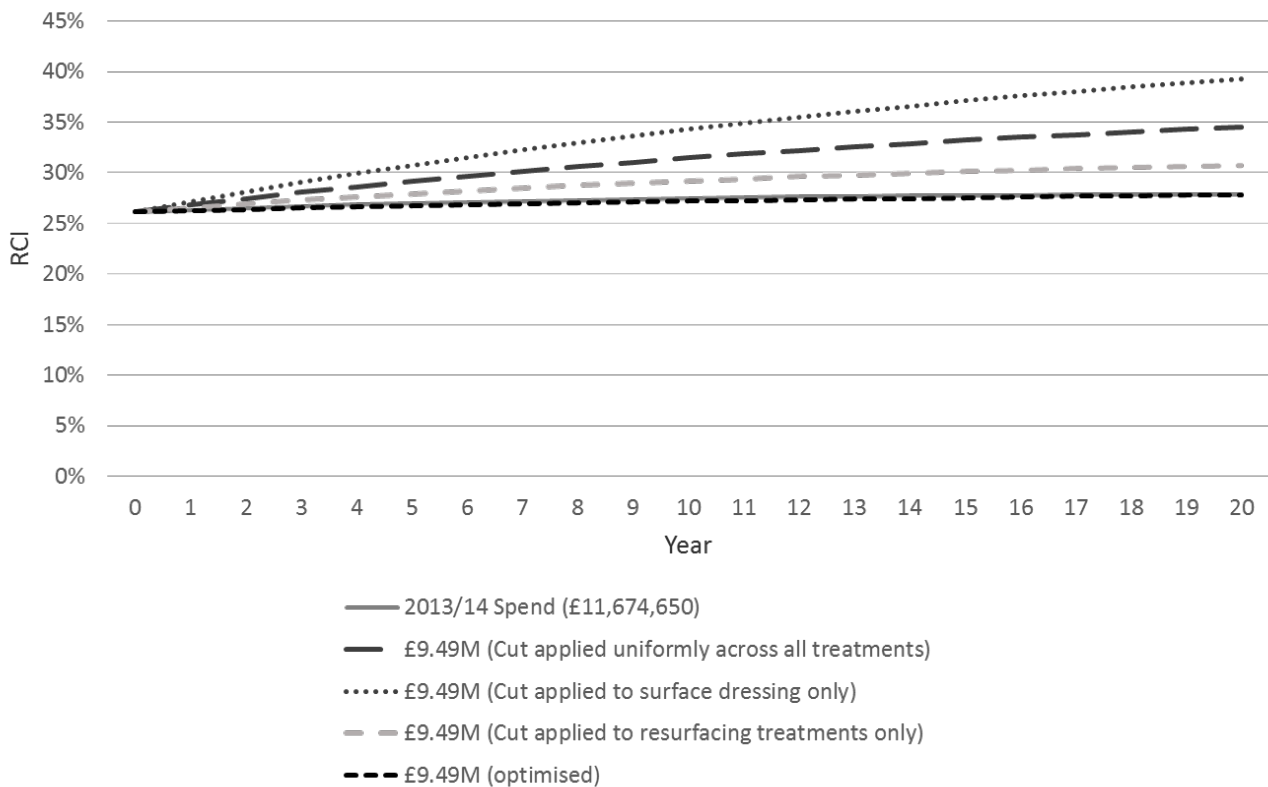


HTAP and ThinC

The Transport to Health & Social Care Information Centre (THInC) was launched to provide travel advice to those accessing health and social care services. The project is funded by the five HTAP (Health & Transport Action Plan) partner organisations: NHS Grampian, Nestrans, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and The Moray Council.

The advice service is managed and staffed by Aberdeenshire Council. Aberdeenshire Council also hosts the HTAP Programme Manager, while the post is jointly funded by Nestrans and NHS Grampian.

RCI Projection for Different Spend Profiles



February 2015 saw the introduction of THInC in the City, a new service offering transport to users based in Aberdeen City. Funded by Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) with transportation provided by Buchan Dial-a-Bus, this service builds on the strengths of the existing partnership and expands it further.

Community Engagement and Economic Impact of Car Parking

A review of Aberdeenshire's off-street pay and display car parking tariffs was undertaken in January 2014, conducted through consultation with local communities and Area Committees. Previously tariffs were applied uniformly to all off-street pay and display car parks across Aberdeenshire.

New Parking Orders were published in November 2014, which saw the introduction of short periods of free parking; up to half an hour in Ellon, Inverurie and Stonehaven and up to one hour in Inverurie and Peterhead.

Some towns saw the introduction of a two hour limit for specified off-street spaces, with this two hour parking period being free of charge.

Road Asset Management & Road Condition Index

Aberdeenshire Council uses asset management modelling techniques to minimise the whole life cost of maintaining its road network. Aberdeenshire is consistently one of the best performing councils in the annual Road Condition Index (RCI) tables arising from the Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey (SRMCS) and currently lies in second place. This has been achieved by a policy of prioritising preventative maintenance programmes such as surface dressing and maintaining these even when other programmes have had to be cut back.

A modelling exercise was undertaken to determine the least detrimental strategy for implementing budget reductions arising from the current round of Council budget settlements. This indicated that a strategy of reducing the resurfacing programme whilst reinvesting part of the saving in an increased

surface dressing programme with enhanced preparatory works offered the best opportunity of minimising impact of a budget reduction on road condition.

Aberdeenshire Council is implementing this strategy in their 2016/17 revenue programme delivering an overall saving of some £900,000 per annum on the road maintenance programme.

As a result of the perceived effectiveness of this approach, Aberdeenshire Council has been selected for a case study on a “Preservation First Carriageway Strategy”. This is being undertaken by EXP Consulting on behalf of the Road Asset Management Framework contract commissioned by SCOTS and CSS Wales.

Flood recovery

Over the course of December 2015 and January 2016 Aberdeenshire saw record levels of rainfall; for example the average monthly rainfall for Braemar is 75mm, but the town saw 77mm fall in the space of 24 hours at the end of December 2015. This has caused substantial damage to local infrastructure, with many bridges and roads being damaged, closed or indeed washed away.

The A93 Braemar to Ballater road was one particularly badly affected example, with part of the road having been washed away at Crathie. A temporary diversion had to be built around the damaged section, which was made possible thanks

to the local landowner and tenant who allowed Aberdeenshire Council access to the site.

Enormous effort was made by multiple Council teams, working in some of the worst weather seen locally for many years, with some river levels rising by 3 metres.

Aberdeenshire Council is working in partnership with local communities to restore all flood damaged infrastructure, with efforts expected to continue for another 6 months.

Delivering Active Travel Commitments

Aberdeenshire Council has combined funding from Sustrans’ Community Links scheme and Paths For All’s Smarter Choices, Smarter Places scheme to develop the Integrated Travel Towns (ITT) project. Inspired by the success of the Peterhead Cycling Demonstration Town, the Council is working to make Ellon, Fraserburgh, Huntly, Inverurie and Portlethen more amenable and accessible for walking, cycling and public transport.

Community engagement has played a key role in the development of the ITT project. Public consultations allowed members of the community to view and comment on the research undertaken by the Council along with innovative use of interactive technology helping to inform the process. This was facilitated via the prototype Online Placecheck tool, which allows members of the community to access



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a map of their town and place comments at specific points on the map.

There has been particular focus on Ellon over the last year; the opening of the new Ellon Academy Community Campus in August 2015 also saw the opening of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the River Ythan. This links directly to the recently upgraded shared use path along the north side of the river, providing a safe link between the new school and the town centre. Since moving to the new site, the percentage of pupils cycling to Ellon Academy has risen from 0% to 5%, and key routes to school have seen increases in pedestrian and cycle activity of between 6% and 16% over the previous year.

Work with Communities and the Third sector on shared outcomes

One of the long-term outcomes from the Single Outcome Agreement is that “Businesses and individuals have access to an integrated transport network”.

Under this is the medium-term outcome of “Improved transport infrastructure”.

The Scottish Household Survey indicated that 80% of people surveyed in 2013/14 found their local public transport services either fairly or

very convenient. Aberdeenshire’s target for this criterion is 80% so the Council is delivering to its target. This figure has continued to rise steadily since 2007/08, when it was at 70%.

Nestrans’ annual monitoring report shows that passenger numbers have increased yearly at Aberdeenshire railway stations. Between 2010/11 and 2013/14 these increases have been: 162% at Portlethen, 64% at Laurencekirk, 45% at Inverurie, 31% at Insch, 9% at Huntly and 9% at Stonehaven.

Conclusion

This submission, and others within specific categories, demonstrates Aberdeenshire Council’s commitment to explore new and exciting opportunities to improve the services we provide. We strive to make use of emerging technology to deliver services efficiently and sustainably and our commitments are driven by community engagement and feedback.