

BANFF & BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2018

ROOM 2, DALRYMPLE HALL, FRASERBURGH

In Attendance

Councillor A. Kille (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor D. Mair (Aberdeenshire Council)

Debra Campbell (Community Planning Officer, Banff and Buchan)

Judith Taylor (Fraserburgh and District Older Peoples Forum)

Mary Regan (Fraserburgh and District Older Peoples Forum)

Therine Henderson (Rosehearty Community Council)

Alison Wymes (Fraserburgh Community Council & Fraserburgh – Aberdeen Commuter)

Bruce Taylor (Enable - Scotland)

Brenda Smith (Bus User)

Helen Stables (Bus User)

Nan Williamson (Bus user)

M. Wilson (Bus User)

Roger Mudie (Bus User)

Ewan Masson (Bus User)

Jan Madgett (Bus User)

Daniel Laird (Commercial 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 B.A. Topping

Donna Stuart (Bus User)

Ellie Morris (Bus User)

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

2. Minutes of Meeting on 21th 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 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 regards to the vandalised electronic Real-Time screen at Broad Street (Fraserburgh), he re-affirmed that the works have been scheduled for this current financial year.
- 3.3 In response to claim that the timetable information on Union Grove, Fraserburgh, is displayed incorrectly, he confirmed that this has now been rectified.

- 3.4 In response to the request for timetable information to be displayed at the bus stops in Lonmay, he confirmed that he had inspected the site today. He apologised for the lack of timetable case on the bus stop pole on the southbound side of the road and confirmed that he would ensure that this would be rectified very soon.

Regarding northbound travel, he confirmed that there is no fixed bus stop as there are a series of bends and for this reason it would be unlikely that a stop would be provided by Transport Scotland. In response to his question as to where people board and alight on this side of the road, it was confirmed from the floor that buses stop at the cottage, but have to pull well off the road on to the grass verge.

Daniel Laird provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.5 In response to the request for the warning signs on *Buchan Xpress* vehicles to be relocated to the top of the stairway, he confirmed that there are no plans to relocate them.
- 3.6 In response to the complaint regarding incorrect information within Stagecoach Bluebird's Buchan Travel Guide (dated 8th January 2018) on Services 78 & 79 and also Service 272, he confirmed that this has been rectified.
- 3.7 In response to various requests/suggestions relating to the reduction in the level of service to/from Lonmay on 8th January 2018, he confirmed that the company was only able to make one minor change to the timetable, the remainder of requests not being commercially viable.
- 3.8 In response to the claim regarding insufficient seating capacity provided on peak journeys between Peterhead and St Combs, resulting in passengers having to stand, he confirmed that following an investigation no issues were identified and no further complaints have been received.
- 3.9 In response to the claim regarding frequent late running and insufficient seating capacity during peak hours, with particular reference to the 0510 hours and 0700 hours ex Fraserburgh - Aberdeen and 1710 hours ex Aberdeen - Fraserburgh, due to "unsuitable" vehicles such as low floor buses being allocated to these journeys, he confirmed that this is being monitored and there should normally only be "Buchan Xpress" type vehicles allocated. However, he conceded that 3 of these vehicles have recently been "off service" for maintenance, resulting in other types of vehicles being allocated to ensure that all journeys are operated.
- 3.10 In response to the request for the 1710 hours ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh (Monday to Friday) to omit Ellon Park and Ride, he confirmed that there are no plans to do this due to passenger demand, the need to make a scheduled stop to conform with driver hours' regulations, and to allow service connections to other destinations at the Park and Ride site.
- 3.11 In response to the claim that passengers who had boarded the 1805 hours ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh at Union Square Bus Station, were asked to leave the vehicle as it was required to operate another service, resulting in passengers having to wait 25 minutes, he confirmed that the driver has been dealt with under disciplinary procedures.
- 3.12 In response to the claim regarding "poor quality" vehicles operating on the Service 272 (Banff - Fraserburgh) route, including a faulty heating system and excessive condensation, he confirmed that the heating issues have been rectified. However, due to the vehicle being required to accommodate pupil numbers on a school contract in the Banff area prior to operating Service 272, it would not be removed at this time.

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Daniel Laird provided the following update:

4.1 Following a review, proposed revisions to a number of services in the area are currently out to public consultation. These are to take account of reliability issues and the opening of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and are planned to be implemented on 12 November 2018 (**Post meeting, the date was confirmed as 19 November 2018**). He summarised as follows:

- Services 67/68/X67/X68 (Aberdeen – Fraserburgh) are proposed for rerouting, with Service 67 operating via Foveran to provide a limited service to/from that area, whilst the other three services would operate via the A90 dual carriageway to provide faster journeys to/from Aberdeen.
- Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon – Aberdeen Airport) is proposed to extend from the airport via the AWPR towards Stonehaven, with the frequency enhanced to hourly and a weekend service also added. There will be opportunities for users of the Fraserburgh - Aberdeen services to make connections at Ellon Park and Ride.

He advised that consultation ends on Friday 21st September and highlighted the importance of public feedback on the proposed changes.

It was raised from the floor that the consultation has not been published widely enough, with no posters on the buses, coupled with a comment that it might have been beneficial to hold an early evening session at Aberdeen bus station.

Daniel Laird confirmed that there had been a good response to the daytime events, whilst Susan Watt confirmed that they would publicise it through Aberdeenshire social media and also email those on the Forum distribution lists.

4.2 There has been a relaunch of student products including a new ticket for Zone 3 now being available between September 2018 and June 2019, providing a cheaper option.

https://maps-stagecoachbus.s3.amazonaws.com/NSCOT_Bluebird.pdf

4.3 Contactless Ticketing has been rolled out through Aberdeenshire since the last Forum meeting and has proved to be very successful and popular with 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 Banff and Buchan Area, and confirmed that Stagecoach are not currently able to fulfil the pending requests numbered 3 to 6 on a commercial basis.

7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

Neil Stewart welcomed any infrastructure or information requests/comments 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,

- 7.1 Query as to whether the real time facility will be re-instated in the recently installed bus shelter at Market Street Interchange (Ellon) northbound.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he was unaware of there being no Real Time Passenger Information at this facility and that he would raise this with colleagues.

- 7.2 Query regarding an update on the works to be undertaken at the Ellon Park and Ride site.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the works are being progressed with land clearing being undertaken following the issues with land ownership and drainage now being resolved. He couldn't confirm a definitive timescale but it was hoped that the works would be completed during the current financial year.

- 7.3 Request for Service 452 (Fraserburgh - Inverurie) to be included in the next edition of Stagecoach Bluebird's Buchan Travel Guide.

- 7.4 Query regarding methods of notifying passengers when buses don't operate.

Daniel Laird confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird provide such information via social media, such as twitter, but they are unable to do so on their app yet. He also confirmed that such information can be accessed via Traveline and the possibility of doing so via the Real Time system is currently being investigated in consultation with Aberdeenshire Council and suppliers.

- 7.5 Complaint regarding information for some arrivals on Real-time disappears from the screens.

Daniel Laird confirmed that there can be an issue with the tracking of vehicles due to breakdowns or area coverage, but 98% of Stagecoach buses are now being tracked, since new ticket machines were introduced earlier in 2018.

8. Service 69/69B (Fraserburgh – St Combs/Lonmay/Peterhead)

- 8.1 Repeated requests for additional journeys between Fraserburgh/Peterhead and Lonmay, in particular in the peak and also for passengers to travel to/from Crimond Medical Centre. It was pointed out that some passengers have to alight at Cortes junction and face a 20 minute walk along an unlit pathway to Lonmay, or have to walk to Rathen road end, to access the bus service.

This was coupled with a request from Councillor Doreen Mair for buses to alternate between serving Lonmay and St Combs/Inverallochy.

Daniel Laird reaffirmed that further provision to/from Lonmay is not viable for the company.

9. Services 67/68 (Fraserburgh – Aberdeen)

- 9.1 Query as to why the Buchan Express vehicles are frequently scheduled to operate on other corridors, with particular reference to the A96 corridor.

Daniel Laird confirmed that there are 17 Buchan Xpress coaches, and they are not all required to operate throughout the entire day, so such vehicles can be seen on other corridors outwith peak times.

- 9.2 Complaint regarding the journeys taking up to 12 minutes longer between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen since the completion of the dual carriageway between Ellon and Aberdeen, with the question as to why the services continue to serve Foveran, Balmedie and the Blackdog slip roads, adding further time onto journeys.

Daniel Laird 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 serving Foveran and Blackdog. This of course results in the buses having to also operate via Balmedie.

- 9.3 Councillor Doreen Mair queried whether Foveran and Blackdog could be served instead by the Peterhead - Aberdeen services.

Daniel Laird pointed out that one of the 2 buses operating between Peterhead and Aberdeen is already planned to operate via Newburgh and Balmedie (Service 63), the other more direct via the A90 (Service 60), so both Peterhead and Fraserburgh are planned to have an hourly service via the dual carriageway, with more during peak times.

He reaffirmed that both Foveran and Blackdog will not be abandoned but agreed to look at the frequency of services using the slip roads at Blackdog.

- 9.4 Query whether there will be sufficient capacity on vehicles leading up to Christmas, coupled with a repeated request for express journeys between Aberdeen and Fraserburgh.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the level of service is designed to accommodate demand with, for example, the considerable numbers boarding at Ellon Park & Ride having additional services from Peterhead. He also confirmed that Services X67/X68 provide faster journeys for those in the Fraserburgh area.

- 9.5 Complaint regarding the proposal for the current 1605 hours, 1635 hours and 1710 hours departures ex Aberdeen – Fraserburgh to be re-timed to depart at 1620 hours, 1655 hours and 1715 hours respectively, from mid-November, as some people finish work at 1600 hours or 1630 hours in time to catch the 1605 hours and 1635 hours departures on Union Street, and they would have an additional 15 to 20 minutes added to their day.

Daniel Laird confirmed that these comments will be added to the others received during the consultation period.

- 9.6 Complaint that 3 buses depart Fraserburgh between 0650 hours and 0700 hours and by the time Service X67 reaches Mintlaw, it can't access the bus stop on Mintlaw roundabout.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the 0650 hours ex Fraserburgh is a positional journey which returns north from Mintlaw at 0725 hours, but agreed to look at the situation on Mintlaw roundabout.

10. A.O.B

- 10.1 Query regarding smaller minibus vehicles appearing on Stagecoach services in the Peterhead area, coupled with a request for one to be allocated to Service 273 (Gardenstown – Banff), in view of the narrow roads in Gamrie.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the company has been allocated 10 new minibuses (Mercedes Sprinters), with 3 currently being trialled on town services in Peterhead. He added that at least one will need to be re-allocated as it is not accommodating passenger demand. He confirmed that there are no plans at present to trial them in the Fraserburgh area and the need for a larger vehicle on Service 273 to carry schoolchildren rules out Sprinters on this route.

- 10.2 Claim regarding the Dial-a-Bus service being restrictive with regard to insufficient time being provided for Lonmay passengers to go shopping or attend health appointments.

Susan Watt confirmed that this would be relayed to her Dial-a-bus colleagues.

- 10.3 Query regarding whether there will be a trial of the Plaxton Panther LE coach model vehicles in the area, as a possible alternative to the Buchan Xpress coaches.

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

Daniel Laird confirmed that these vehicles only have 53 seats and would not be able to accommodate passenger demand on the Buchan corridor at peak times.

13. Next Meeting

Councillor Kille confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Fraserburgh in spring 2019.