

Best Bus Service



Banchory Quality Bus Corridor and Discover Royal Deeside

Background

The Banchory Quality Bus Corridor (QBC) and Discover Royal Deeside bus service is a Quality Partnership initiative between Aberdeenshire Council and Stagecoach Bluebird.

Through its Local Transport Strategy (LTS), Aberdeenshire Council endeavours to promote sustainable alternatives to the private car. To provide improved, high quality, public transport services and facilities across Aberdeenshire, the Council is committed to working in partnership with Stagecoach Bluebird and other transport operators to introduce improvements on key corridors to/from Aberdeen, cross-country routes and rural feeders, including, where appropriate, demand responsive transport.



Stagecoach Bluebird, likewise, is committed to providing high quality bus services and to grow the bus market through modal shift.

Mainline routes such as Aberdeen – Banchory, and onwards to Ballater / Braemar, are being developed as QBC's. The Royal Deeside QBC is one of six such corridors in Aberdeenshire.

New Discover Royal Deeside service

With support from the Scottish Executive's Bus Route Development Grant (BRDG) Fund and Aberdeenshire Council, Stagecoach Bluebird has introduced an enhanced service along the corridor, under the distinctive Discover Royal Deeside brand.

Under the terms of the 'Kickstart' initiative, £1.21m has been committed over four years, with a view to the enhanced service becoming self-sustaining.

Discover Royal Deeside buses now operate along the QBC between Banchory and Aberdeen every 15 minutes peak (doubling of frequency) and every 20 minutes off peak (50% frequency increase), with hourly through services to both Lumphanan and Ballater.

Eleven new 'Discover Royal Deeside' liveried, state-of-the-art wheelchair accessible coaches, proudly displaying the royal seal of approval (Bluebird Buses holds The Queen's Royal Warrant for bus and coach services) have been allocated to the enhanced service. The vehicles also have the latest environmentally friendly engines and CCTV, offering added passenger and driver security.



Improved bus infrastructure

Passengers using the Discover Royal Deeside services benefit from enhanced infrastructure, including 30 new solar-illuminated bus shelters and 12 new bus stops, as well as 53 additional boarding platforms along the route. Information provision has also been improved with new timetable displays provided at all boarding stops and new bus stop flags at all stops.



As a result of the investment in improved infrastructure, bus stops on the corridor:

- all incorporate details of the Traveline Scotland contact details and SMS text message service for bus times;
- all display locational names for infrequent users;
- all, with the exception of those used solely for alighting, have timetable cases;
- 69% are provided with a bus shelter; and
- 80% have boarding platforms.

At-bus stop timetable information is maintained to a high standard under a separate partnership arrangement between Aberdeenshire Council and Stagecoach Bluebird.

As part of its LTS, the Council launched 23 dedicated bus interchange points across Aberdeenshire in March 2009. Banchory, Aboyne and Ballater Interchanges form three of these

key locations, with high quality passenger waiting and boarding facilities, improved conventional information and on-street interactive journey planning terminals.



Listening to the public

Both partners are committed to public consultation through the Council's Area Bus Forums, allowing passengers to speak directly to senior management at Stagecoach Bluebird. In response to public requests, the initial Discover Royal Deeside proposals were amended to provide an hourly service to Lumphanan via Torphins and journey extensions in the evenings along the entire corridor to Braemar via Aboyne and Ballater. The associated infrastructure investment by the Council was also increased accordingly.

Innovative marketing

The successful BRDG bid allowed Stagecoach Bluebird to execute a high profile awareness campaign to coincide with the launch of the improved service and implement a market research plan in the following years to develop on the already identified potential for market growth. The campaign consisted of extensive local press advertising, an informative mail drop to 10,000 residents in Deeside, radio, outdoor and on-bus advertising, as well as promotional give-aways to passengers and local residents.

A follow-up campaign celebrated a year of operation, with further promotional media and

re-launch. In the last 6 months, a range of additional money saving 'Megarider' tickets have been introduced, offering commuters significant discount on their travel.

A telemarketing survey is scheduled to be carried out in July 2009 along the line of route. Non-bus users will be identified and will be sent a mailer pack about the service and free ticket offer.

A second phase of activity will be carried out later in the year to further target non-bus users and identify passenger perceptions, brand awareness and customer satisfaction, on those who redeemed the initial vouchers.

Success to date

In addition to overall patronage growth of 29.7%, a bus passenger satisfaction survey undertaken in March 2009, on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council, highlighted the following levels of customer satisfaction:

- 90% with service reliability;
- 90% with on-bus comfort;
- 92% with on-bus safety and security;
- 82% with bus stop information;
- 85% with condition of bus stops/shelters; and
- 91% with safety and security at bus stops/shelters.



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Future development

In order to create a sustainable modal shift, both parties are continually reviewing the service provision on the corridor to establish if a possible increase in frequency is feasible. The introduction of additional 'Megarider' tickets has allowed for development of employee business schemes, which can offer a further 40% off bus travel through salary sacrifice initiatives.

Through-ticketing between operators at interchange points is also being progressively introduced under the terms of the voluntary Aberdeenshire Connect multi-operator ticketing arrangement, in which Stagecoach Bluebird is already a committed participant.

The results of the planned telemarketing and research activity will guide any service or infrastructure improvements in the future.

Aberdeenshire Council has a strategic aim to establish an inter-urban park and ride facility in Banchory, and a conceptual design for the facility has been completed. The Discover Royal Deeside services, with possible further enhancements, will form the basis of an inter-urban park and ride service between Banchory and Aberdeen, the principal aim of which is to provide a sustainable alternative for commuters and, as such, in turn also increase the employment opportunities of local residents.

