

Transport Team/Partnership of the Year



Aberdeenshire Council and Stagecoach Bluebird

Introduction and background

Aberdeenshire Council's Local Transport Strategy places strong emphasis on partnership working with commercial bus and taxi operators, the community transport sector and the community in general, whilst Stagecoach Bluebird seek to organically grow the market through service development and investment. In this context, Aberdeenshire Council and Stagecoach Bluebird have developed new and maintained and enhanced longstanding partnership initiatives in 2008/9, through ongoing and effective joint public/private sector working arrangements.



Notwithstanding the crucial client – contractor relationship that must exist between transport authorities and the bus industry, under the overall auspices of the north-east Scotland Quality Partnership for public transport, which also involves Aberdeen City Council, First Aberdeen and Nestrans, Aberdeenshire and Stagecoach Bluebird have progressed a wide variety of partnership initiatives over the last year, to the benefit of the local travelling public.

New and existing joint initiatives have been developed between the partners to address many of the key areas of successful transport provision.

Approaches to delivery: areas of joint working

Policy – the strategic framework

- the North East Scotland Local Authorities Bus Operators Forum which oversees the Quality Partnership for Public Transport is fully supported by both partners at Steering Group, Executive and Task and Finishing Group levels.

Consultation – what the public needs?

- Area Bus Forums in each of the Council's six administrative areas are administered and chaired by Aberdeenshire Council but are also seen as the principal means of public consultation by Stagecoach Bluebird on commercial service matters.

Advising the public – information provision

- Stagecoach Bluebird contribute funding towards a Publicity Assistant post in the Council's Public Transport Unit, ensuring all timetable displays across the authority are fully maintained.



Bus service delivery – quality bus corridors

- Service frequencies have been enhanced on five mainline corridors, with new vehicles introduced in tandem with improved public transport infrastructure, including the provision of interactive passenger information terminals at key interchange points along each corridor.

Demand responsive transport – Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus



- Stagecoach Bluebird operate four of the Council's innovative *Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus* services whose success is founded upon partnership working between the Council, operators and local community, and which in certain areas also provide a through travel facility onto core commercial services.

Interchange opportunities – facilities



- A longstanding partnership agreement covering the operation of services from Ellon Park and Ride has been reviewed, whereby the Council continues to provide and maintain the facility and the company have, in turn, introduced an enhanced level of bus service provision.

- A reverse vending machine has been installed at Ellon Park and Ride offering discounted travel on Stagecoach Bluebird bus services in return for recycled drinks containers.
- An agreement has been concluded on the joint funding and joint operation of Peterhead Interchange – a ‘state of the art’ Bus Station.

Seamless travel – ticketing



- Stagecoach Bluebird participates in the Council promoted *Aberdeenshire Connect* multi-operator voluntary through-ticketing arrangement. This provides passengers with a 10% discount on single and return fares involving travel between supported feeder and commercial mainline services, through designated interchange points.

Staff skills – knowledge and experience

- A Stagecoach Bluebird employee was seconded to the Council to assist in the deployment of smartcard enabled electronic ticket machines (ETMs) and back-office facilities to supported bus service operators across Aberdeenshire.
- A local protocol has recently been agreed on the submission of commercial bus service registrations, acknowledging the needs of both authority and operator.

Monitoring and review

- The partners share key operational information, as required, and most recently have collaborated in a customer satisfaction survey of Aberdeenshire bus users.

Evidence of progress: measurable success

Effective partnership working has brought positive outcomes and measurable improvements in service delivery to the travelling public. In the last financial year:

- 97% of the 1,030 bus stops equipped with timetable cases have consistently displayed comprehensive and up-to-date information.
- An additional 11% bus stop timetable cases have been installed resulting in over 70% of Aberdeenshire stops with such passenger information.
- Linked to the development of Quality Bus Corridors, 7% additional bus shelters have been erected and 26% additional boarding kerbs have been provided at stops.
- 9.5% adult patronage growth has been experienced on the Aberdeen – Stonehaven/ Montrose *Coastrider* Quality Corridor.
- 3.1% adult patronage growth has been experienced on the Aberdeen – Westhill/ Alford *X15/X17* Quality Corridor.
- 27.5% adult patronage growth has been experienced on the Aberdeen – Banchory/ Braemar *Royal Deeside* Quality Corridor.
- 3.1% adult patronage growth has been experienced on the Aberdeen – Peterhead/ Fraserburgh *Buchan Link* Quality Corridor.
- *Aberdeenshire A2B dial-a-bus* has experienced 19.5% patronage growth.



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- Ellon Park and Ride continues to show 12.6% year-on-year patronage growth, with 23.4% growth experienced in 2008/09.
- Currently 55% of bus services within Aberdeenshire are covered by the *Aberdeenshire Connect* through-ticketing arrangement, which continues to be rolled out on a corridor-by-corridor basis.
- In February 2009, Aberdeenshire Council became the first local authority ETM 'back-office' in Scotland to achieve Transport Scotland accreditation for both fixed and mobile ticket machines.

In March 2009 a customer satisfaction survey of 3,330 Aberdeenshire bus users indicated that when compared with the Department for Transport's Quarterly Bus Passenger Survey results for non-metropolitan areas, local Bus Quality Indicators exceeded the 'national benchmark' on 4 of the 5 high level indicators, including overall service delivery. In terms of the composite indicators, performance was particularly good in relation to bus stop information, an area of service delivery on which many partnership working initiatives have focused.

Joint working between the partners is not confined to public transport initiatives and last year also saw demonstrable progress on various school transport safety initiatives, including the launch of the *Bus Stop!* school transport safety DVD, which was produced in partnership with Talisman UK.

In summary, the ongoing constructive dialogue and, in turn, effective teamwork between the partners has assisted in making significant progress towards the relevant Scottish Government national outcomes and associated local, Aberdeenshire Single Outcome Agreement targets.

