

Scottish Transport Awards 2010

Transport Team / Partnership of the Year Category



Stagecoach Bluebird

Aberdeenshire 
COUNCIL

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Stagecoach Bluebird operate regular routes throughout the North East of Scotland and in particular, connecting Aberdeen with Peterhead and Fraserburgh via Ellon Park and Ride for fast and frequent bus links.

Numerous service improvements have taken place over the last 3 years on these Buchan routes and it is through effective partnerships and working relationships that improvements have been possible and have contributed to passenger growth in the area.

The Background

'The Buchan Link' services launched in 2005 following investment of £2.2m in new vehicles by Stagecoach Bluebird. At this time the corridor was identified as having the potential for growth and a Quality Partnership Scheme with Aberdeenshire Council began – an initiative to encourage joint working to improve public transport options through improved services and infrastructure.

Following from this period the routes have seen further development with the introduction of branded double deck buses to resolve capacity issues in 2007 and additional coaches specific to services between Ellon Park and Ride and Aberdeen.

In early 2009 Stagecoach Bluebird significantly improved the journey times on the corridor as well as introducing brand new coaches



later in the year. The signing of a Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership between Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, First Aberdeen and Stagecoach Bluebird in 2010 for the Buchan/Aberdeen routes is another initiative with the intention of overall improvements to the quality of public transport provision in the area, particularly focusing on improving the overall reliability of customer journeys.

The Partners

Stagecoach Bluebird have made significant improvements to 'The Buchan Link' routes since their launch, including numerous service revisions to improve the frequency, journey time and overall reliability on the routes, as well as continued investment on the fleet and marketing campaigns to encourage modal shift.

In many cases these improvements would not have been possible without the support of Aberdeenshire Council who are responsible for the road side publicity and infrastructure. As part of the Quality Partnership agreement between Stagecoach and Aberdeenshire Council, which aims to provide first-class services to encourage bus travel, improvements were also made to the park and ride site at Ellon, offering a safe and secure environment for commuters to leave their cars for hassle free bus travel into Aberdeen city. The facility is staffed by Aberdeenshire Council and kept up to date with the latest service information through display screens, electronic information points and printed timetables provided by both parties. Ellon Park and Ride is also home to Scotland's first reverse vending recycling machine, which offers a small discount on travel for those recycling plastic bottles at the site.

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This successful coordination of the Quality Partnership has seen the introduction of high quality wheelchair accessible vehicles, better passenger waiting areas, park and ride schemes and a range of ticketing and information initiatives.

Service Improvements

In recent years the 260/263 (Peterhead to Aberdeen) and the 267/268 (Fraserburgh to Aberdeen) routes have seen a number of timetable changes to improve reliability, most recently, these changes have had a significant impact with punctuality levels now up 7%.

In 2009 12 brand new fully wheelchair accessible Plaxton Panther coaches were introduced onto the Buchan Link network. In addition, free Wi-Fi services were available on the coaches offering internet access for



passengers en route to their destination. The objective of this initiative was to encourage commuter usage on the routes and results have been positive so far.

Improved Bus Infrastructure

Passengers using 'the Buchan Link' services benefit from enhanced infrastructure, including 56 illuminated bus shelters, of which 44 are solar-illuminated bus shelters as well as 100 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;
- 46% are provided with a bus shelter; and
- 66% have boarding platforms.

At-bus stop timetable information is maintained to a high standard under a separate partnership

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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. Fraserburgh, Peterhead, Ellon, and Mintlaw Interchanges form four of these key locations, with high quality passenger waiting and boarding facilities, improved conventional information and on-street interactive journey planning terminals.

The Peterhead Interchange, maintained and operated in partnership with Stagecoach Bluebird, boasts a number of services including four high quality bus shelters and a modern passenger waiting area incorporating a Travel Shop, hot and cold refreshments, television and electronic departure boards..

Market Development and Growth

Upon identification of previous punctuality problems affecting not only the Buchan routes but Aberdeen city centre in general, a Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership was signed by Nestrans, Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Stagecoach Bluebird and First Aberdeen. A key element of the agreement is an updated set of standards and targets which will be monitored on an annual basis to assess progress towards achieving the overall objectives of the Quality Partnership and the overarching target to increase bus patronage by at least 10% over the period 2008/9 to 2014/15. A BPIP can provide local authorities with information that previously may not have been available to them; and which can be used as a valuable tool in planning and prioritising traffic management schemes and road works. The partners have identified the Buchan and King Street corridor as the first corridor for action. A full audit of the route has been carried out and a task group is working to

identify actions for improvements and develop a robust method for monitoring current and future levels of punctuality and reliability.

Results

Passenger numbers on 'The Buchan Link' routes have showed a steady increase of 0.2% within 2009, a promising rate considering the current economic climate.

According to statistics from Icomeera, the company hosting the Buchan Link Wi-Fi, statistics have shown that the Wi-Fi has been used on the Buchan Link coaches over 6000 times during the last 3 months, which equates to an average of 1500 times per month. Further results confirmed that 25% of the users of Wi-Fi were logging on whilst commuting to their workplace.

Conclusion

There have been a number of service improvements related to 'The Buchan Link' services over the past few years, through route developments made by Stagecoach Bluebird and infrastructure improvements by Aberdeenshire Council. It is through the successful Quality Partnership agreement that both parties have shown a commitment to the corridor and further involvement through the signing of the BPIP agreement will only strive to improve the quality of service even further.

