

Best Bus Service



Aberdeenshire's A2B Dial-A-Bus Service

Background

In summer 2004, Aberdeenshire Council introduced its very own demand responsive transport (DRT) services, the A2B dial-a-bus. These door-to-door services, which have operated in partnership with bus, taxi and community transport operators, formed part of a Scottish Executive pilot study to develop best practice in the field. A2B dial-a-bus services were initially introduced in Alford, Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Strathdon in 2004, and in 2005 in Central Buchan.

Since then, the concept has been extended covering ten areas across Aberdeenshire, with 53,814 trips being made in 2009/10.

In 2005, the A2B dial-a-bus service won the Scottish Transport Award for best bus service in the Rural Transport category. This submission



aims to demonstrate how through encouraging customer feedback, and ongoing service monitoring and review, Aberdeenshire A2B has built on its initial success and continues to play a crucial, and in many instances lifeline, role for residents of Aberdeenshire.

A2B Objectives

In providing and developing Aberdeenshire's A2B demand responsive transport provision, the aims are to improve the cost-effectiveness of rural transport service delivery, to maximise vehicle utilisation, and to improve accessibility in support of the Council's wider sustainability and social inclusion objectives as set out in the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) and Single Outcome Agreement (SOA).

Aberdeenshire's A2B Services

Flexible services have been progressively introduced over the last five years with services currently operating in and around:

- Alford
- Central Buchan
- Fraserburgh
- Huntly
- Inverurie
- Oldmeldrum
- Peterhead
- Strathdon
- Turriff
- Westhill



The services are the product of extensive consultation and consequently the services vary from area to area. While the majority are open to the general public, including visitors to the area, some are targeted at those with mobility difficulties, including the elderly, disabled, and those without access to conventional bus routes. Hours of operation, geographical coverage and service flexibility reflect local travel needs.

On all A2B services, passengers are asked to pre-book their trips by calling the dedicated dial-a-bus hotline. Calls are answered by the A2B travel despatch team, based in the Council's Public Transport Unit, who use e-scheduling software to optimise passenger pick-up and drop-off times.

I am over the moon with the service as it gives me a bit more independence to get around on my own. I could not use the timetabled service bus as it was not at suitable times for my work. I have special needs and find this a very safe form of transport.

When the services were initially launched, bookings were taken up to the day-before travel. However, having established a quality and reliable service, 'same day bookings' are now made for services where vehicles are equipped with mobile data terminals.

Partnership Working

Partnership working is at the heart of delivering community-orientated services. Initially, services delivered by in-house vehicles were the product of Council cross-Service working utilising a mixture of Social Work and Education Minibuses. This approach has been superseded by the integrated provision of passenger transport within the Council. Nestrans, the Regional Transport Partnership, has assisted the development of the A2B services through the provision of low-floored minibuses in the Donside and Westhill areas, and MPVs on the Huntly and Turriff services.

Strong partnerships have also been formed with local operators, whose understanding of local areas has been of invaluable benefit in efficient service operation.



Key Aspects of Service Delivery

Aberdeenshire A2B services are based upon:

- Extensive consultation and partnership working involving local communities and operators to identify and address local issues;
- Flexible door-to-door services, tailored to individual needs;
- Integration with conventional bus services - not complementary “add-ons”;
- “Area-wide” and “semi-fixed route” services registered with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner as local bus services;
- ‘Real-time’ multiple vehicle scheduling software;
- Vehicles equipped with mobile data terminals;
- Simplified and zonal fares;
- Participation in the Aberdeenshire Connect multi-operator through-ticketing initiative, to allow seamless transfer onto mainline services;
- Accessible, liveried vehicles; and
- Extensive marketing with a corporate brand image on all promotional material.

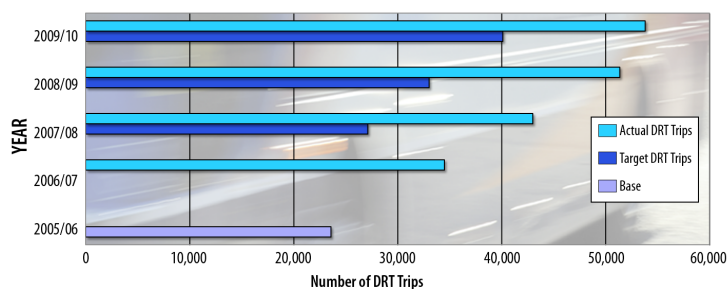


Evidence of Progress

Aberdeenshire's LTS, produced in 2007, set the ambitious target to increase the number of demand responsive trips by 30% by 2010 based on the 2005/06 total which stood at 23,600. As the graph illustrates, the ongoing development of the A2B services has meant this target has been achieved and more!

In 2009/10, approximately 54,000 passenger journeys were made, which represents a 43% increase since 2005/06.

To increase the number of DRT trips by 30% by 2010 based on 2006 levels



The performance of individual services varies depending on local conditions and whether the service replaces or complements existing provision. The most extensive service, Central Buchan, carried 21,771 passengers in the last year, reversing a trend of passenger decline experienced on the previous conventional bus service, and at a cost per passenger figure comparable with the conventional service.

Satisfaction surveys are periodically undertaken on the A2B services. In 2009, these revealed significant levels of support for the service. For example:

- 95% thought the service reliability was either ‘very good’ or ‘good’;
- 99% rated the overall service as either ‘very good’ or ‘good’;
- Performance of the booking office, which on average handles just over 500 calls per week, was rated as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ by 90% of respondents;
- 75% of respondents stated that they preferred the A2B service to other timetabled bus services that they had used; and
- 94% of respondents stated that the service had made a “big difference” to them.

The A2B bus is more than a shopping trip as it is turning into a social event. Most weeks, we meet up in the Café for a cup of tea & chat after we finish our shopping & wait to get picked up for our return journey.



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The survey also revealed that 54% of respondents used the A2B services for shopping purposes, 21% to access medical services, 13% to access leisure services, with 'work' and 'education' also common reasons for using the service. On the Central Buchan service specifically, A2B provides a crucial role in providing access to employment,

with analysis of the e-scheduling performance management reports revealing that approximately 27% of service users took this service for travel to work purposes; emphasising that A2B helps deliver significant economic benefits to local residents, as well as the well-publicised social benefits. This service is also popular with children attending after school activities.

While the above figures provide overwhelming levels of support for the service, it is in the real stories from passengers that the services'

Dial-a-bus is the best thing that ever happened. No longer is there the worry of keeping medical appointments and getting to the shops; to say nothing about the pleasure of visiting friends. Life with the Dial-a-Bus has made a tremendous difference. The helpfulness and kindness of the drivers is second to none. Thank you!

true benefits are understood. A sample of some of the ongoing feedback received through the satisfaction surveys are scattered throughout this submission. As these demonstrate, whether it's someone seeing the services as "more than a shopping trip" or another passenger who thinks the dial-a-bus has made a "tremendous difference in keeping medical appointments", it is clear that for many the A2B service is a lifeline service for a wide range of reasons.

Work Going Forward

We are continually looking at opportunities to build on success to date. Through ongoing monitoring of individual service performance, existing services will continue to be amended in response to changing individual and community needs and the possibility of new DRT services will be actively explored.

It's a good service which gives me the freedom to go shopping on my own as I can't carry heavy bags. The drivers are very helpful and cheerful. I really appreciate this service and hope it can continue.

The lessons that have been learnt over the past five years have turned this pilot initiative into a core component of the Council's supported public transport network, and Aberdeenshire A2B service will undoubtedly continue to benefit the future delivery of rural transport services throughout Aberdeenshire and beyond.

It's made a vast improvement to my life. Most people in the area are of pensionable age and have bus passes that were of not much use to them. I just pray that this service will continue for a long time to come.