

The Scottish Transport Local Authority of the Year



Moving Aberdeenshire Forward

Background

The Aberdeenshire Council area covers some 6313 sqkm, has an expanding population, currently estimated at around 236,000, and with our partners in Aberdeen City is home to a powerhouse of the Scottish economy operating at a global level.

The area is linked by some 5500 kms of roads, over 10% of the national stock, around 100 bus services and 6 railway stations.

The transport challenges faced by Aberdeenshire Council are numerous and varied, however through clear strategies supported across political lines the Transportation Service is rising to these challenges and delivering improved services for the residents and businesses of Aberdeenshire.



Approaches to Delivery and Putting Policy into Practice

Clear corporate leadership and direction is provided by the Council's high level Strategic Priorities and the Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government. The Local Transport Strategy (LTS) clearly links transportation aspirations to the strategic corporate agenda, while informing the development of practical delivery objectives within the Service Plan. Strong political support from elected members and the commitment of staff ensures that ink is translated to action.

Our LTS states:

"The Council can't discuss "what we do" without asking "how we do it." The LTS process must be considered alongside the Council's established ways of working, taking into account issues such as inclusion, accountability, partnership working, evidence-based decision making and efficiency. It must also be an active document, which can be reviewed, revised and disseminated at regular intervals."

This approach is adopted across the Council's transport related services. Delivering travel behaviour change, improving road safety, and reducing the environmental impact of transport will not simply happen overnight and requires a long-term, sustained effort on behalf of all – not just Council services.

Partnership working is central to the work we do and successful examples of our work with public and private sector colleagues are provided throughout this submission.

Specifically, strong partnerships exist with colleagues at the Scottish Government and with our Regional Transport Partnership for Aberdeen City and Shire, Nestrans. In 2009, this partnership was responsible for the successful reopening of Laurencekirk Rail Station, after over 40 years of closure.

Although the Local Transport Strategy has a relatively short time span, concentration on the short term future is not enough, and a long term view is required to ensure that we can continue



to provide a transport system that supports the economic development of the area, particularly in the current economic climate. Through substantial involvement in the development of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan, and Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan, long term transportation needs have been fully embedded into decision making at the highest level.

All of this will now also feed into a light touch review of our LTS to set the direction for the period through to 2015.

Innovation

Aberdeenshire Council has a long record of embracing innovation in the transport sector, and this has been recognised through numerous awards; none more so than being named as the "Scottish Transport Local Authority of the Year" in both 2008 and 2009, and being 'commended' at the 2010 Awards.



However opportunities always exist to improve the services that we provide, both internally and externally, through continued innovation.

Recently, the Council's approach to consultation on the development of the 2009 Walking and Cycling Action Plan was cited as the "most innovative" of all the best practice methods in Consumer Focus Scotland's 'Consumer Engagement in Decision Making: Best Practice Guide'. The consultation programme involved the use of online surveys promoted through a dedicated website; awareness raising through press releases and Twitter; a promotional film posted on the Council's dedicated Travel Planning YouTube channel; and distribution of posters promoting the consultation on walking and cycling routes throughout the region. Workshops were also held with school pupils who, equipped with digital cameras, investigated walking and cycling routes within their towns, taking photos of places where they thought improvements could be made.



The Council's commitment to innovation has also been shown through the significant research progressed on the issue of school transport safety, and the various pupil safety initiatives and demonstration projects launched in this regard. Projects have included the first UK trial of the innovative SeeMe® interactive school bus stop system, trials of new, higher-visibility school bus signage, School Transport Pick-up/Drop-off Assessments, and the development of the 'Bus Stop!' school transport safety awareness campaign.



In recent months, the Bus Stop! Campaign has been developed from what was primarily an in-class learning resource pack into a regional media campaign. Working with private sector partners, funding was secured to develop a 30 second TV advert incorporating key shots from the existing '1Second.1Life' film, allowing the road safety message to be delivered not only to pupils but also parents and motorists in the home environment. As the TV advert promotes the '1Second.1Life' website, additional content was developed for the site, including video messages from a range of stakeholders, including a local head teacher, school bus driver and school pupil. Advice from emergency personnel is also provided along with a short message from local champion boxer Lee McAllister who, in September 2010, helped launch the Council's 'Belt-Up' Campaign to encourage pupils to wear seatbelts on school buses.

Based on a survey of over 900 motorists, the recent trial of new school bus signage also revealed extremely positive results in terms of the increased visibility and comprehensibility of the new sign. As a result, the Council has recently taken the decision to roll-out the new signage to all operators across the region; a process which is currently ongoing.

Playing a leading role in the development of studies in the highly emotive area of School Transport Safety has not been without hard work and considerable resource investment. However, leading research in this area has provided the Council with great satisfaction as the results and lessons learned from the Aberdeenshire studies become increasingly disseminated to partners not only in Scotland but across the UK and wider Europe. Working closely with the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland, for example, the Council played a key role in the development of the recent good practice publication, “A Guide to Improving School Transport Safety”.



Continuing on the road safety front, the Council is currently working with partners at Aberdeen City and The Moray Councils to develop a joint Road Safety Plan for the North East of Scotland, building on our work across the various public sector bodies to develop an overarching Road Casualty Reduction Strategy.

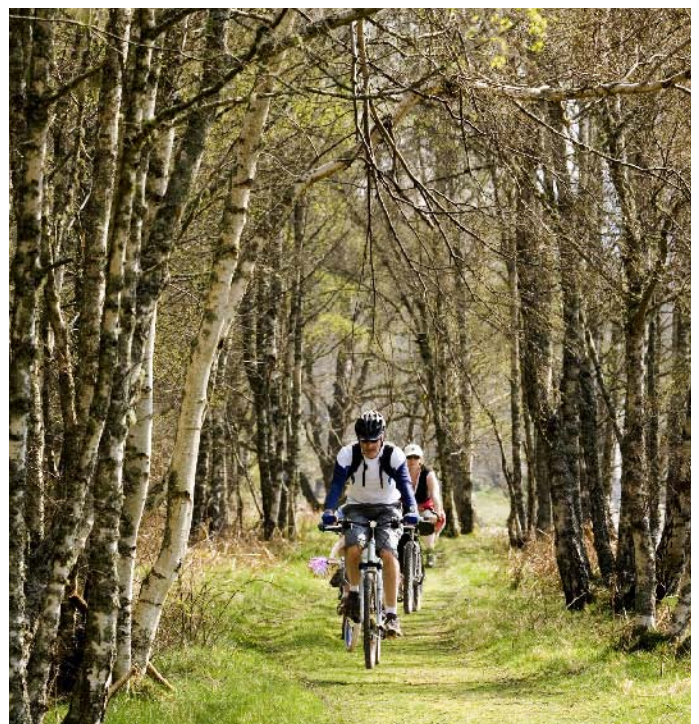


2010 also saw Aberdeenshire Council play a leading role in the implementation of the first Operation Zenith Motorcycle Safety Campaign. In 2009, motorcyclists accounted for 26% of all those killed on the area's roads despite making up only 2% of Grampians' motoring population.

Accordingly, the Council got together with partners at Road Safety Grampian, Bear Scotland, neighbouring Councils and local motorcycle groups in recognition that there is a shared responsibility to reduce the number of road collisions involving motorcyclists. Working together, the partners have introduced a range of measures covering the Four E's; Education, Engagement, Engineering, and Enforcement to tackle the problem of motorcycle

collisions. From increased enforcement and the operation of 'Bikesafe' training courses to the use of new motorcycle safety signage and novel approaches to engagement, early signs are that the holistic and innovative approach adopted by Operation Zenith is delivering positive results both in terms of increased safety awareness and reduced casualty numbers.

Following the publication of the Council's first Walking and Cycling Action Plan in summer 2009, evidence continues to be shown of ink being translated into action. Initiatives taken forward in the last year have included the development of Scotland's first Cycle Demonstration Town in Peterhead, the production of new online cycle maps and the launch of the Royal Deeside bus service as 'bicycle-friendly'. On the latter, to improve integration between bikes and buses, working with Stagecoach Bluebird, the Council has provided bike bags free of charge on the service which travels adjacent to the Deeside Cycle Way.



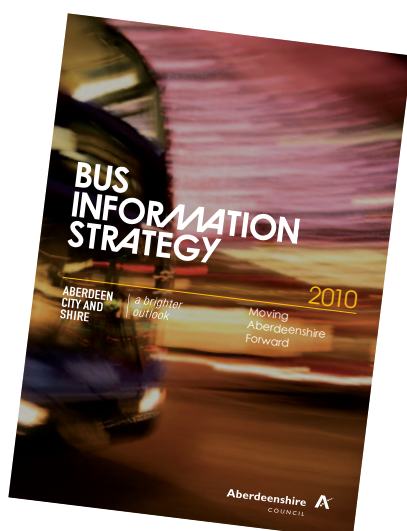
School Travel Planning has been a core area of work since 2002 and innovation is at the heart of the approach. At the 2009, Scottish Transport Awards, the Go For It initiative developed in partnership with Highland Council picked up the award in the Travel to School and Work Scheme category. Impressive results continue to be made through engagement with our schools, and importantly the pupils.



The Council has also actively promoted travel planning to businesses across the region using a range of innovative travel behaviour change initiatives. In May 2010, for instance, No Excuse Zones were launched in Westhill and Peterhead. The key aims of this marketing and information campaign is to reduce car congestion and pollution by encouraging communities to be healthier and more active. The concept centres on the promotion of the short times necessary to cycle to work, school and services within the towns covered. As well as showing safe routes, 'No Excuse' maps highlight the health, financial and environmental benefits associated with replacing short car journeys with cycling. More than simply a map of routes the marketing philosophy is deliberately eye catching, informative and thought provoking, acting as a challenge to residents to get on their bike!

Looking to the future, we are continuing to develop micro-simulation traffic models for our main settlements. This information has proved to be a valuable resource for our planning colleagues responsible for the development of the Council's new Local Development Plan.

Public transport provision is an essential plank within our current LTS, and the role that it has to play in modal shift is crucial. In March 2010, the Council produced its Bus



Information Strategy, setting out the content and standards of information expected of the Council and operators in relation to timetable leaflets, maps, bus stop information, real-time passenger information and internet information, amongst others.

Through partnership working with Operators, innovative initiatives have been developed to add to the attractiveness of public transport within the area. For example, Stagecoach Bluebird have introduced new buses offering free Wi-Fi on their Buchan Link corridor, building on from the Council's provision of Wi-Fi at the Ellon Park and Ride site; a key hub for the route, whilst work is ongoing with partners to develop the options for Real Time Passenger Information systems. These facilities greatly add to the comfort and journey experience.

Measurement of Results

Alongside analysis of nationally produced indicators, broad spectrum local surveys, such as the Citizen's Panel, the regular Area Bus Forums, and the comprehensive Aberdeenshire Resident's Survey, are used to gather data on progress, actual and perceived. This is augmented with targeted work, such as 28 automated traffic counters, 6 automated cycle counters, bus user surveys, and the now nationally adopted school travel Annual Hands Up Survey.

Bus passenger data is collected through partnership arrangements with the operators, and augmented by "on service" surveys. Following an extensive customer satisfaction in March 2009, which was completed by over 3,300 bus users, a follow-up survey was completed in March 2010 with 600 bus users. The results from this survey revealed an increase in satisfaction levels between the 2009 and 2010 surveys. In addition to customer surveys, DRT management information is retrieved from in-house booking and dispatch centre software, providing a highly useful data set.

All information is used, along with a wide range of Management Indicators to monitor effectiveness of the Local Transport Strategy. The results of the LTS reviews are published annually in the Annual Progress Report (APR) via the Council's website. As well as providing an invaluable tool internally,

allowing the opportunity to take a step back, publication of the APR document ensures that our progress is available to all stakeholders in a transparent manner.

This wide range of data streams is used to compile the Council's Performance Indicators, which are reported to Elected Members on a quarterly basis, and ultimately inform progress towards the outcomes in the Single Outcome Agreement. This information allows Elected Members to make information based investment decisions, ensuring that the ethos of best value is maintained in the provision of infrastructure and services.

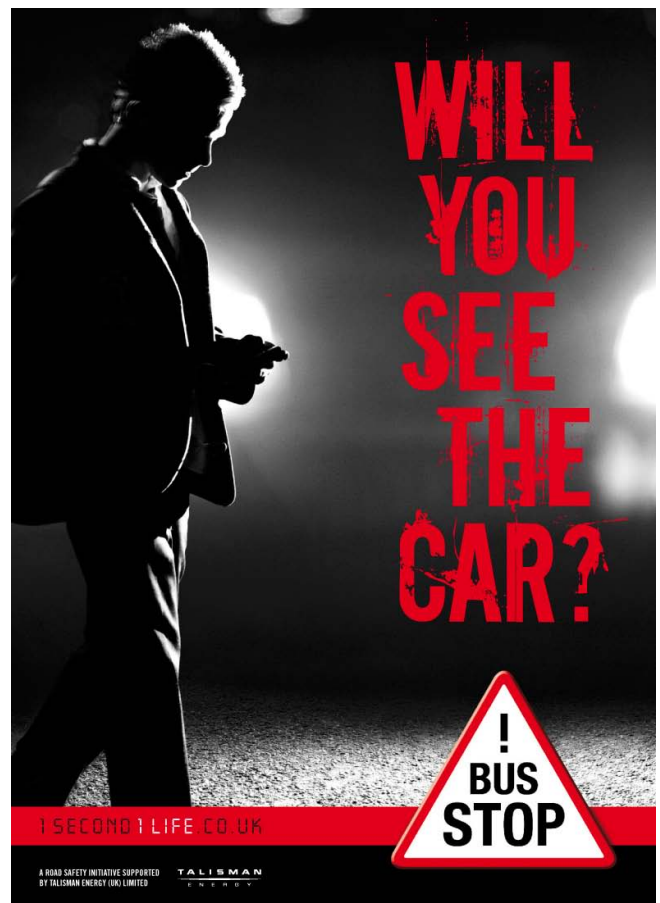
Evidence of Progress

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to be the "Very Best of Scotland". Within the Transportation sector we aim to deliver a network, both in terms of infrastructure and services that supports this aspiration.

The deployment of e-scheduling software for school transport has already demonstrated the potential for real benefits. For example, as part of the 2010 tendering exercise, the Trapeze software was used to re-schedule the entire home-to-school transport network and established the potential for a 32% reduction in vehicle mileage for Special Education Needs services, and a 22% reduction in vehicle mileage for services to mainstream schools across Aberdeenshire (589,000 and 420,000 miles respectively); resulting in financial savings of 13% and a reduction of over 300 vehicles required to operate the service.

School Travel Planning continues to be a success story. Through sustained effort and commitment by the School Travel Planning team some 92% of schools across the area are now involved in the process. These improvements can only be delivered in partnerships with school communities.

Bus Stop! has been extremely well-received by all who have seen this hard-hitting, emotive campaign. The Bus Stop! Pack has been rolled out to all schools across North East Scotland, while it is estimated that approximately 500,000 residents in North Scotland will have seen the advert at least once following the TV advertising campaign



broadcast during autumn/winter 2010. A review of traffic to the dedicated Bus Stop! website also revealed that the number of website visits increased by 109% following the TV campaign.

The impact of Operation Zenith has also been extremely positive and it is considered that the engagement with over 4000 motorcyclists during 2010 not only raised awareness, but contributed to a 22% reduction in motorcycle injury collisions compared to 2009. An online evaluation of Operation Zenith, completed by nearly 200 bikers also confirmed the success of the campaign with 80% of respondents stating that they felt the campaign had a positive impact in terms of increasing awareness levels of motorcyclists and their safety.

Public transport is a key element of the areas transport provision, and Aberdeenshire Council is a proud member of the longest standing Quality Partnership for Public Transport in Scotland. Over recent years several Bus Route Development projects have been completed along our major radial routes, while Ellon Park and Ride and Peterhead Transport Interchange add to the recent infrastructure improvements.

In March 2010 satisfaction surveys with 600 existing bus users indicated that service delivery exceeded the national benchmark in all five of the high level national (DfT) Bus Quality Indicators. Follow-up surveys will be undertaken in 2011.

By demonstrating a long term commitment to Demand Response Transport (DRT) Aberdeenshire Council has continued to build on its pioneering role in the development of such services. First introduced in 2004/05 with five services, the A2B dial-a-bus, network now comprises ten services, making over 2,400 trips in 2009/10 for the benefit of 53,814 passengers. A recent satisfaction survey also indicated that 95% of respondents stated that the service had made a “big difference” to them. While the above figures are impressive, it is really in the specific, real story, one-to-one feedback from passengers that the services’ true benefits begin to be understood. The sector leading experience of our officers in this area is now feeding into an Audit Scotland review during 2011.

Conclusion

Aberdeenshire Council considers transportation to be a crucial aspect to the future of our area and plays a key role in supporting businesses in these



difficult times. Through a consistent, coordinated approach, supported from the highest political level, the Council has demonstrated a long term commitment to the delivery of high quality, innovative services to meet the needs of all.

In recent years tangible results have been the reward for this approach. However the details contained within this submission highlights the commitment to build upon these previous successes, to strive to be “the very best of Scotland.”

Serving Aberdeenshire from mountain to sea – the very best of Scotland



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Aberdeenshire 
COUNCIL

The Council has a clear approach to transportation. Its strategies are aligned and well articulated, and it has made improvements to infrastructure and public transport usage.

It works well with other partners and responds to local needs. It has made significant improvements in road safety and the condition of its roads is among the best in Scotland.

Extract from Aberdeenshire Council's
Audit of Best Value and Community Planning:
prepared by Audit Scotland, June 2008.

SCOTTISH
TRANSPORT
LOCAL AUTHORITY
OF THE YEAR
2008 & 2009
COMMENDED
2010