

# BUCHAN AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 20<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2019

MINTLAW ACADEMY, MINTLAW

## In Attendance

### **Councillor N. Smith (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor J. Ingram (Aberdeenshire Council)

Myra McCredie (Mintlaw Community Council)

Anne Johnson (Cruden Community Council)

Stuart Johnson (Cruden Community Council)

Gavin Smith (Cruden Community Council)

Jayne Fraser (Buchan Dial-A-Community Bus)

Lesley Brown (Bus User)

James McKenzie (Bus User)

Rona McKenzie (Bus User)

Catherine Whitehill (Bus User)

Peter Knight (Managing Director, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Daniel Laird (Commercial Director, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Neil Stewart (Principal Officer, Passenger Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

Susan Watt (Senior Transport Officer, Passenger Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

## Apologies

Councillor A. Simpson

Joyce Clark

### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Councillor N. Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.

### **2. Minutes of Meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

The minutes were then approved.

### **3. Matters arising from the Minutes**

Neil Stewart provided the following update on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council:

- 3.1 In response to Councillor Ingram's query as whether passenger usage has increased in recent times on Central Buchan A2B dial-a-bus, he confirmed that it has seen increasing passenger journeys year on year with just under 18,000 trips in 2016/17 to being on course for well over 20,000 trips in 2019/20. He confirmed that there are regular early morning passengers from Maud and New Deer to Mintlaw.

Daniel Laird provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.2 In response to the claim that Service 66 (Maud/Stuartfield - Peterhead) is not connecting with the mainline services (67/68) between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen at Mintlaw, he confirmed that the company has tried to maintain reasonable connections but it is difficult to arrange this with journeys to/from Maud/Stuartfield in the west at the same time as journeys to/from Longside in the east.

Councillor Ingram confirmed that he had received a letter regarding reliability issues on this part subsidised/part commercial corridor.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Council only subsidises some evening journeys (Monday to Saturday) and the Sunday service.

- 3.3 In response to the claim regarding frequent late running of the 1155 hours ex Mintlaw - Peterhead (Monday to Friday), he confirmed that this had been addressed and no further complaints have been received.
- 3.4 In response to the query as to whether Stagecoach Bluebird provides leaflets/posters advertising their 50p travel for children, accompanied by an adult, at weekends and during school holidays, he confirmed that the company's marketing team had advertised the promotion mostly through digital social media, along with radio and some traditional media, and this had been very well received.

It was raised from the floor that a related article had been incorporated in a local magazine, which was distributed to over 600 households in the area, to which Daniel Laird expressed his thanks.

- 3.5 In response to the suggestion that labels be fixed to the storage compartment doors on the Buchan Xpress vehicles, warning passengers that they spring out, as people have been struck by them, he confirmed that only the drivers should be operating the doors and they should ensure there is clearance from passengers. He advised that any incidents be reported to the company.

#### **4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update**

Daniel Laird provided the following update:

- 4.1 Aberdeenshire Council's review of supported Local Bus services earlier this year, coupled with the tendering of such services in South Aberdeenshire, had a knock-on impact on the commercial network resulting in revisions from 19 August 2019.
- 4.2 Service 747 (Peterhead / Ellon - Airport - Stonehaven - Montrose)

The service was introduced on 20 January 2019 following public consultation and the opening of the AWPR, operating between Peterhead/Ellon and Stonehaven via A90, then on to Montrose via A92. Initially it operated on an approximate hourly basis and it was hoped that after a strong publicity campaign, that the corridor would see on-going growth, but this has not materialised. This resulted in a reduction in the level of service from 19 August 2019 to try to maintain commercial viability.

He also confirmed that Stagecoach have worked closely with Aberdeen Airport and the loss of the Gatwick to Aberdeen service had been disappointing.

- 4.3 All the company's main operational corridors, including the Buchan services to Ellon/Peterhead and Mintlaw/Fraserburgh are currently being monitored and reviewed to assess the impact of the completion of both the A90 dualling between Aberdeen/Ellon and the Western Peripheral Route. He explained that, on the whole, congestion had reduced on the Buchan corridor, the only exception being both ends of the Ellon by-pass during the peak periods, so the aim of the review is to address reliability, speed up journeys where possible, try to retain local links, and consider vehicle types/allocations.

- 4.4 The closure of Broad Street in Aberdeen to host the Christmas Village over the festive period, followed by the long-term closure of Union Terrace from January 2020 to carry out improvement works to Union Terrace Gardens, will likely result in disruption to bus services.
- 4.5 The Scottish Government has announced a £500 million funding package that will enable local authorities – in partnership with bus companies – to introduce bus priority and other schemes to tackle traffic congestion. Further details to be advised in due course.

## **5. Aberdeenshire Council Update**

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 Council supported local bus services in South Aberdeenshire were offered for tender earlier in Spring this year and the new contracts were implemented on 19 August 2019.

Tenders are scheduled to be invited for North Aberdeenshire contracts next Spring, for implementation in August 2020. These include Service 51 (Fraserburgh/New Pitsligo – Ellon), Service 83 Town Service Peterhead (Waterside and Buchanhaven), Service 84 Town Service Peterhead (Inverugie and Cairntrodlie), Service 270 (New Pitsligo – Fraserburgh via Strichen), and Service 272 (Fraserburgh – Banff via Strichen and New Pitsligo), along with some journeys on Service 66 (Maud – Peterhead), Service 69 (Peterhead – Fraserburgh via St Fergus) and Service 81 (Boddam – Peterhead). The timing of this procurement exercise will depend on the Aberdeenshire supported services review.

- 5.2 Transport Scotland are piloting a free bus travel scheme for Modern Apprentices in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Shetland from 25 November 2019.

Councillor N. Smith confirmed that this would be funded by the Scottish Government.

## **6. Aberdeenshire Review of Supported Passenger Transport Services**

Neil Stewart confirmed the following:

The Council is undertaking what it is calling a ‘clean-sheet’ review of the local bus, and dial-a-bus, services that it financially supports. This is not as a result of reduced funding, but it is aimed at influencing decisions on how to prioritise spend.

A survey questionnaire has been launched on the Council’s web site. It focuses on ascertaining views on how best to provide supported bus services and can be completed as individuals or on behalf of an organisation. It will run until 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019. He urged those who hadn’t completed the questionnaire yet to do so via the link on the Council’s web site and advised that those who can’t access the internet will soon be able to pick up printed copies in local libraries and Aberdeenshire Council offices.

He explained that the questionnaire includes questions regarding the following:

- Preferred trip purpose
- Preferences for types of services e.g. mainline to/from Aberdeen, between Aberdeenshire towns, rural areas to nearest town, town services
- Preferred times of day/day(s) of week for travel
- Fixed route or Demand Responsive
- Views on Community Transport
- Reasons for not travelling by bus

It was raised from the floor as to whether mobile libraries would be included into the distribution list.

Neil Stewart confirmed that these should be included but he would raise this matter with his contact at Library and Information services.

## **7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information**

- 7.1 Repeated request for provision of a bus shelter on the A952 at Fetterangus road end or to the south end of the village.

Councillor N. Smith confirmed that this had been the subject of a request in the past but the northbound footpath is too narrow to install any type of shelter and the southbound location is restricted due to the position of a hedge, and an objection was received from the house owner concerned.

Councillor Ingram requested that officers have another look at all possible options where there might be sufficient space for a shelter facility.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be arranged.

- 7.2 Request for provision of bus shelters on Buchan Road (Fraserburgh), near the bottom of Lewis Road, on both sides of the road.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be considered.

- 7.3 Query regarding the on-going issue with the location of the bus stop at Longhaven, highlighting that various site meetings have taken place involving Transport Scotland, the Community Council, and residents, to consider the issue of vehicles parking in the layby to visit the shop, this creating an issue for buses trying to pick up and drop off passengers. It was advised that the implementation of parking restrictions in part of the layby in May 2019, allowed buses to access the bus stop.

Councillor N. Smith confirmed that due to the bus stop being located on the A90 trunk road, it will be up to Transport Scotland to consider any further action at this location and hopefully an update can be provided at the next meeting.

## **8. Chapel Street Bus Stop Consultation**

Neil Stewart confirmed that a Council 'working group' in Peterhead has been looking at traffic movements in the town centre, particular congestion in the vicinity of the bus stop located on Chapel Street, where buses previously took layover to allow interworking of services and passenger interchange. Due to the very high passenger numbers utilising the stop it was considered that rather than remove it, retain it as a timing point only, so buses can only pick up and drop off passengers then move on to the Peterhead Interchange. This revised arrangement has been closely monitored over several months and no issues have been reported, with traffic movements improving.

**9. Service 69 (Fraserburgh - Peterhead)**

- 9.1 Request to bridge the gap late afternoon from Peterhead to Inverallochy between 1400 hours and 1720 hours (Monday to Friday).

Daniel Laird confirmed that the service has been monitored and revised, taking into account the volume of passengers and their movements. He acknowledged that the service is trying to accommodate too many different requests but agreed to keep the service under review.

- 9.2 Complaint regarding the fare being too expensive from Inverallochy to Fraserburgh at £5.50 day return, compared with Boddam to Peterhead at £3.30 day return.

Daniel Laird confirmed that single and return fares can be based on the commerciality of each service, highlighting that there are standardised 'dayrider' tickets in the Fraserburgh and Peterhead areas (£2.10), offering more value for money than day singles/returns.

**10. Service 60/61/67/68 (Peterhead - Aberdeen and Fraserburgh - Aberdeen)**

- 10.1 Councillor Ingram raised concerns regarding the reliability of services on the corridor following the opening of the AWPR, in particular in the Ellon area.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the completion of the AWPR and dual carriageway between Balmedie and Tipperty, has created faster journey times between Ellon and Aberdeen but there are issues on the A90 in the a.m. peak between Toll of Birness and the Ellon Park & Ride roundabout, and in the p.m. peak from the Ellon South Road roundabout to the Ellon Park & Ride roundabout. This has created inconsistencies and reliability issues, which are being analysed with a view to implementing a more realistic timetable.

Councillor N. Smith and Councillor Ingram raised the matter of dualling between Toll of Birness and Ellon, to alleviate the queues and the need to press Transport Scotland to look at this.

- 10.2 Claim regarding there being insufficient seats to allow passengers to board at King Street (Aberdeen University) for northbound travel, due to people travelling within the City. This was coupled with queries as to whether the service could be limited stop and whether this is due to Stagecoach offering cheaper fares than other bus companies.

Daniel Laird confirmed that, whilst passengers travelling within Aberdeen contribute to the commercial viability of the services, including the frequency provided, he would look at this matter, including the possibility of reducing the number of stops served within the City, as it is not acceptable to have long distance passengers stranded at bus stops.

He advised that the fares offered by Stagecoach Bluebird and First Bus Aberdeen are not significantly different.

**11. Boddam - Peterhead (Services 81/82/82A)**

- 11.1 Query as to when the "sprinters" would be withdrawn from the corridors, including Boddam – Peterhead, where they do not provide sufficient capacity.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the last of the "sprinters" should have been moved to the Inverness area by now, so he would ensure that this is actioned.

**12. Service 271 (Macduff - New Pitsligo – Fraserburgh)**

- 12.1 Councillor Ingram pointed out that a larger vehicle is required to cater for passenger demand on the 1600 hours ex Fraserburgh – Banff.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he was aware of this and that Stagecoach had agreed to provide a larger vehicle at no additional cost to the Council.

**13. Date and Venue of Next Meeting**

Councillor Smith confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum would take place in Mintlaw Academy in Spring 2020. Further details will be advised in due course.