

KINCARDINE AND MEARNS AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 5th MARCH 2020

LIBRARY, MACKIE ACADEMY, STONEHAVEN

In Attendance

Councillor W. Agnew (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor S. Dickinson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Michael Morgan (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Peter Flockhart (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Chris Greene (Benholm and Johnshaven Community Council)

Shelia Jamieson (Portlethen and District Community Council)

Morag Andrew (Newtonhill Bus User)

Ainslie Thomson (Portlethen Bus User)

Ian Bennett (Portlethen Bus User)

Sheena Adam (Stonehaven Bus User)

Maureen Cook (Bus User)

Dorothy Foreman (Bus User)

Irene Gray (Bus User)

Rose Lawson (Bus User)

M Pirie (Bus User)

Cecile Mackie (Bus User)

John Shinnie (Bus User)

Nancy Grant (Bus User)

Sandy Hodge (Bus User)

Lavina Hodge (Bus User)

Sandra Walker (Bus User)

Daniel Laird (Commercial Director, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Sandy Gallacher (Interim Operations Manager, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Simon King (Allocation Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland)

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

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

Apologies

Councillor I. Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Agnew welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.

2. Minutes of Meeting on 31st October 2019

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

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

- 3.1 In response to the query as to why Aberdeenshire Council has not adopted Chapelton Park and Choose, as well as the issue of there being no lighting on site, he confirmed that the developers retained ownership of the site and the Council is doing its utmost to engage with them regarding the lack of lighting and other matters affecting passengers.

It was raised from the floor that there are significant safety issues for passengers using the facility late evenings and early mornings, particularly during the winter months. This was coupled with a request for the Council to meet with the developers as soon as possible, given the additional journeys via the facility, planned from 6 April 2020.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would raise this as a matter of urgency with his colleagues.

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

- 3.2 In response to the request for Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) timings to be amended to improve connections on Barclay Street, he confirmed that the revisions planned for implementation on 6 April 2020 would address this.
- 3.3 In response to the request for Service 4A/4C to serve Stonehaven Community Hospital, he confirmed that this had been given due consideration in consultation with the Council, but it is not currently possible to re-route the service without incurring additional resources.
- 3.4 It is not possible with current resources to extend the 0935 hours ex Stonehaven (Forest Park) to commence from Farrochie Road.
- 3.5 In response to the request for the 2150 hours ex Aberdeen - Portlethen to be retarded to depart at 2220 hours to allow those attending HM Theatre in Aberdeen to travel home, he confirmed the company has been able to provide a departure at 2253 hours, planned for implementation on 6 April 2020.
- 3.6 In response to the claim that the 1150 hours ex Aberdeen – Stonehaven (Service 7B) did not extend from Barclay Street to Spurryhillock on Sunday 27 October 2019, he confirmed that investigations found that the vehicle had broken down on route to Aberdeen, which had a knock-on effect on the return trip at 1150 hours ex Aberdeen, and he apologised for this.
- 3.7 In response to the repeated request to address the gap in service on Saturday mornings on Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service), he confirmed that this is not possible on a commercial basis.

4. Stagecoach Update

(Please note that at the time of the meeting Stagecoach Bluebird planned to implement their network revisions with effect from 6 April 2020. As a result of the Covid -19 emergency and its impact on bus service operations, these changes have been put on hold indefinitely)

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

- 4.1 Following a review of Stagecoach Bluebird's commercial network, proposed resulting revisions have been the subject of public consultation, and this resulted in 250 responses from the public and, where possible, this feedback has been accommodated in the revised proposals.

The revisions also take account of any reliability issues, as well as the opportunity to provide faster journeys to/from Aberdeen as a result of reduced congestion in many areas, due to the completion of the AWPR.

He summarised as follows:

4.2 Service X7 replaces Service X6 (Stonehaven - Aberdeen Limited Stop)

This service will be enhanced, offering express journeys from Stonehaven to Aberdeen up to every 20 minutes, in conjunction with Stagecoach East Scotland's Service X7 (Perth - Dundee - Stonehaven - Aberdeen). On weekdays, two journeys per hour will operate from Forest Park to Aberdeen via Barclay Street and Chapelton Park & Choose, with the third journey operating from Barclay Street to Aberdeen via Chapelton Park & Choose operated by Stagecoach East Scotland.

At weekends, journeys will operate hourly from Forest Park to Aberdeen with a second journey every hour from Barclay Street (Stagecoach East Scotland).

4.3 Services 7/7B: Newtonhill/Chapelton - Portlethen - Marywell - Aberdeen)

Service 7 will normally operate up to every hour between Portlethen (Berrymuir Road) and Aberdeen via Portlethen Asda, Schoolhill and Bridge of Dee. Certain journeys in the mornings and evenings will extend to Stonehaven.

Service 7B will operate up to every hour from Chapelton to Aberdeen via Chapelton Park & Choose, Newtonhill village and Portlethen, providing a direct link from Chapelton to the city for the first time, and additional journeys will serve St Michael's Road in Newtonhill. Services will operate up to every hour.

In summary, Services 7 and 7B will offer a combined service up to every 30 minutes from Portlethen to Aberdeen.

4.4 Services 8/8A/8C replace Services 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service)

Continues to provide local links in Stonehaven up to every 30 minutes (Monday to Saturday), connecting with express Service X7 journeys to Aberdeen from Barclay Street. Service 8 will operate a limited number of journeys off-peak (Monday-Friday) between Stonehaven and Portlethen (Asda).

4.5 Service 747 (Peterhead / Ellon - Airport - Stonehaven - Montrose)

Due to low usage, this service, which was introduced on 20 January 2019, will revert to 5 return journeys per day between Peterhead/Ellon Park & Ride and Aberdeen Airport/Dyce as per the Aberdeenshire Council contract.

All journeys between Stonehaven, Kingswells Park & Ride, Craibstone Park & Ride and Aberdeen Airport will therefore be withdrawn and the journeys between Stonehaven and Montrose will revert to operating as Service 107.

5. Aberdeenshire Council: Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- 5.1 Regarding the commercial service revisions to be implemented by Stagecoach Bluebird in the Kincardine and Mearns Area, no action will be taken by the Council. However, the Council will continue financially support 50% of the Stonehaven town service and various journeys via the Mearns coastal villages. Stagecoach Bluebird also consulted with the Council regarding the retiming of journeys on the contracted Service 26 (Luthermuir/Laurencekirk – Stonehaven) as the joint aim is to improve reliability issues on this route.
- 5.2 In response to the sad news that M W Nicoll Coach Hirers (Laurencekirk) Ltd. would cease trading in October 2019, the Council had to undertake competitive tendering on a short term basis for the replacement of the majority of journeys on Service 9 (Laurencekirk - Montrose).

Initially, Aberdeenshire Council decided to support the continuation of journeys which were previously operated on a commercial basis by the above operator between Montrose and Laurencekirk (Mearns Academy), these carrying “out of zone” schoolchildren residing in Angus. The Council agreed to do this until Saturday 4 January 2020, to allow the parents/carers almost 3 months to arrange alternative means of transport to/from school.

These journeys were as follows:

0825 hours ex Montrose - Laurencekirk (Mearns Academy) (Monday to Friday): 1
Aberdeenshire based passenger, 20 Angus based passengers)
1535 hours ex Laurencekirk (Mearns Academy) - Montrose (Monday to Friday): 1
Aberdeenshire based passenger, 22 Angus based passengers)

These journeys were not subject to tender for continuation beyond Monday 6th January 2020, as this authority does not provide dedicated home to school transport for out of zone schoolchildren, particularly if they are from another local authority area, unless there happens to be demand at the same time from Aberdeenshire residents in significant numbers, e.g. for work purposes, and there is no significant increase in cost if the service has to be diverted or extended. Aberdeenshire based children on this route already have dedicated home to school transport provided by the Council.

However, the successful operator, Stagecoach East Scotland, confirmed that they would provide the 0825 hours ex Montrose morning journey to Laurencekirk (Mearns Academy) on a commercial basis. Complaints have since been received by the Council, that the vehicle has insufficient capacity for this journey, such complaints being passed to the operator as they are responsible for the size of the vehicle allocated in this instance.

Stagecoach East Scotland do not have any resources available to operate the 1535 hours ex Laurencekirk (Mearns Academy) – Montrose, and it is common for most operators to be fully resource committed between 1530 hrs and 1630 hrs due to the carriage of schoolchildren who are entitled to free home to school transport. There is an Aberdeenshire Council supported journey departing Laurencekirk at 1700 hours and, for children who reside in Montrose, there is a 1551 hours rail departure from Laurencekirk.

Simon King confirmed that his company's inspectors carried out spot checks and no issues were found regarding capacity on the 0825 hours ex Montrose, but they would continue to monitor the journey.

- 5.3 Service 29 (Gannochy Bridge - Fettercairn - Laurencekirk) was recently offered for tender on a long-term basis, with Ian Smith and Sons from Woodside (near Coupar Angus) being the successful operator and will commence operation on 20 April 2020. The company has confirmed that, like the current operator (Stagecoach Bluebird), it will commercially extend the service at no additional cost to/from Edzell Village to pick up out-of-zone school children, this being subject to review.
- 5.4 The Scottish Government has recently agreed that everyone under 19 years of age will be entitled to free concessionary bus travel as from January 2021.
- 5.5 A review is being undertaken of the fortnightly A2B Dial-A-Bus services to Portlethen Asda from the Mearns coastal villages and Laurencekirk, it being suggested that the services could operate to Montrose instead of Portlethen Asda. The Council is currently speaking to customers to gauge their views and to highlight that passengers can be picked up/dropped off at various locations in Montrose, such as Tesco, Aldi, Lidl and on the High Street. This would result in a significant reduction in mileage on Route 5a (St Cyrus - Johnshaven - Gourdon - Portlethen) and Route 5 (Laurencekirk - Portlethen).

He asked that comments be provided to the A2B Team by Monday 23 March 2020 to assist in the final decision by telephoning A2B on 01467 535 333 or emailing a2bdialabus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

He also confirmed that all Council-operated A2B services are listed on the website <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/public-transport/a2b-dial-a-bus/>.

6. Aberdeenshire Review of Supported Passenger Transport Services

Neil Stewart referred to the ongoing 'clean-sheet' review and confirmed that a survey questionnaire was launched by the Council at the end of November 2019. It focused on ascertaining views on how best to provide supported bus services and resulted in almost 2,400 responses. He referred to the handout and talked through the main findings, as below:

- 6.1 In Kincardine and Mearns, respondents per postcode were as follows:
 1. AB39: Stonehaven 94
 2. DD10: St. Cyrus 51
 3. AB30: Laurencekirk 46
 4. AB12: Portlethen 20
- 6.2 The largest proportion of respondents to the questionnaire was in the 60+ age group (37%). 88% of respondents were bus users with just over 44% of them travelling by bus in Aberdeenshire on a regular basis.
- 6.3 The primary purposes for travel of bus users who responded were:
 1. Social/leisure (33%)

2. Work (22%)
3. Shopping (22%)

Whilst the most common secondary purposes for travel were:

1. Shopping (34%)
2. Social/leisure (26%)
3. Medical/health (19%)

The most common reason for not using the bus was that the current services do not take people where and/or when they wished to go (24%).

- 6.4 65% thought that supported bus services should be targeted at people who do not have access to private transport, rather than encouraging people to leave their cars at home. 54% considered that the main priority was for provision to be focussed on 'older people' (> 60 years), whilst the 'adult' category (aged 25 – 60 years) and the 'children & young people' category (< 25 years) were ranked equally (23%).

Accounting for respondents' second and third preferences, there was no change in the priority ranking.

- 6.5 Regarding first ranked trip purpose priorities:

1. Work was favoured by 53%
2. Access to healthcare by 34%
3. Education/training 7%
4. Shopping 3%

Accounting for respondents' second, third, etc. preferences, there is no change to the expressed order of priority.

- 6.6 Regarding bus service types, the first ranked priorities were:

1. Rural services connecting with mainline routes to/from Aberdeen (38%)
2. Rural services to/from local towns (22%)
3. Mainline route enhancements (16%)
4. Cross-country services and town services ranked equally (both 12%)

Accounting for respondents' second, third, etc. preferences, the priority ranking was, as follows:

1. Rural services connecting with mainline routes to/from Aberdeen and Rural local services to/from local towns ranked equally
3. Cross-country services
4. Mainline route enhancements and town services ranked equally

- 6.7 In terms of preferred time periods of operation the first preferences were for provision during:

1. Mon - Fri peak times (68%)

2. Mon - Fri inter-peak hours (22%)
3. Weekend evening services (4%)
4. Mon - Fri evening and Saturday daytime and Sunday daytime services ranked equally (all 2%)

Accounting for respondents' second, third, etc. preferences the priority ranking was, as follows:

1. Mon - Fri peak times
2. Mon - Fri inter-peak hours
3. Monday to Friday evening services and Saturday daytime services were ranked equally
5. Weekend evening services and Sunday daytime services were ranked equally.

6.8 Regarding service delivery, 77% preferred traditional timetabled bus services operating along a fixed route with set journey times and stopping places, followed by pre-bookable timetabled door-to-door services (14%).

6.9 Regarding policy priorities, there was a relatively even split in the number of respondents selecting local economy and jobs (26%) and social inclusion issues (25%) as being of the highest priority in Aberdeenshire. The most popular second ranked priority was social inclusion (27%), closely followed by health and well-being (26%).

Accounting for second, third, etc. preferences the priority ranking was similar, as follows:

1. Local economy and jobs and Social inclusion and Health and wellbeing were ranked equally
4. Reduction of poverty and inequalities
5. Environmental issues.

6.10 Regarding Community Transport, 69% of respondents felt that communities should have a role in the provision of local passenger transport services, with 43% stating that communities should help design bus services and 27% stating that they should assist in the design of community/voluntary transport services. 80% expressed the view that the Council should continue to provide financial support for community/voluntary transport services.

7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

7.1 Request for provision of a bus stop on Arduthie Road (Stonehaven) at Arduthie School.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

7.2 Requests for the bus stop shields, which are currently lying on the grass at two locations in Portlethen, to be uplifted and secured to the poles on Bruntland Road (opposite the Academy) and the Glebe (Muirend Road).

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

7.3 Claim that the Real-Time information display on Barclay Street (Stonehaven) is not working.

Councillor Dickinson confirmed that she had spoken to Jim Bowe from the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU), and he had confirmed that technical issues had arisen due to a change of Comms provider and the matter is being attended to. She also advised that the Council is currently in discussions with Aberdeenshire Libraries to investigate displaying real time information (RTI) via screens at their locations. The PTU are also exploring the opportunity of including an RTI facility on the MyAberdeenshire App (<https://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/my/mobile-app/>) and will also focus on other facilities within Stonehaven.

- 7.4 Request for an update on proposed measures to improve traffic flow on Barclay Street (Stonehaven), highlighting the volume of buses, goods vehicles loading/unloading, and general parking in the area, all creating issues.

Simon King advised that Stagecoach East Scotland continue to monitor the situation, and whilst they still have some concerns regarding the safety of the interchange location for both drivers and passengers, there has been a reduction in the number of issues reported by his colleagues, and the impending withdrawal of Service 747 (see Page 3, Item 4.5 above) is also expected to alleviate these problems. He continued to express the view that an alternative bus interchange should still be considered within the town.

There was a suggestion from the floor that the reinstatement of Cameron Street as an interchange point for northbound buses, be considered.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the revised bus movements arising from the forthcoming Stagecoach Bluebird revisions on the 6 April 2020 will be monitored over a 3 month period.

- 7.5 Request for an update on potential Union Square Bus Station improvements.

Daniel Laird confirmed that Stagecoach Bluebird continues to undertake discussions with the owners of the facility (Hammerson Ltd) and further details will be reported in due course. He also highlighted that the phasing of the traffic lights at the entrances/exits to/from the bus station onto Market Street and Guild Street, will be matters for discussion with Aberdeen City Council.

8. Services X6/X7/7A/7B (Aberdeen - Portlethen - Stonehaven)

- 8.1 Repeated request for the reinstatement of a.m. peak journeys between Farrochie Road (Stonehaven) and Aberdeen (Monday to Friday), arriving in Aberdeen for those travelling to work or for medical appointments, highlighting that passengers will have to take 3 buses to travel to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Daniel Laird reaffirmed that this is not possible with current resources.

- 8.2 Query as to why single deck vehicles cannot be allocated to the route to allow operation under the Slug Road bridge.

Daniel Laird reiterated that double deck buses are required for the fulfilment of school contracts in the area, and these vehicles are allocated to journeys to/from Aberdeen at other times, to allow their full utilisation. He added that it is not commercially viable to purchase additional single deck vehicles

- 8.3 Query as to whether there is any funding available to operators from the Scottish Government towards public transport initiatives.

Daniel Laird advised that the Scottish Government has pledged £500 million to support bus service infrastructure to encourage greater use of public transport. He added that the company is currently working with Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, First Bus, and Nestrans on plans to improve bus flows on Queens Road and at Bridge of Dee, but it could take several years to reach full implementation.

- 8.4 Thanks were expressed from the floor for the proposed hourly service to Newtonhill via St Michael's Road. However, it was raised that drivers will experience issues operating via St Michael's Road when the bus is due there at 1523 hours, coinciding with the end of the Newtonhill Primary school day.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this would be closely monitored.

(Following the meeting, Stagecoach Bluebird confirmed that the 1523 hours journey will only operate during school holidays).

- 8.5 Request for the Service X7 (Aberdeen - Stonehaven - Perth - Dundee) to be re-routed to serve Portlethen, also highlighting the reduction in the number of journeys between Stonehaven and Portlethen as from 6 April 2020, adversely affecting residents from both towns e.g. Portlethen residents attending Kincardine Community Hospital in Stonehaven, and Stonehaven residents shopping at Asda in Portlethen.

Simon King confirmed that the additional running time cannot currently be accommodated but this would be kept under review.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the service review found that the vast majority of passengers travel between Portlethen/Aberdeen and Stonehaven/Aberdeen, but the company has maintained a link between the two towns, albeit limited, by providing two weekday return journeys originating in Stonehaven and one weekday return journey originating in Portlethen, as from 6 April 2020.

There was a request for Service 8 to cover other parts of Portlethen and for an additional journey to fill the gap between 1016 hours and 1316 hours ex Stonehaven to Portlethen.

Daniel Laird confirmed that both requests would be considered once the service has had time to bed in.

It was also raised from the floor that passengers currently travelling on Service X7 (Aberdeen – Perth) would not want journeys to divert via Portlethen due to additional time involved on what are supposed to be faster journeys.

Daniel Laird highlighted the difficulty in striking a balance between passenger needs.

- 8.6 Claim regarding frequent late running of the 0839 hours ex Stonehaven - Aberdeen (Monday to Friday) via Chapelton Park and Choose (0850 hours). It was also claimed that, when raised with Stagecoach Bluebird, they were informed that this was due to late operation of a school contract prior to this journey.

Daniel Laird confirmed that he was aware of this matter and is looking at vehicle allocations at Mackie Academy in order to rectify the situation without having to make any retimings.

- 8.7 Stagecoach Bluebird and Stagecoach East Scotland drivers received compliments from the floor for their excellent customer service.

Daniel Laird and Simon King expressed their thanks and confirmed that this would be relayed to their drivers.

- 8.8 It was queried as to whether Service 7B (see page 3, item 4.3 above) will operate as hail and ride on St Michael's Road (Newtonhill), coupled with a request that, if that is the case, drivers look carefully for passengers.

Daniel Laird confirmed that it will be hail and ride and that drivers will be reminded of this.

- 8.9 Request for the gap to be filled between 1435 hours and 1603 hours ex Portlethen (Berrymuir Road) - Aberdeen on the proposed timetable to be implemented on 6 April 2020.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this is not possible due to school transport commitments at this time of day.

- 8.10 Request for more journeys to be re-routed via Wellington Road, Altens (Aberdeen) for those travelling to/from work and/or various car dealerships.

Daniel Laird confirmed that there is peak hour provision for those travelling for work purposes, but passenger demand between towns south of Aberdeen and Altens is extremely limited throughout the remainder of the day.

9. Other Matters

- 9.1 Query as to whether passengers are legally bound to fasten seatbelts whilst travelling on a bus service.

Daniel Laird confirmed that to be the case where seat belts are fitted and if you are aged 14 years or above the law states that you must wear a seat belt if fitted. He highlighted the difficulty in trying to enforce this.

- 9.2 Query as to whether Stagecoach are carrying out essential cleaning of buses in accordance with the Government guidelines regarding Coronavirus.

Daniel Laird and Simon King confirmed that the daily vehicle cleaning programme has been enhanced, as per the Government guidelines, and hand sanitiser is provided on board. He also confirmed that all drivers are aware of the guidelines, but also highlighted the difficulties drivers face being on the frontline.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Councillor Agnew advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in Autumn 2020.