

# **BANFF & MACDUFF AREA BUS FORUM**

**MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 30<sup>th</sup> MAY 2019**

**BUCHAN HALL, BUCHAN STREET, MACDUFF**

## **In Attendance**

### **Councillor A. Kille (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor M. Roy (Aberdeenshire Council)

Monica Sorrell (Macduff Resident and Bus User)

Nicky Thom (Gardenstown Resident & Bus User)

Alasdair Galloway (Banff Bus User)

Mrs P. Brown (Bus User)

E. Stewart (Bus User)

Brenda McKay (Bus User)

W. Mustard (Banff and Macduff Community Council)

K. A. Mustard (Banff and Macduff Community Council)

E. Shacklock (Bus User)

K. Smith (Macduff Resident and Bus User)

A. Milne (Bus User)

Richard Menard (Macduff Resident)

Lynn Menard (Deveron Coaches)

Jamie Reid (Operations Manager: Buchan and Moray, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

**Apologies:** none received

## **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Councillor Kille welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given. He apologised for the late change in venue and expressed his thanks to Richard and Lynn Menard for allowing access to Buchan Hall. This was echoed by Neil Stewart and Susan Watt.

## **2. Minutes of Meeting on 8<sup>h</sup> November 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 request for the bus shelter at Loch Street (Whitehills), in front of the public toilet block, to be replaced with an enclosed shelter, he confirmed that this would be fulfilled during the current financial year.

He expressed some caution as he thought that perhaps a cantilever structure had replaced an enclosed one in the past, following antisocial behaviour, and a monitoring period will be undertaken once the new shelter has been installed.

- 3.2 Regarding the request for a bus stop near Inverboyndie, he asked if anyone was aware of the specific location preferred. As no-one could assist on the night, he confirmed that he would ask Stagecoach to obtain feedback from drivers.
- 3.3 A new bus stop shield has been attached to the bus shelter on Shore Street (Macduff) opposite the Town Hall.
- 3.4 In response to the repeated request for Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown/Fraserburgh) to be re-routed via High Shore (Macduff), he confirmed that whilst the “Sprinter” minibus can access the roads in question, Stagecoach Bluebird have advised that if there is a breakdown or the vehicle requires routine maintenance, they don’t have a similar sized replacement available. Should a second similarly sized vehicle be based at Macduff depot in the future, this request will be revisited.

Jamie Reid provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.5 In response to the request for Stagecoach Bluebird to purchase a smaller vehicle to ensure that Service 273 (Gardenstown - Banff) can operate to the bottom of Gardenstown, he confirmed that a “Sprinter” minibus has been allocated to the route, with favourable feedback from passengers.
- 3.6 In response to the request for Service 35 (Aberdeen - Banff - Elgin) to be re-routed via Deveron Community and Sports Centre in the evenings, he confirmed this had been fulfilled (see also Item 7.6).

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

Jamie Reid provided the following update:

- 4.1 He confirmed that new double decker buses have been allocated to Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff - Elgin) with a huge investment by the company over the past 18 months and invited comments from the floor. Feedback was received on the night as follows:
  - \* Vehicles noisy - “high pitched whine”
  - \* Vehicles uncomfortable for longer distances, with limited leg room
  - \* Temperature control variable as not air conditioned - upstairs can be too hot or too cold
  - \* Very little space for luggage or pushchairs, and no space for cycles
  - \* Reliability and punctuality have both improved significantly
  - \* Increased capacity means nobody left standing at bus stops

Jamie Reid thanked everyone for their comments and whilst he confirmed that nothing can be done regarding the configuration of seats and storage space, he would investigate the temperature control issues (see also Item 7).

#### **5. Aberdeenshire Council Update**

- 5.1 Neil Stewart confirmed that the Council had to undertake a review of supported Local Bus services to contain spending within the approved Revenue Budget for 2019/2020, resulting in savings of £560,000 across Aberdeenshire. Services affected in the Macduff and Banff area were as below:

Service	Route	Revisions & Comments
272	Banff - Fraserburgh	0720 hrs from Fraserburgh to Banff (Mon - Fri) and 1705 hrs from Banff to Fraserburgh (Monday to Friday) withdrawn.
273	Banff - Gardenstown/Fraserburgh	Saturday service reprieved until at least the end of financial year 2019-2020.
301	Macduff - Aberchirder - Huntly	Saturday service, comprising 2 return journeys, withdrawn; Aberchirder has an alternative Saturday service to/from Turriff and Inverurie (Service 308).
308	Aberchirder / Turriff / Rothienorman - Inverurie	1114 hrs from Aberchirder to Inverurie (Mon - Fri), 1310 hrs from Turriff to Inverurie (Mon - Fri), 1011 hrs from Inverurie to Aberchirder (Mon - Fri) and 1357 hrs from Inverurie to Rothienorman (Mon - Fri) withdrawn. Remainder of Monday to Friday service plus Saturday service unaffected.

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

6.1 Request for Service 35 to make an additional stop after Woolmanhill (Aberdeen).

Jamie Reid confirmed that this would be considered.

6.2 Request for the timetable display at the bus stop at James Street (Macduff) to be updated, as it is an old version.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated

6.3 Repeated complaint regarding buses having difficulty in operating through Aberchirder and not being able to serve the bus stop on Main Street, due to parked vehicles.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this was being investigated as part of a traffic management review and this would again be brought to the attention of colleagues in Roads and Landscape services.

6.4 Claim that with Chalmers Hospital (Banff) being assigned new patients following the closure of Macduff Medical Centre, traffic levels and parking in the vicinity of the hospital have increased considerably and buses struggle to gain access and serve the bus stops.

Councillor Roy confirmed that there is investment for additional off street parking in the area and this should help alleviate the situation.

**7. Service 35 (Aberdeen - Turriff - Macduff - Banff - Elgin)**

- 7.1 Query as to why Stagecoach invested so much money in double deck vehicles in view of the frequency of high winds on the corridor.

Jamie Reid confirmed that safety is paramount, and the decker vehicles would be replaced with single deck vehicles in such instances.

- 7.2 Query as to why coaches of the type allocated to the Service 10 (Aberdeen - Elgin - Inverness) corridor, were not allocated to the Service 35 corridor.

Jamie Reid confirmed that coaches of the type allocated to the Service 10 corridor do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate demand on the Service 35 corridor. Furthermore, any higher capacity coaches than those on Service 10 would be too long to negotiate many sections of the Service 35 route.

- 7.3 Query as to whether passenger toilets can be installed in the double deckers in view of the length of journey involved.

Jamie Reid confirmed that this is unfortunately not possible due to the associated increase in the overall weight of the vehicles. He advised that drivers are instructed to stop for a few minutes at places such as Oldmeldrum, where toilets are close by, and wait for passengers.

- 7.4 Request for the service extensions to serve Deveron Community and Sports Centre be withdrawn on the basis of limited passenger demand and the roads being unsuitable for buses, with claims that pavements are being hit and there have been close calls with residents' walls.

Jamie Reid confirmed that the journeys were re-routed in response to requests to serve the facility and Neil Stewart added that there were also general requests for Aberdeen - Banff journeys, which previously terminated at Low Street, to extend within the town, allowing shoppers and workers to return home for example.

There was confirmation from the floor that the extensions are being used, but not necessarily to/from Deveron Community and Sports Centre.

Jamie Reid confirmed that the route between Low Street and the facility will be reviewed.

- 7.5 Query as to why the 1430 hours ex Aberdeen (Monday to Friday) now terminates in Oldmeldrum instead of Banff.

Jamie Reid confirmed that this would have been a commercial decision but he would try to find out the reason.

- 7.6 Request to fill the gap between 1518 hours and 1918 hours from Portsoy to Aberdeen on a Sunday. It was raised that there was previously a journey at 1718 hours ex Portsoy – Aberdeen, but it now terminates at Macduff.

Jamie Reid again confirmed that this would have been a commercial decision but he would report the request to colleagues.

- 7.7 Query as to whether passenger feedback on the corridor will be taken into consideration when Stagecoach considers new vehicles in the future.

Jamie Reid confirmed that it is important to receive feedback and, of course, it will be taken into account in future vehicle acquisitions.

**8. Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown/Fraserburgh)**

- 8.1 Request for the service to be re-routed to operate via Chalmers Hospital in the opposite direction, as it currently meets Service 300 (Banff/Macduff Town Service) “head on”, resulting, at times, in one of the buses having to reverse.

Jamie Reid confirmed that he would report this to colleagues with a view to a route revision with effect from 19 August 2019.

- 8.2 Complaint regarding instances of passengers not being allowed to board the service when travelling from Banff to Macduff and vice versa.

Neil Stewart apologised for the confusion caused to passengers and explained the rationale behind this restriction i.e. a Council supported service should not potentially compete with a commercial service. He added that, at certain times of day within Macduff/Banff, the subsidised Service 273 operates via a similar route as, and just in front of, the commercial Service 300 operated by Deveron Coaches, therefore a restriction applies whereby Service 273 cannot, for example, pick up a passenger in Macduff for Banff, if Service 300 is following soon afterwards.

He acknowledged the confusion this creates with passengers and confirmed that discussions will be held with Stagecoach Bluebird, with a view to minimising the number of journeys affected and for those affected to be advertised within timetable publicity. He also acknowledged that the low frequency of both services must make this situation hard for the public to comprehend.

Jamie Reid confirmed that drivers on Service 273 have been instructed accordingly and they should always stop to inform any intending passengers affected by this.

- 8.3 Nicky Thom thanked Aberdeenshire Council for re-instating the Saturday service and for agreeing to the allocation of the “Sprinter” vehicle to the route. She confirmed that she had distributed leaflets and posters around Gardenstown to publicise the service.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Saturday service would operate until at least 31 March 2019 and will be reviewed along with other services in Aberdeenshire later this year.

- 8.4 Claim regarding persistent late running of the 0755 hours ex Troup to Banff (Monday to Friday; schooldays) resulting in people being late for work, as it is frequently sits behind the “school bus”.

Jamie Reid confirmed that he would report this to colleagues with a view to a timing revision with effect from 19 August 2019.

- 8.5 A Stagecoach driver advised that not enough running time is given in order to operate to the bottom of Gardenstown and back and requested that an additional six minutes be added to the return journey operating time.

Jamie Reid confirmed that he would report this to colleagues with a view to a revision with effect from 19 August 2019. Neil Stewart agreed to such a revision.

- 8.5 Request for all journeys on the service to follow the same route within Macduff, in view of the closure of Macduff Health Centre.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would ask Stagecoach to implement this on 19 August 2019.

**9. Next Meeting**

Councillor Kille confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in Macduff in November 2019.