

BANFF & MACDUFF AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 14th NOVEMBER 2019

BUCHAN HALL, BUCHAN STREET, MACDUFF

In Attendance

Councillor A. Kille (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Glenda Anderson (Gardenstown Village Action Committee)

Nicky Thom (Gardenstown Resident)

Ian Thom (Gardenstown Resident)

Graham Wall (Gardenstown Resident)

Odette Strain (Bus User)

Edwina Stewart (Bus User)

E. Shacklock (Bus User)

Monica Sorrell (Bus User)

K. Smith (Banff Resident)

Ross Gibb (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Richard Menard (Macduff Resident)

Lynn Menard (Deveron Coaches)

Jack Wright (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:

Councillor B.A Topping (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor M. Findlater (Aberdeenshire Council)

B Wiseman

1. Welcome and Introduction

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

2. Minutes of Meeting on 30th May 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 a bus stop at Inverboyndie, he explained that buses can stop anywhere on a hail and ride basis as long as it is safe to do so. He added that fixed bus stops could only really be provided at the far ends of the village to avoid siting them outside residential properties.

Richard Menard explained that the request had come from himself and that a designated bus stop would provide clarity for passengers. He added that more housing is planned for the village.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would ask one of his colleagues who is responsible for bus stop provision to contact him direct.

- 3.2 In response to the request for the timetable display at the bus stop at James Street (Macduff) to be updated, as it is an old version, he confirmed that the information has now been updated.
- 3.3 In response to the request for journeys on Service 273 (Gardenstown - Banff) to be re-routed within Banff to avoid meeting buses on Service 300 (Banff/Macduff Town Service) in the vicinity of Chalmers Hospital, he confirmed that journeys were retimed with effect from 19th August 2019 to try to avoid this happening as far as possible.

It was raised from the floor that, at times, the 1110 hours ex Chalmers Hospital (Service 273) arrives early at 1100 hours at Cluny Street and waits for 10 minutes on a yellow box junction, creating issues for other traffic.

Jack Wright confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 3.4 In response to the claim regarding persistent late running of the 0755 hours ex Troup to Banff (Monday to Friday; schooldays) resulting in people being late for work, he confirmed that the journey was also retimed on 19th August 2019 and he was not aware of any problems since then.
- 3.5 In response to the complaint regarding instances of passengers not being allowed to board the service when travelling from Banff to Macduff and vice versa, he confirmed that the restrictions were removed on 19th August 2019 as a result of the aforementioned re-timings to avoid the Council subsidised Service 273 potentially competing with the commercial Service 300.
- 3.6 The Saturday journeys on Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown) will be reviewed along with other supported bus services in Aberdeenshire next year.
- 3.7 In response to the complaints that drivers are not given enough time to operate to the bottom of Gardenstown and back, he confirmed that additional running time had been built in to address this on 19th August 2019.

There was a comment from the floor that there is still a problem with the distribution of running times along the route.

Neil Stewart explained that whilst he would ask Stagecoach to look at this, care needs to be taken to avoid the possibility of reverting to times which compete with Service 300.

- 3.8 In response to the request for all journeys on Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown/Fraserburgh) to follow the same route within Macduff, in view of the closure of Macduff Health Centre, he confirmed that that was also implemented on 19 August 2019.

Jack Wright provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.9 In response to the comments received at the previous meeting regarding the allocation of the new double decker buses to Service 35 (Aberdeen - Banff - Elgin), he acknowledged that there have been mixed reviews from passengers.
- 3.10 In response to the request for Service 35 to make an additional stop after Woolmanhill (Aberdeen), he confirmed that due to the road works planned in this area over the next year, including Union Terrace (Aberdeen), this would need to be put on hold for now.

- 3.11 In response to the request to review the need for Service 35 extensions to serve Deveron Community and Sports Centre on the basis of limited passenger demand and the roads perhaps being unsuitable for buses, he confirmed that there were no plans to review this at present.
- 3.12 In response to the query as to why the 1430 hours ex Aberdeen (Monday to Friday) now terminates in Oldmeldrum instead of Banff, he confirmed that the vehicle is allocated to operate a school contract in the area and therefore cannot be extended.
- 3.13 In response to the request to fill the gap between 1518 hours and 1956 hours from Portsoy to Aberdeen on a Sunday, he confirmed that this will be discussed at the company's next service review meeting.

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Jack Wright provided the following update:

- 4.1 He confirmed that the new double decker buses allocated to Service 35 (Aberdeen – Banff - Elgin) have had a mixed review since they were introduced and confirmed that there had been some mechanical issues recently, resulting in the buses being withdrawn from the corridor for a short period of time, to allow rectification through the manufacturer.
- 4.2 The company is currently reviewing its commercial service network with the aim of implementing revisions in 2020.

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update

- 5.1 Service 473 (Gardenstown – Fraserburgh) currently records very low passenger usage from Pennan on this Council 'in-house' service, meaning that intending passengers in the village now need to book travel in advance. Notices have been displayed in the village to inform residents.
- 5.2 Tenders are scheduled to be invited for North Aberdeenshire Local Bus Service contracts next spring, including Services 271 (Macduff - Fraserburgh), Service 272 (Banff - Fraserburgh), Service 273 (Banff - Gardenstown/Fraserburgh), Service 301 (Macduff - Huntly) and Service 405 (Macduff - Cullen), along with a late Saturday evening journey on Service 35 from Aberdeen to Whitehills. The timing will be dependent on the supported bus service review.

6. Aberdeenshire Review of Supported Passenger Transport Services

Neil Stewart explained as follows:

- 6.1 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 9th December 2019.

He urged those who hadn't completed the questionnaire yet to do so via the link on the Council's web site.

(<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/public-transport/policies-strategies-and-contracts/>)

He 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

7. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

- 7.1 Request for the provision of a bus shelter at the bus stop on Harbour Street (Gardenstown) for those travelling up the hill. However, it was raised that the preferred location would be at the bottom of the hill or at the top of Main Street, where the road is wider.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be not be possible at the top of Main Street but the area where the bus turns on Harbour Street/New Ground will be considered if there is sufficient space for a facility.

- 7.2 Complaint that the information displayed at the timetable on Garden Street (Gardenstown) is still incorrect.

Neil Stewart confirmed his understanding that this had been corrected and that it is based on the information downloaded through the Stagecoach electronic bus service registration. He therefore agreed to arrange for this matter to be investigated again.

- 7.3 Query as to why timetables displayed at bus stops do not indicate the dates of schooldays and non-school days, creating confusion for passengers with journeys which are denoted as operating, for example, on schooldays only.

Susan Watt confirmed that the timetables leaflets list such dates.

(Following the meeting, it was confirmed that listing specific school dates would create difficulties within the system used for displays at bus stops, but the matter will be looked into.)

- 7.4 Claim that the recent road works programmed on Buchan Road (Macduff) created confusion for passengers as the temporary bus stops were located too close to the works, resulting in the contractors moving them, meaning that the Council notices were not directing people to the correct location.

Susan Watt confirmed that the PTU is rarely informed when traffic lights are in operation, but the road is still open. On this occasion, a temporary bus stop had been located outside the area of the works, but the works were later extended from the original location, resulting in a build-up of traffic behind buses stopping to pick up passengers.

8. Service 35 (Aberdeen - Turriff - Macduff - Banff - Elgin)

- 8.1 Complaint regarding uncomfortable single decker buses being allocated to the route on Sundays coupled with a query as to why coaches, similar to those used on Service 10 (Aberdeen - Elgin - Inverness) are not allocated to Service 35.

Jack Wright confirmed that if there are breakdowns or other emergency situations, alternative vehicles will be allocated to ensure that the journey operates. He referred to the aforementioned mechanical problems (Item 4.1 refers) when 4 double deck vehicles had to be removed from the corridor for repairs. However, he apologised for this happening on Sundays, as there should be a greater choice of alternative vehicles and agreed to investigate.

He also advised that there was a pressing need to provide additional capacity on Service 35 and the double deck vehicles have considerably more seats than the coaches used on Service 10.

- 8.2 Query as to the company's procedure regarding the allocation of double deck vehicles to the corridor when high winds are predicted, and whether it is left to the driver to take such decisions.

Jack Wright confirmed that safety is paramount, and the decker vehicles would be replaced with single deck vehicles when high winds are forecast on the Met Office website. He advised that the decision is undertaken at operational management level.

- 8.3 Repeated claim that the heating system is faulty, at times blowing out cold air.

Jack Wright confirmed that the company is currently in discussions with the manufacturer to rectify the issues with the complex heating system, which he explained is regulated by the vehicle and not by the driver. He confirmed that there had been an improvement over the last 2 weeks, but the situation will be monitored.

- 8.4 Repeated request to fill the gap between 1518 hours and 1956 hours from Portsoy to Aberdeen on a Sunday, coupled with a query as to whether the 1600 hours ex Elgin - Macduff could be extended to Aberdeen.

Jack Wright referred to his earlier comments (Item 3.13 refers) and confirmed that whilst the extension request would be considered, it may not be possible operationally.

- 8.5 Councillor Kille queried the safety of buses/coaches parking outside the Macduff depot on Shore Street (Macduff), where it is common for up to two vehicles with hazards lights to sit there, creating a safety hazard for vehicles travelling in both directions.

Jack Wright confirmed that this was due to driver changeovers, as legally they are not allowed to transport passengers into the depot grounds for safety reasons, but that this would be discussed.

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

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

9. Service 273 (Banff – Gardenstown/Fraserburgh)

- 9.1 Repeated claim regarding school children frequently travelling on the 0755 hours ex Troup to Banff (Monday to Friday; schooldays), rather than the “school bus” which is operated by a “sprinter” vehicle, resulting, at times, in insufficient seating for other passengers and late running.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 9.2 It was raised from the floor that the 1515 hours ex Banff Academy (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday; schooldays) and the 1605 hours ex Banff Academy (Monday and Tuesday; schooldays), which is operated by the “sprinter” vehicle, is frequently used by school children, resulting in insufficient seating for fare paying passengers.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 9.3 Complaint that Stagecoach drivers did not operate some journeys to the bottom of Gardenstown during the Gala Day (3rd August), resulting in passengers not being able to travel to or from the event at the harbour.

Richard Menard confirmed that drivers couldn't access the bottom of the village due to traffic lights and the number of parked cars

It was raised from the floor that the Gardenstown Village Action Committee will meet early next year to discuss the issue of car parking. Stagecoach drivers were praised for their efforts to serve the village.

Councillor Kille acknowledged that the road works should have been scheduled to avoid a clash with the Harbour Gala Day, as there were traffic and parking issues.

10. Service 301 (Macduff - Huntly)

- 10.1 Request for the timetable to be revised to provide connections with rail services at Huntly Railway Station.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the timing of journeys is dictated by a combination of the Gordon Schools (Huntly) opening and closing times and the fact that the service interworks with Service 303 (Huntly - Turriff). This leaves very little room for movement of times, but this would be investigated.

11. Next Meeting

Councillor Kille confirmed that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in the same venue in Macduff in Spring 2020.