

# KINCARDINE AND MEARNS AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019

COUNCIL CHAMBER, VIEWMOUNT, STONEHAVEN

## In Attendance

### **Councillor W. Agnew (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor I. Mollison (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor S. Dickinson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Paul Melling (P.D.C.C. and Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Ken Watson (Transport Action Kincardineshire)

Euan Williamson (Portlethen Bus User)

Ainslie Thomson (Portlethen Bus User)

Morag Andrew (Newtonhill Bus User)

Michael Morgan (Newtonhill Bus User)

Peter Flockhart (Newtonhill Bus User)

Irene Gray (Stonehaven Bus User)

Sheena Adam (Stonehaven Bus User)

Sidney Adam (Stonehaven Bus User)

George Ewing (Bus User)

John Shinnie (Bus User)

Duncan Ross (Bus User)

Nancy Grant (Bus User)

Ian Bennett (Bus User)

M Pirie (Bus User)

Cecile Mackie (Bus User)

Simon King (Allocation Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland)

Peter James (Stagecoach East Scotland)

David Liston (Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Ian Bell (Operations Manager, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

Roddy Aiken (Transport Officer, Passenger Transport Unit, Aberdeenshire Council)

## Apologies

None

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

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

### **2. Minutes of Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

The minutes were approved

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

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

- 3.1 Regarding provision of a bus shelter on Kirkton Road (Stonehaven) opposite the entrance to Kincardine Community Hospital, he confirmed that ownership of the land is still with the developer and the Council needs to obtain permission to install a shelter and area of hardstanding without having to purchase the land, so the matter is still ongoing.
- 3.2 Regarding the possibility of lowering the road below the railway bridge on Slug Road, Stonehaven, he advised that feasibility works have been undertaken, these confirming that the necessary works will initially cost the Council an estimated £100k, but additional costs associated with public utilities is estimated at £400k. Therefore, the matter will not be taken forward.
- 3.3 In response to the request for the 'bum bar' on the bus shelter on Muirend Road (at Rowanbank Road, Portlethen) to be replaced by seats, he confirmed that the 'bum bar' has been replaced by extended 'perching' which is more comfortable.
- 3.4 In response to the request for earlier departures on Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) on Saturdays, to allow people to attend social events such as coffee mornings in the town centre, he confirmed that due to the aforementioned review to contain spending, there is no money available to subsidise additional journeys at this time.
- 3.5 In response to the request for the Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) timings to be amended to improve connections on Barclay Street, he confirmed that the Council is currently awaiting proposals from Stagecoach Bluebird.
- 3.6 In response to the requests for the 'bum bars' to be replaced by seats, and higher quality bus shelter facilities in general, at Barclay Street Interchange, he confirmed that there will be a review of public transport infrastructure in the area, possibly during the current financial year.
- 3.7 A "no smoking" sign has been fixed to the bus shelter at Barclay Street Interchange (Stonehaven).
- 3.8 In response to Councillor Dickinson's correspondence regarding congestion problems on Barclay Street (Stonehaven), due to the volume of buses in the vicinity of the interchange at certain times of the day, he confirmed that whilst there had been no further reports of such problems, but the situation will continue to be monitored. Stagecoach will also take account of such reports when they consider their service proposals for the area.
- 3.9 In response to the request for real time passenger information to be displayed in local facilities, such as libraries and shops, in the vicinity of principal bus stops, which are frequently utilised by passengers bus users, he confirmed that this can be achieved but would rely on wider collaboration with local facility owners and assessing their capabilities to deliver the hardware to allow the Council to set-up URL's (Uniform Resource Locators) to correctly point their displays to the chosen stops.  
  
He requested details of preferred locations, with Portlethen Library being suggested from the floor, but other locations can be proposed by emailing [public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)
- 3.10 Confirmation is awaited from Stagecoach as to whether there is enough time to serve Stonehaven Community Hospital within the timetable for Service 4A/4C. If so, a risk assessment will be required.

David Liston provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland:

- 3.10 In response to the request for consideration to be given to the possibility of a new service operating between Dyce/Airport and south of Aberdeen, following completion of the AWPR, David Liston confirmed that following the introduction of Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon - Airport - Stonehaven/Montrose) and Service 757 (Chapelton - Portlethen - Airport), very positive feedback has been received. He added that there had been some initial timing issues which have hopefully been resolved since a revised timetable was introduced in March 2019.
- 3.11 In response to the request for Service 747 to operate via Portlethen, Newtonhill and Kingswells Park and Ride, he confirmed that this was the reason for the introduction of Service 757.
- 3.12 In response to the complaint regarding confusion amongst passengers wishing to board the Megabus services or Service 10 (Aberdeen - Inverness) at Union Square bus station, he confirmed that there are proposals to reline bus/coach bays and provide additional signage to make stance allocations clearer to drivers and passengers.

It was raised from the floor that the bus station is 'not fit for purpose', with no designated queuing areas for Megabus passengers and a lack of stances, resulting in buses using random stances and passengers missing their departures.

David Liston confirmed that the allocation of stances would be looked at again, whilst Ian Bell confirmed that the Customer Service Advisor is available during the day to inform passengers of any issues or changes to stance allocations, etc.

- 3.13 Regarding requests for improved waiting facilities, David Liston reiterated that discussions have been, and will continue to be, held with the owners, Hammerson Ltd, and proposals for long term structural improvements put forward for consideration, however due to very limited space it is very difficult to re-develop the existing site. He added that the matter of high quality real time display screens within Union Square shopping centre has also been raised in these discussions.
- 3.14 No smoking signs have been reinstated, where applicable, at Union Square bus station.
- 3.15 In response to the claim regarding frequent late running of Service 7B in the p.m. peak period, with buses arriving up to 30 minutes late in Portlethen, he confirmed that consultation has been held with passengers and the forthcoming review of services on the corridor will take account of their comments.

#### **4. Stagecoach Bus Update**

David Liston provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach North Scotland, whilst Peter James provided an update on behalf of Stagecoach East Scotland.

David Liston confirmed the following:

- 4.1 Aberdeenshire Council has undertaken a review of supported Local Bus services (see 5. below), which resulted in subsidised journeys/services operated by Stagecoach being withdrawn. As a consequence of this, there had been minor revisions to the commercial bus network on 15 April 2019.

- 4.2 Once the outcome of tendering for Aberdeenshire passenger transport contracts in south Aberdeenshire is confirmed, there will be further changes implemented to the bus network in Aberdeenshire on 19 August 2019. Public consultations will be undertaken in June 2019 at various locations, including the Stonehaven area.
- 4.3 A review is currently being undertaken in an attempt to reduce the number of different vehicle types from 17 down to 10. It is hoped this will make it easier for drivers and mechanics to be familiar with all types of vehicles and also to reduce costs. He also confirmed that there will be nine new coaches coming into the fleet in the near future, which will result in better quality vehicles being cascaded down to other corridors.
- 4.4 Following the introduction of contactless payments on buses, over 30% of all fares are now purchased through this new system.
- 4.5 Training for staff engagement has been introduced throughout the Stagecoach companies, covering topics such as better working practices and also health and wellbeing.
- 4.6 The re-routing of services due to the height restrictions at the Slug Road Bridge (Stonehaven) is continuing to create major issues with vehicle deployment.

Peter James confirmed the following:

- 4.7 The completion of the AWPR has necessitated a review of Service X7 (Aberdeen - Stonehaven - Perth) due to a reduction in journey times, with revisions planned for summer 2019.

## **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 in the Kincardine and Mearns area were as below:

Service	Route	Revisions & Comments
26	Luthermuir / Laurencekirk - Stonehaven	Saturday service withdrawn. Rail service only between Laurencekirk and Stonehaven.
204	Strachan - Banchory - Aberdeen via South Deeside Road	0715 hrs from Strachan to Aberdeen (Mon - Fri) and 1720 hrs from Aberdeen to Strachan (Mon - Fri) withdrawn; No alternatives to/from Strachan or via South Deeside Road. There are alternatives between Banchory and Aberdeen via North Deeside Road.

- 5.2 As mentioned by David Liston, the Council is currently undertaking a major procurement exercise involving contracts in south Aberdeenshire, with new and/or revised contracts being implemented on 19 August 2019.

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

- 6.1 Query as to why the display screens situated within Union Square shopping centre, at the entrance to the Bus Station, are not in operation or only display scheduled times instead of Real-Time information.

David Liston confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 6.2 Claim that there are road closure notices displayed at the bus stops on Cookston Road, Portlethen, for works which were completed in February 2019.

Susan Watt apologised and confirmed that these will be removed as soon as possible.

- 6.3 Query as to why Aberdeenshire Council has not adopted Chapelton Park and Choose, highlighting that there is no lighting provided or a pedestrian crossing, with safety implications. There is no Real-Time passenger information and fly posting is an issue at the bus stop.

Peter James confirmed that Stagecoach East Scotland drivers have also raised safety issues at the same site.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 6.4 Query as to who decides on the timing of journeys, highlighting that it is impossible for Service X7 to operate from Union Square to Holburn Street in 4 minutes, as displayed in the bus stop timetable publicity.

Peter James advised that the timetable information is produced electronically through the bus service registration system, but as there are a limited number of fixed timing points, the intermediate locations are given an approximate time based on average distances involved. It is therefore difficult to provide exact times and is safer to under, rather than over, predict journey times.

- 6.5 Claim regarding the Real-Time information displayed at stances at Union Square Bus Station is not always correct, with particular regard to the Service 7 stance.

Ian Bell confirmed that the Real-Time information at the Service 7 stance has been rectified, and will be monitored at the other stances.

- 6.6 Request for information regarding non operation of journeys to be delivered through Real-Time, social media, or drivers, so passengers are not left at bus stops unaware.

Peter James confirmed that reports of breakdowns are provided through social media such as Twitter and also on Traveline. If drivers are aware of such issues, then they can update passengers.

- 6.7 Complaint that Real-Time journey information on Barclay Street, Stonehaven, often disappears off the screen.

Peter James confirmed that there can be issues with the tracking of vehicles due to breakdowns or area coverage.

- 6.8 Complaint regarding the public transport infrastructure on Barclay Street, Stonehaven, not being sufficient to cater for the volume of buses.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this matter is being reviewed but there is limited space available.

- 6.9 Request for 'pearl bars' to be re-instated on timetable information displays as these give an indication of where the bus operates and is particularly helpful for new users and tourists.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated

Peter James confirmed that the Stagecoach mobile app provides Real-time information, showing where the journeys operate.

**7. Services X6/X7/7/7A/7B (Aberdeen - Portlethen - Stonehaven) and 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service)**

- 7.1 Suggestion that the omission of Lily Loch Road, Stonehaven, where it was claimed few people board or alight, would speed up journeys.

There was a response from the floor that there is significant usage from Lily Loch Road.

David Liston confirmed that these sorts of factors may be subject to consultation at the next service review.

- 7.2 Request for the 0928 hours ex Forrest Park (Saturday) to be extended to serve Farrochie Road.

David Liston confirmed that this would be investigated but highlighted that it would depend on the type of bus required/available for the journey, as double deck vehicles cannot operate under the bridge on Slug Road.

- 7.3 Complaint that Service X7 frequently does not connect with Service 4A/4C (Stonehaven Town Service) at Barclay Street.

Davis Liston confirmed that this is being considered in the aforementioned area review.

- 7.4 Complaint regarding coaches being allocated to Services 7/7A/7B, resulting in parents with pushchairs and elderly passengers struggling to board the bus.

David Liston confirmed that low floor vehicles should be allocated to the corridor but occasionally, due to breakdowns, a coach may be substituted to ensure that the journey operates.

- 7.5 Claim that the vehicle which operated the 1103 hours ex Portlethen – Aberdeen on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019, had a damp seat. This was coupled with a query as to whether seatbelts are checked by drivers.

David Liston confirmed that drivers have to undertake a 21 point check list on the vehicle before leaving the depot, this including all seats and seatbelts. The cleaners click the seatbelts in when the vehicle is being cleaned at the end of the day and the driver unclips them at the start of his shift. He advised that seating can be damaged or be subject to spillages during the current or previous journey and should be reported to the driver.

- 7.6 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.

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered in the review.

**8. Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon - Airport - Stonehaven - Montrose) and Service 757 (Chapelton - Newtonhill - Portlethen - Airport)**

- 8.1 There were compliments from the floor regarding the standard of drivers on the corridor

- 8.2 Request for the introduction of a journey on the 757 service from Chapelton to the Airport to fill the gap between 0627 hours and 0927 hours ex Chapelton - Airport (Monday to Friday).

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered.

- 8.3 Request for an earlier journey from Newtonhill to Aberdeen Airport to catch the first available flight(s) departing at 0600 hours.

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered.

**9. Other Matters**

- 9.1 Request for Aberdeenshire Council to take more cognisance of the availability or feasibility of bus services when approving housing developments on the A90 south corridor e.g. Chapelton

Neil Stewart confirmed that this is always the case, with developer contributions often required in the early stages of a development, but the availability of commercial bus services taken into account in the future, so as not to burden the local authority with the need for financial support.

- 9.2 Query regarding the introduction of a 'tourist ticket' which could possibly encourage more people to visit the area and use bus services to/from local attractions e.g. Dunnottar Castle.

David Liston confirmed that this would be considered whilst advising that the Company's Group Ticket allows a day's travel for up to any 4 people at a reduced rate.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Agnew advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in Stonehaven in October/November 2019.