

# **GARIOCH AREA BUS FORUM**

**MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2019**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, GORDON HOUSE, INVERURIE**

## **In Attendance**

### **Councillor F. Hood (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor N. Baillie (Aberdeenshire Council)

Sue Wainman (Kemnay Community Council)

Sheila Gray (Kintore Community Council)

Ann Marston (Kintore Community Council)

Margaret Basley (Kemnay Bus User)

Alice Downie (Kemnay Bus User)

Mari Ford (Bus User)

Margaret Wood (Bus User)

Walter Burns (Bus User)

Ann Burns (Bus User)

Eriz Lachowski (Bus User)

Alison Lachowski (Bus User)

Neil Peace (Kintore Bus User)

Caroline MacIntyre (Bus User)

Stewart MacIntyre (Bus User)

Nancy McEwan (Kemnay Bus User)

Dale McEwan (Kemnay Bus User)

Margaret Neve (Inverurie Bus User)

Daniel Laird (Commercial Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

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

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

## **Apologies**

Councillor I. Walker (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor A. Hassan (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor H. Smith (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor A. McKelvie (Aberdeenshire Council)

Pam Young (Newmachar Community Council)

Ian Young (Newmachar Community Council)

Jock McGregor (Bus User)

Margaret McGregor (Bus User)

Aileen Swaffield (Bus User)

Sandra Coutts (Bus User)

## **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Councillor Hood welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given. He apologised on behalf of the Council for the late decision to cancel the meeting originally scheduled to take place on 22 May 2019.

## **2. Minutes of Meeting on 6<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 In response to the request from Councillor Smith for the provision of a bus layby on the A96 at Colpy road end (northbound) for Service 10 (Aberdeen - Huntly - Elgin) coaches to pull off the road to allow passengers to board and alight, he confirmed that a report produced by Transport Scotland has a preferred solution of relocating the northbound bus stop (250m south of the junction). Whilst the Council is aware that this is not the preference of the local community, it has been proposed from a road safety perspective. Unfortunately, there will be a delay in progressing the works due to a pedestrian safety concern with regard to accessing the southbound bus stop. This has been raised with Transport Scotland and an update will be provided in due course.
- 3.2 In response to Councillor Walker's request for lighting at the bus stop at Strawberryfield Road (Westhill), he confirmed that this had been ruled out by colleagues in Roads and Landscape Services in view of the current lighting provision in the area.
- 3.3 The timetable information provided in the publicity case on Kemnay (High Street) has been corrected.
- 3.4 In response to complaints that the timetable information is placed too high at a number of bus stops in Kintore (no specific locations) and Blackburn (at Benview), he confirmed that information has been lowered in 21 shelters (4 in Blackburn and 17 in Kintore).

Thanks were expressed from the floor but at the same time it was requested that bus stops/shelters in Inverurie Town also be assessed for the same reason.

Neil Stewart confirmed that he would relay this request to colleagues.

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

- 3.5 In response to the request for additional journeys between Kintore and Aberdeen to bridge the gap between 1530 hours and 1634 hours ex Kintore (Monday to Friday), he confirmed that following an investigation and monitoring of the service, it is not possible to fulfil this on a commercial basis.
- 3.6 In response to the matter raised by Councillor Hood regarding buses stopping on a slip road, on a bend at Kintore, for driver changeovers, he confirmed that this issue should be resolved with effect from 19 August 2019 with drivers being instructed to park at other locations.

It was raised from the floor that some drivers are still parking on the bend and outside the Post Office, holding up other traffic and creating a safety issue for other vehicles, coupled with a query as to why drivers are having to wait for up to 9 minutes.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this would be investigated but confirmed that the Post Office is a timing point and journeys need to have some recovery time built in, in case of late running.

- 3.7 In response to the request for the 2205 hours ex Aberdeen - Whitehills (Service 35) to be retarded to depart at 2215 hours, to allow people more time to arrive at the bus stop after attending His Majesty's Theatre (HMT), he confirmed that the journey now departs at 2215 hours.
- 3.8 In response to the request for the bus stops named in timetable publicity to correspond with the actual names of the bus stops themselves, so as to reduce confusion for passengers, he confirmed that the bus stop names are drawn from a national database so should correspond.
- It was raised from the floor that the same bus stop is sometimes named differently on two or more bus services, therefore Daniel Laird agreed to investigate the matter, whilst asking for specific locations to be confirmed.
- 3.9 In response to the claim that there were 16 standees on the 0720 hours ex Kemnay - Aberdeen on Wednesday 5 September 2018, he confirmed that the company's records show only 6 passengers on the vehicle. However, he didn't dispute the claim and confirmed that every effort was made to investigate the matter further but it was too late to check cctv footage.
- 3.10 In response to the request for the service or at least 50% of the service, to be re-routed to serve Union Terrace and John Street instead of via the Denburn, he confirmed that this had again been reconsidered and it was felt that it would still create reliability issues on the corridor. He also advised that the bus stop situated at Blackfriars Street is to be removed by Aberdeen City Council in response to congestion issues.

#### **4. Inverurie Consultation**

Neil Stewart had previously confirmed that time would be set aside to seek people's views on the current bus service levels in Inverurie and coverage of the town, including suggestions on where improvements could be considered.

- 4.1 Councillor Baillie pointed out that Inverurie is expanding and requested that consideration be given to extending Service 22 (Inverurie Town Service) to serve Osprey Heights, Bainzie Road and Bennachie View Care Home (Inverurie).

Daniel Laird confirmed that Service 22 currently operates hourly, so extension of the service would either require an additional vehicle or a reduced frequency.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Council's Inverurie A2B dial-a-bus service can assist where there are currently no fixed bus routes. (<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/public-transport/a2b-dial-a-bus/inverurie-town-service/>)

He also advised that he had expected to receive funding from the developers of Osprey Heights towards a bus service but this had not been achieved.

Susan Watt confirmed that the Uryside development, opposite Osprey Heights, is served by Service 49 (Inverurie – Oldmeldrum - Ellon).

- 4.2 Request for Service 22 (Inverurie Town Service) to operate more frequently to the Inverurie Health and Care Hub for medical appointments.

Susan Watt referred to the Inverurie A2B dial-a-bus service, pointing out that, in addition to the Monday to Friday service between 0930 hours and 1415 hours, an extra minibus operates on Mondays (0830 hours to 1600 hours) and Thursdays (0900 hours to 1600 hours) to cover medical appointments at the Hub.

It was raised from the floor that it was difficult to manage appointments within the A2B operating times and that it can be difficult to get through to the booking line and/or obtain a place on the vehicle.

- 4.3 Councillor Baillie requested the Inverurie A2B dial-a-bus service to have extended operational times on a daily basis, highlighting that it does not cater for workers.

Neil Stewart confirmed that availability is determined by the use of the vehicle(s) on contracts to and from schools in Inverurie. He confirmed that Service 22 operates during peak periods.

- 4.4 Claim that passengers sometimes have to book 14 days in advance in order to travel on the Inverurie A2B dial-a-bus service to attend a medical appointment at the Hub.

Susan Watt confirmed that customers can book between 24 hours and 14 days in advance, but it is advisable to provide as much notice as possible.

- 4.5 Councillor Baillie stated that, with new developments proposed such as at Crichton, beside Thainstone, with over 700 houses plus businesses planned for the site, it is essential that the area has a regular peak and inter-peak journeys for those travelling to/from work.

This was acknowledged by Neil Stewart and Daniel Laird.

- 4.6 Councillor Baillie asked for more information to be readily available for other passenger transport such as Taxicard, for those with mobility issues receiving discounted taxi fares.

Susan Watt confirmed that she would relay this to colleagues in the PTU.

- 4.7 Request for additional services to serve the Conglass area of Inverurie, with a suggestion that Service 10 (Aberdeen - Inverurie - Elgin) be re-routed as per the current Service 10B (via Bennachie View care Home).

Daniel Laird confirmed that there will be more Service 10B journeys with effect from 19 August 2019 and these journeys would be monitored.

- 4.8 Request for the Sunday journeys on Service 421 (Alford - Kemnay - Inverurie) to be re-instated.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the journeys were withdrawn as part of the Council's review of supported local bus services (see 6.1 below) and there are no plans to re-instate them.

- 4.9 Request for timetables and leaflets to be readily available for passengers, in particular at Inverurie Health and Care Hub. Councillor Baillie confirmed his understanding that the Hub had decided not to put timetables out for the public.

Susan Watt confirmed that timetables/leaflets were provided during the week prior to the Hub being opened and that she would follow this up.

## 5. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

5.1 Daniel Laird confirmed that, following a review, revisions were proposed to the majority of services in the area and were currently subject to public consultation and he summarised below:

- As a result of Aberdeenshire Council's procurement exercise in south Aberdeenshire, a number of services will be revised with effect from 19 August 2019, and a number of reliability issues will also be addressed from the same date. The proposals are out for consultation with a deadline of 28 June 2019, and the feedback will be taken on board for changes implemented on 19 August 2019.
- Service 35 (Aberdeen - Banff - Elgin): 15 new decker vehicles have been allocated to the corridor at a cost of £3.5 million. As well as addressing reliability and capacity issues, he explained that the vehicles are more accessible for those with mobility impairments and people with buggies.
- A Service 10 (Aberdeen – Inverurie – Elgin/Inverness) journey which serves Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI) at around 1600 hours will be extended from Inverurie to Huntly.
- It is proposed that Service 220 (currently X20) (Alford - Kemnay - Aberdeen) be rerouted to operate via ARI.

Users of the service expressed dissatisfaction from the floor with this proposal, stating that they preferred the current route via Great Northern Road and that connections to/from ARI can be made in Bucksburn.

Daniel Laird confirmed that he would take these comments into account.

**(For information, Stagecoach received over 350 comments during the consultation period and they adjusted their proposals to fulfil requests on various services, including Services 10 and 35, and also 220, deciding to continue operation via Great Northern Road as requested above)**

5.2 Query as to whether passengers will be updated by Stagecoach on the outcome of the consultation process in regards to the commercial service proposals for 19 August 2019.

Daniel Laird confirmed that service revisions are provided to the Council(s) at least 10 weeks prior to the proposed implementation date and there follows a 4 week consultation period with both the local authority and the public, with finalised service registrations being submitted to the Traffic Commissioner 6 weeks before implementation. He advised that timetables will be available 3-4 weeks prior to the revision date of 19 August 2019.

Councillor Hood confirmed that there had been various service revisions this year and it is important that passengers are informed of the changes and that timetables are available well in advance of implementation. He asked if the changes could be advertised in the Press & Journal and local press.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the company is holding various consultation events in the Aberdeenshire area, with one in Kemnay Village Hall on 24 June 2019, as well as an online survey. He also advised that full details of the proposals are on the company's web site.

## 6. Aberdeenshire Council Update

6.1 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 Garioch Area were as below:

Service	Route	Revisions & Comments
218	Alford - Westhill/Aberdeen	1812 hrs from Alford to Elrick (Mon - Fri) and 1906 hrs from Elrick to Alford (Mon - Fri) journeys, which connect with Service X17 (Elrick - Westhill - Aberdeen), are withdrawn.
402	Kingseat - Hatton of Fintray - Inverurie	0915 hrs from Kingseat to Inverurie (Thursday) and 1215 hrs from Inverurie to Kingseat (Thursday) withdrawn; The Tuesday return journey from Kingseat and Inverurie via Newmachar and Kinmuck is unaffected; A weekly A2B dial-a-bus service has recently been introduced between Hatton of Fintray and Inverurie.
421	Alford / Kemnay - Inverurie	1820 hrs from Alford to Inverurie (Mon - Fri), 1905 hrs from Inverurie to Alford (Mon - Fri), 1845 hrs from Alford to Inverurie (Saturday), 2127 hrs from Inverurie to Kemnay (Saturday), and Sunday service, comprising 3 return journeys, withdrawn; Alternative evening and Sunday services to/from Aberdeen only.
777	Oldmeldrum - Westhill - Dyce	0640 hrs from Oldmeldrum to Dyce (Mon - Fri) and 1640 hrs from Dyce to Oldmeldrum (Mon - Fri) withdrawn; Alternatives available for the vast majority of passenger journeys currently being undertaken, albeit requiring interchange in some cases.

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

- 7.1 Repeated claim regarding Real Time passenger information not operating correctly, with live bus times sometimes disappearing from the screens and being replaced by scheduled times.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this matter in general was being investigated in conjunction with the Council and suppliers, but the tracking has improved with the introduction the new ticket machines on Stagecoach vehicles, resulting in 98-99%% of buses tracking correctly, but such issues can occur due to breakdowns or emergency re-routing of services.

## **8. Service 10 (Aberdeen - Inverness)**

- 8.1 Request for consideration to be given to the service operating via Aberdeen airport, as it had done a number of years ago.

Daniel Laird confirmed that adding more stops could put too much pressure on the current service but this matter would be considered at the next service review.

- 8.2 Requests for the existing 2200 hours ex Aberdeen - Elgin (Monday to Friday) to be re-timed to depart at 2215 hours and not at the proposed time of 2145 hours, as this will still allow those working at ARI to travel home and also cater for those attending events at HMT.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this would be considered.

**(For information, Stagecoach decided to fulfil the above request following the consultation period)**

## **9. Service X20/420 (now 220/420) (Aberdeen - Kemnay/Alford)**

(A list of complaints relating to operational matters on Service X20 was handed to Daniel Laird at the meeting. With the exception of the most recent incident, these complaints had all been responded to by the company).

- 9.1 Claims that the heating system consistently does not operate correctly on the vehicles, with particular reference to 1008 hours ex Kintore – Aberdeen (18 June 2019), when the heating was switched on when it was not required. Other instances when there appeared to be no heating working were 1110 hours ex Kemnay (5 December 2018), 0725 hours ex Kemnay – (14 January 2019) and 0825 hours ex Kemnay (24 January 2019).

Daniel Laird apologised for this and confirmed that, whilst drivers can control the level of heating on coaches, sometimes the buses only have an on/off mechanism linked to the engine. He added that all vehicles undertake a winter and summer maintenance service check, which includes testing of the heating system. He promised to investigate the matter in general.

- 9.2 Claim that the 1108 hours ex Kemnay - Aberdeen broke down at Kintore on 5 March 2019 and did not operate on 15 March 2019.

Daniel Laird confirmed that these claims would be investigated.

- 9.3 Claim regarding poor quality vehicles being allocated to the corridor (e.g. 0723 hours ex Kemnay on 17 April 2019).

Daniel Laird advised that some of the older vehicles interwork with school contracts but confirmed that the company is trying to improve quality.

- 9.4 Request for the existing 0720 hours ex Kemnay – Aberdeen, which is proposed to be re-timed to depart at 0715 hours, to continue to depart at the current time and operate via its existing route, in particular for those attending Aberdeen University.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this would be considered in the review.

## **10. Service 37/X37 (Aberdeen - Inverurie)**

- 10.1 Claims regarding poor quality vehicles being allocated to the corridor, resulting in frequent non-operation, breakdowns and reliability issues, coupled with the vehicles being uncomfortable and noisy.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the vehicles on the corridor are currently around 7 years old and are subject to a full service every 28 days. He acknowledged that newer vehicles would be welcome on the corridor and advised that Stagecoach North Scotland's Managing Director is from an engineering background and he is looking at the quality of the fleet.

- 10.2 Claims that the heating system consistently does not operate correctly on some of the vehicles, with it being switched off in winter, but switched on during the summer months.

Daniel Laird confirmed that drivers carry out their daily checks before commencing their scheduled journeys and will report any defects accordingly.

Councillor Hood expressed his disappointment at the number of times the subject of faulty heating systems has been raised at Bus Forums over many years, and asked Daniel Laird to look into this matter in general.

- 10.3 Claim regarding a lack of consistency with regard to vehicle type on the corridor, with passengers sometimes having difficulty in negotiating the steps on the coaches. There was particular reference to 1134 hours ex Kintore – Aberdeen today, which was operated by a double decker.

Daniel Laird confirmed that low floor vehicles are normally allocated to the corridor, however unforeseen circumstances such as breakdowns can result in other vehicle types being used as substitutes to ensure continuation of the service.

- 10.4 Query as to whether any *Buchan Express* vehicles are allocated to the corridor.

Daniel Laird confirmed that they are not scheduled to operate on the route but there might be the odd occasion when one of these vehicles is the only spare available.

- 10.5 Queries as to whether the service will be re-routed to Kintore to serve the railway station when it is completed and whether the Kemnay service would cease to operate via Kintore at that time.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this is being considered, pointing out that the train is not convenient for everyone e.g. to/from ARI.

- 10.6 Request for additional journeys to operate between Kintore and Inverurie.

Daniel Laird confirmed that this is not commercially viable at the moment, highlighting that passenger numbers are very low.

He also advised that it is a difficult economic climate for bus operators at the moment, referring to the following:

- Shortfall in Transport Scotland's Budget for Concessionary Travel of £6 million last financial year and this resulted in operators not receiving payments for carrying entitlement card holders for a 3 week period.
- Bus Service Operators' Grant (fuel duty rebate) has been reduced.
- Grants available from the Scottish Government for lower carbon emission vehicles and related incentives have been reduced.

## **11. Service 727 (Union Square Bus Station - Airport)**

- 11.1 Request for the service to operate via Craibstone Park and Ride and TECA (The Event Complex Aberdeen), once opened.

Daniel Laird confirmed that the service previously served Craibstone Park and Ride, but usage to/from the site was extremely limited. He confirmed that the service is planned to operate via TECA once its completion date is known.

Regarding Craibstone, he advised that Service 747 (Peterhead/Ellon - Airport - Stonehaven - Montrose), Service 220 (Aberdeen - Kemnay - Alford) and Service 37 (Aberdeen - Inverurie) currently serve the facility, but Service 757 (Chapelton – Portlethen - Airport) will be withdrawn on 19 August 2019 due to very low passenger demand.

He further advised discussions have been held with Aberdeen City Council and Nestrans regarding ways of improving the attractiveness of the park and ride facility, as usage has not lived up to expectations.

## **12. A.O.B.**

- 12.1 Query regarding the lack of bus services operating via Craibstone Park and Ride?

Daniel Laird confirmed that Stagecoach Service 727 (Union Square - Airport) initially operated via Craibstone Park & Ride, but usage was very limited and the service was eventually withdrawn from the site. He advised that Service 37 (Inverurie - Kintore - Blackburn - Aberdeen) still operates via the facility on a half-hourly frequency.

He also confirmed that a study of the Park and Ride facilities in the north east, including why usage varies so much, has recently been undertaken and there will be proposals for the interested parties to discuss in the near future.

12.2 Query as to whether bus drivers undertake training in customer service.

Daniel Laird confirmed that all drivers are required to initially complete a course in customer care, then have to undertake refresher courses every 5 years.

12.3 Claims that a number of bus drivers continue to smoke outwith the designated area within Union Square Bus Station, with one driver actually smoking on the vehicle, this being reported to the company.

Daniel Laird confirmed that both practices are prohibited and the company takes such matters very seriously.

12.4 Query as to whether developers have to provide financial contributions as part of planning conditions.

Neil Stewart confirmed that, depending on the size and type of development, it used to be common practice for developers to provide bus service infrastructure, such as shelters, and/or fund new or diverted bus services for a specific period or until a certain number of houses have been occupied, following which the bus service may become commercially viable.

Councillor Hood confirmed that Aberdeenshire Council's Developer Obligations Team seeks to negotiate with developers in relation to contributions to local bus services etc., in mitigation of their proposed developments.

However, he explained that the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority decided that all new housing, industrial, retail, etc. developments would be expected to pay into the Strategic Transport Fund, which would then be used to fund specified transport improvements. By spreading the cost across the region, no single development would be liable for the cost of a specific strategic project.

He explained that the developers of the new settlement at Chapelton questioned the requirement to pay sums into the Strategic Transport Fund and the Court of Session decided that the requirement to pay into the Fund was not lawful as it would result in developers paying for transport improvements unrelated to their development.

He expressed concern at the implications for planning authorities which must in the future establish a clear-cut and direct link between new development and the improvements sought.

12.5 Neil Stewart asked everyone to consider the format of the Bus Forum meetings and whether they have any suggestions on improvements and either contact him direct or bring any ideas/comments along to the next meeting, if applicable.

### 13. **Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Hood advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in November 2019.