

# **GARIOCH AREA BUS FORUM**

## **MINUTES OF MEETING ON THURSDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2019**

### **FRIENDSHIP ROOM, VILLAGE HALL, KEMNAY**

#### **In Attendance**

#### **Councillor D. Lonchay (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)**

Councillor N. Baillie (Aberdeenshire Council)  
Dr Graeme Baxter (Robert Gordon University)  
Sue Wainman (Kemnay Community Council)  
Sheila Gray (Kintore Community Council)  
Ann Marston (Kintore Community Council)  
Neil Peace (Kintore Bus User)  
Irene Davidson (Kintore Resident)  
Stella Park (Kemnay Bus User)  
Alice Downie (Kemnay Bus User)  
Helen Adair (Kemnay Bus User)  
Doreen Abel (Kemnay Bus User)  
Margaret Basley (Kemnay Bus User)  
Gladys Duguid (Kintore Bus User)  
Madge McGinley (Kintore Bus User)  
Sandra Coutts (Blackburn Bus User)  
Ron Sinclair (Inverurie Bus User)  
Kyle Clark (Bus User)  
Shonagh Donachie (Bus User)  
Louise Cook (Bus User)  
Richard Lamplugh (Bus User)  
Chloe Gray (Commercial Analyst, 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**

Ann Burns (Bus User)  
Walter Burns (Bus User)  
Alison Lachowski (Bus User)  
Eric Lachowski (Bus User)  
Jock McGregor (Bus User)  
Margaret McGregor (Bus User)  
Raymond Swaffield (Westhill & Elrick Community Council)  
Pam Young (Newmacher Community Council)

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

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

#### **2. Minutes of Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June 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 layby on the A96 at Colpy (northbound), he confirmed that the preferred location is still being discussed with Transport Scotland, with the Council preferring the existing site. Access to the southbound bus stop is also under discussion, with Transport Scotland trying to establish a safer crossing point.
- 3.2 In response to complaints that the timetable information is placed too high at a number of bus stops in Kintore and Blackburn, he confirmed that this will be rectified and the work will be commencing shortly, but it will be a major exercise.

Chloe Gray provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 3.3 In response to complaints regarding the heating system on some vehicles, she confirmed that these had been followed up by the company's engineering team. She requested that any further problems be communicated direct to Stagecoach so action can be taken as soon as possible.
- 3.4 In response to claims regarding several breakdowns on services at Kintore, she confirmed this to be true and apologised on behalf of the company for any inconvenience that these may have caused, whilst confirming that every effort is being made to minimise such occurrences.
- 3.5 In response to a request for the 0720 hours ex Kemnay – Aberdeen journey to depart at 0715 hours, she confirmed that the journey has been retimed accordingly.

### **4. Bus Services on Inverurie – Aberdeen Corridor**

Dr Graeme Baxter (Robert Gordon University) provided a brief overview of the CIVITAS PORTIS project, which involves 33 partners from five European port cities (Aberdeen, Antwerp in Belgium, Trieste in Italy, Constanta in Romania and Klaipeda in Lithuania) and the port city of Ningbo in China. The project involves these cities working together over four years on sustainable mobility in terms of commuter's traffic as well as transport and logistics.

He confirmed that, in the Aberdeen area, the City Council is the lead partner and one of the aims is to reduce car usage on the A96 between Inverurie and Aberdeen. He invited both positive and negative comments/opinions from the floor regarding public transport provision over the last two to three years on the corridor, taking into account any major developments that have taken place during this period (e.g. AWPR and upgrading of the Aberdeen - Inverurie railway line).

A summary of the main points raised at the meeting is as follows:

- Poor quality vehicles on the corridor, with exception of Service 10 (Inverness - Aberdeen)
- Increase in volume of breakdowns
- Reliability issues
- Reduction in the frequency of services via Kintore and Blackburn

- Longer journey times on most routes
- Expensive fares between intermediate points on routes
- Introduction of new vehicles on Service 10 was positive
- Picking up/setting down restrictions inconsistent on services between Kemnay/Aberdeen

There was a positive response to Graeme Baxter's comment on the possibility of "e-readers" being installed at selected bus stops and interchanges along the A96 corridor, as part of the project.

## **5. Stagecoach Bluebird Update**

Chloe Gray provided the following update on behalf of Stagecoach Bluebird:

- 5.1 In response to requests for the 2205 hours ex Aberdeen - Whitehills (Service 35) to be retarded to allow people more time to arrive at the bus stop after attending His Majesty's Theatre (HMT), she confirmed that the journey now departs at 2215 hours.
- 5.2 In response to the negative feedback regarding the company's proposal to re-route Service 220 (Alford/Kemnay – Aberdeen) via Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI), she confirmed that it did not go ahead. She advised that, if necessary, passengers can connect with Service 10 (Inverness - Huntly - Inverurie - Aberdeen), Service 35 (Elgin - Aberdeen) or Service 37 (Aberdeen – Kintore – Blackburn - Inverurie) in Bucksburn to access ARI.
- 5.3 The Festive period timetables have been released and are available on-line.
- 5.4 All services are currently being monitored and reviewed following a lengthy period of operation after the completion of the AWPR. Longer term, this monitoring will help the company address reliability, speed up journeys, retain local links, and consider vehicle types/allocations.

## **6. Aberdeenshire Council Update**

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

The Council's supported Local Bus Services in South Aberdeenshire were offered for tender in Spring this year and the new contracts were implemented on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2019. The main change was Bains Coaches being successful with their bid for the weekday Service 421 between Alford and Inverurie via Kemnay.

Councillor Baillie queried whether the service operates at the weekend.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Saturday daytime service was retained but the Sunday service was withdrawn as part of the Supported Local Bus Service Review, as reported at the previous meeting.

There was a request for more journeys between Kemnay and Inverurie Health and Care Hub on Service 421.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be considered but journey times are already tight on the service.

(After the meeting, Susan Watt asked Bains Coaches if they would reroute their commercial Service 240 (Oldmeldrum – Inverurie – Kemnay), but the company ruled it out.)

## **7. Aberdeenshire Review of Supported Passenger Transport Services**

Neil Stewart explained as follows:

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 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

He urged those who hadn’t completed the questionnaire yet to do so via the link on the Council’s web site, as there were only a few days left.

[\(https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/public-transport/policies-strategies-and-contracts/\)](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

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

- 8.1 Claim that the seating in the bus shelters located at Kintore Post Office and Inverurie Town Hall are positioned too high for most passengers.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

## **9. Service X17 (Aberdeen - Westhill)**

- 9.1 Complaint regarding frequent late running of peak journeys serving Prime 4 (Kingswells).

Chloe Gray confirmed that journey times were being reviewed in light of congestion at these times.

Neil Stewart pointed out that the corridor was perhaps the only one adversely affected in terms of journey times, by completion of the AWPR.

## **10. Service 22 (Inverurie Town Service)**

- 10.1 Councillor Baillie repeated his comment from the previous meeting that Inverurie is expanding and asked that consideration be given to extending Service 22 to Inverurie Health and Care Hub, Osprey Heights, Bainzie Road and Bennachie View Care Home within the town.

Neil Stewart confirmed that for Service 22 to cover these areas would require the cost of an additional vehicle and there is currently no additional funding available within the Budget for Local Bus services. He confirmed that the 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/>).

Susan Watt confirmed that the Uryside development, opposite Osprey Heights, is currently covered by Council supported Service 49 (Inverurie – Oldmeldrum - Ellon) and the main road (B9170) is covered by Bains Coaches commercial Service 240 (Oldmeldrum - Inverurie - Kemnay).

Susan Watt confirmed that there are now two A2B dial-a-bus services operating within Inverurie, these being available to cover medical appointments at the Health and Care Hub.

(For information, Bainzie Road is covered by Stagecoach commercial Service 37: Inverurie – Aberdeen, and Bennachie View Care Home is covered by Council supported Service 41 (Insch - Inverurie).

- 10.2 Councillor Baillie requested that A2B leaflets be readily available at the Inverurie Health and Care Hub, as he had heard that this is not the case.  
Susan Watt confirmed that leaflets had been provided but it is up to management at the Hub to ensure that these are on show. She added that she would contact the facility regarding this matter.

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

- 11.1 Query as to whether there will be a reduction in frequency on the corridor following completion of Kintore Railway Station.

Chloe Gray confirmed that there are currently no plans to reduce the level of service.

- 11.2 Request for some journeys to be re-instated via School Road (Kintore), rather than all serving Hallforest Road.

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be considered in the aforementioned review.

- 11.3 Request for some journeys to be re-instated via Great Northern Road, rather than all operating via North Anderson Drive and ARI.

Chloe Gray confirmed that there is high passenger demand for travel to/from ARI and there are currently no plans to re-route the service via Great Northern Road. She also referred to interchange opportunities in Bucksburn with Stagecoach's frequent Service 727 (Airport – Union Square), which operates via Great Northern Road.

- 11.4 Repeated request for additional journeys between Kintore and Aberdeen to bridge the gap between 1530 hours and 1634 hours ex Kintore (Monday to Friday).

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would also be considered in the review.

- 11.5 Request for a circular service between Kemnay, Kintore and Inverurie, to connect with Service 37/X37.

Neil Stewart expressed the view that this would not be commercially viable.

## **12. Service 220/420 (Alford - Kemnay - Aberdeen)**

- 12.1 Claims that it is commonplace for buses on Service 420 to have to wait outside the Northern Hotel (Aberdeen) for a few minutes, particularly the 0645 hours ex Kemnay – Aberdeen.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the Traffic Commissioner stipulates that there should be timing points at least every 15 minutes on registered local bus services, so with the Northern Hotel as a timing point, drivers must stop there if they are running ahead of schedule.

Chloe Gray referred to the review being undertaken of running times on Stagecoach services.

- 12.2 Claim that the driver of the 1615 hours ex Aberdeen - Kemnay did not pick up passengers waiting at the bus stop at Woodside (Aberdeen) today (5<sup>th</sup> December)

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 12.3 Request for the picking up/setting down restrictions to be removed from Service 420, as it creates confusion for passengers and drivers.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the supported journeys on Service 420 (Kemnay – Aberdeen) have picking up/setting down restrictions on the parts of the route shared with commercial bus services. This is in order to avoid the potential for a subsidised service to compete with a commercial one, whilst also potentially providing faster journey times for Aberdeenshire passengers.

He explained that, in August 2019, Stagecoach renumbered some of their commercial journeys to operate as Service 420. These journeys do not serve Dyce Park & Ride, unlike Service 220, and this may have caused confusion. He confirmed that discussions would be held with the operator regarding this matter.

- 12.4 Claims regarding the late arrival of Aberdeen bound journeys in Blackburn, including Service 37 (Inverurie - Aberdeen), throughout most of the day.

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be investigated.

- 12.5 Claim regarding late running of the 1815 hours and 2015 hours ex Aberdeen – Kemnay (Monday to Friday).

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be investigated but requested that times and dates be provided in the future.

- 12.6 Request for the 1715 hours ex Aberdeen – Alford (Monday to Friday) to be operated by a larger vehicle, to ensure sufficient seating capacity is provided.

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be investigated.

(For information, this journey is supported by the Council and the vehicle specification is minimum 32 seats, so this will be discussed with the operator.)

### 13. **Inverurie A2B Dial-a-bus**

- 13.1 Repeated claim regarding the difficulty to manage appointments at Inverurie Health and Care Hub within the A2B service's operating times, coupled with a request for the operating times to be extended to cover 'peak' periods.

Susan Watt confirmed 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.

- 13.2 Repeated claim that it is difficult to get through to the Council's booking line.

Susan Watt confirmed that Monday mornings are very busy with in-coming calls, but other times are normally quieter. Customers can book as early as 14 days in advance, up to 24 hours before travel, but it is advisable to provide as much notice as possible.

### 14. **A.O.B.**

- 14.1 Query regarding issues associated with buses operating via the car park at Tesco (Inverurie).

Susan Watt confirmed this had been the subject of discussion between the Council and Tesco, and consultation with Stagecoach Bluebird and Bains Coaches, as there is limited space within the car park, particularly for larger buses. She added that there is significant passenger demand to/from the facility by bus and that the matter is ongoing, with a number of proposals 'on the table'. She confirmed that the next meeting is scheduled for around April/May 2020 following which it is hoped that there be an agreed resolution.

- 14.2 Claim that 'school buses' are using Fraser Place, Kendal Road and Fyfe Park, in Kemnay.

Susan Watt confirmed that, whilst the suitability of the roads would be checked, if the school contract(s) concerned are not registered as local bus services, they can operate along any streets, as long as there are no vehicle restrictions in place.

- 14.3 Repeated claim that it is difficult to reach Stagecoach Bluebird by telephone and if a message is left on the system it is often not replied to, as is the case with Twitter comments.

Chloe Gray confirmed that this would be investigated.

### 15. **Date of Next Meeting**

Councillor Lonchay advised that the next meeting of the Area Bus Forum will be held in Spring 2020. Neil Stewart confirmed that consideration would be given to holding the meeting in Inch, in response to a previous request.