

**BANFF AND MACDUFF AREA BUS FORUM**  
**Buchan Hall, Buchan Street**  
**Macduff**  
**Tuesday 04 October 2022**  
**7.30 pm - 9.00 pm**

The Area Bus Forum meeting did not go ahead, as attendance was limited to the top table (Chair: Councillor Menard; Stagecoach Bluebird: Daniel Laird and Craig Elrick; Aberdeenshire Council: Neil Stewart and Susan Watt) and Councillor Findlater. We have therefore put together some information as an update for the Banff & Macduff Area.

**3. Matters arising from the Minutes dated 14<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

- Due to virtually no usage of Service 473 (Gardenstown – Fraserburgh), this Tuesday shoppers' service was withdrawn on 8 February 2022.
- The Troup to Banff return journey is no longer registered for farepayers, but there is a separate return journey on Service 273 from Gardenstown at 0815 hrs, returning from Banff Low Street at 1615 hrs.
- Regarding the request for Service 301 (Macduff – Huntly) to be revised to provide connections with rail services at Huntly Railway Station, it is only possible to connect with a train to Aberdeen from the first bus arriving in Huntly at 0825 hrs). It is too difficult thereafter, given that the service interworks with Service 303 (Huntly – Turriff) and also has to fit in with school start and finish times.

**4. Stagecoach Bluebird: Update**

An email had been received from a member of the public, who was unable to attend, prior to the meeting. The following questions relating to Service 35 (Elgin – Banff – Macduff – Aberdeen) received responses from Stagecoach Bluebird as below:

**Question 1**

On the 35 route - buses frequently arrive too early at stops and do not wait until allotted time and travel on to other stops. This means buses leaves stops too early and people miss the bus. For example, the bus can sit at Dyce stop at Marriott for 10 minutes as it has passed all previous stops from Aberdeen too early. Similarly, can wait at Whitehills or Macduff as bus leaves too early from Elgin. Do timetables need to be amended to reflect truer timings?

**Stagecoach**

Yes, despite increased road traffic since the height of the pandemic, the running times on service 35 do need reviewed, particularly to address buses arriving at stops early. Stagecoach is working on this internally with their Moray depot team. However, as this is a major service in their network, they want to take the time to do this properly, so cannot confirm any timescales at this point.

## Question 2

Could there be a service 35 bus leave Elgin at 17.00 during the working week? There is a large time gap between the 16.00 and the 17.25 at the height of people leaving work and if you can't catch the 16.00 one you can't get another bus for an hour and half. This is an awful long time when you are trying to get home from work. This gap may be alright for areas that can get alternative bus routes but from Cullen onwards down the coast there are no alternatives.

## Stagecoach

This gap is filled by the 1700 service 38 (Elgin – Buckie) which operates as far as Buckie, but this only helps with local trips within Moray, not those heading back towards Aberdeenshire. This is something Stagecoach will review as part of the exercise mentioned above.

## Question 3

Can express buses be looked at for some of the buses on the service 35 route? The journey from Portsoy to Aberdeen takes longer now than it did 30 years ago. To go 50 miles is taking 2 hours 31 mins.

## Stagecoach

Unfortunately, the road infrastructure on the route (A98 and A947) does not really allow for faster operating speeds, particularly as buses are legally limited to 50mph on single carriageway roads. However, the timing review above will try to reduce this as much as possible, in a safe and reliable way. It should be noted that, closer to Aberdeen, services have taken advantage of the Haudagain Bypass to reduce delays at the roundabout.

The A947 and A96 within Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire are both being reviewed as part of the Bus Partnership Fund bid to find ways to make bus journey times quicker and more consistent. Stagecoach is an active participant in this process, providing its operational experience as well as punctuality data.

## Question 4

The buses pre-covid were very cold - windows and heating were to be looked at after inspectors agreed the buses were cold. Is there an update?

## Stagecoach

Stagecoach have had no recent complaints regarding heating or ventilation on the vehicles, but this is something that will be monitored as the colder weather arrives. The company's Chief Engineer has provided support to the local engineering teams with regards to the annual winter preparation process, which includes a full service of bus heating systems, to reduce the likelihood of faults.

## Question 5

Request for the service 35 bus on Sundays, leaving Elgin at 16.00 and terminating at Macduff at 17.56, to be extended to continue through to Aberdeen. There is a long gap between journeys from Buckie/Cullen/Portsoy to Aberdeen (arrivals in the city at 17.47 and 22.25, the latter being too late for people who require onward travel.

## Stagecoach

Stagecoach will look at this as part of a future review, but as the vehicles and drivers for the service are based in Macduff and Elgin, when frequency and passenger numbers are lower on Sunday, it is more difficult to justify adding more journeys, particularly when it most likely would require an additional driver's shift.

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

Early in the pandemic, a small number of services in the Macduff/Banff Area were suspended, then officers had to review supported services to contain spending within the allocated Budget for 2021-22. However, later in 2021, a revised Budget meant we were able to reinstate all the journeys concerned.

We also undertook a tendering process in 2021 in north Aberdeenshire. In the Macduff/Banff area. Watermill Coaches were successful with Services 271/271A (Banff – Fraserburgh) and 273 (Banff – Gardenstown – Fraserburgh), Deveron Coaches with Service 405 (Macduff – Cullen), whilst Stagecoach retained the remainder.

The Budget for 2022/23 is all but fully committed, which means that if there is a need to reinstate any journeys withdrawn from the commercial network, existing journeys or services subsidised by the Council would need to be withdrawn. Significant pressures are predicted in 2023/2024.

U-22 Scheme – so far just over 50% of those eligible have cards but this is increasing. The Council appreciates that this has led to increased and changing demands throughout Aberdeenshire, most of which can be absorbed by the commercial network, but we are monitoring the situation.

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

A recent request for electronic timetable info at bus stop outside Morrisons on High Street Banff will be considered by the Council.

## **9. A.O.B.**

This would have been Neil Stewart's last Banff/Macduff Area Bus Forum following his announcement that he will be retiring at the end of November 2022. If you wish to comment on any of the above, please contact [public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

## **10. Next Meeting** Spring 2023 (date to be advised)