

## **BUS FORUM MEETING**

**MINUTES OF MEETING ON MONDAY 17 JUNE 2024**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS, BUCHAN HOUSE, PETERHEAD and ONLINE**

**[In Attendance representing Aberdeenshire Council and Stagecoach Bluebird:](#)**

**Councillor D. Beagrie (Aberdeenshire Council) (co-chair)**

**Councillor I. Taylor (Aberdeenshire Council) (co-chair)**

Jim Bowe (Principal Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

Susan Watt (Principal Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

William Mainus (Commercial Director, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Craig Elrick (Buchan Operations Manager, Stagecoach Bluebird)

Marion Mackay (Principal Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

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

Councillor Taylor welcomed everyone in the room and attending online to the meeting. He advised that the meeting would be recorded and explained the format and agenda. Introductions were made.

### **2. Aberdeenshire Council Bus Services Update**

**Susan Watt provided the following update:**

- She thanked everyone for attending the meeting and referred to the previous online meeting held on 7 December 2023, whereby feedback was taken onboard with the organising of this hybrid meeting. Further feedback is welcome following this meeting.
- She mentioned the council operated A2B dial-a-bus services which have not experienced recent revisions and there are no current plans to amend them. They are operated by minibuses within the Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Ellon areas for people who need a door-to-door service. Central Buchan A2B dial-a-bus service operated by Kininmonth Cabs is open to the general public, connecting onto mainline bus services at Mintlaw. Information on these services are available on the Council's website and paper timetables are available tonight.
- Contracts in north Aberdeenshire for fixed bus route services were awarded in August 2021 for a 5-year period, and replacement services will be tendered in 2026. There are no planned revisions to these contracts except following the current Stagecoach's network review, which will result in some small revisions to contracted journeys as from 19 August 2024.

### **Jim Bowe provided the following update:**

- He advised that the improvements at Peterhead bus station have been completed, which included five new high specification bus shelters. The shelters have the latest solar powered LED courtesy lighting, wooden bench seating and Sedum Vegetation living roof systems. Three of the shelters also include a 42-inch battery powered e-paper real time passenger information display with paperless bus timetables. The site improvements include the installation of new lit bollards, high specification wooden bench seating with planters and a bench/planter with cycle pod to provide additional cycle parking facilities. The cycle lockers were also replaced with new units. A large mural has been painted on the western wall, designed, and painted by an Aberdeen artist, who was chosen through an evaluation panel which included S3 pupils from Peterhead Academy. The artist has since returned to the Academy to talk to the pupils about his art.
- Seventeen old bus shelters have been replaced with the latest standard design shelter. These have been installed between Sandhaven and Fraserburgh. In addition, seven bus stop poles with the latest solar powered LED lighting solution have been installed in the Banff and Buchan areas.
- 13-inch battery powered e-paper real time passenger information displays have been installed at Crimond, Inverallochy and New Leeds.
- Three replacement high specification bus shelters which includes solar powered LED courtesy lighting, wooden bench seating, living roof system and 13-inch battery powered e-paper real time passenger information displays have been installed at Fraserburgh Bus station, these are the shelters opposite the building.

### **3. Stagecoach Bluebird Update**

#### **William Mainus and Craig Elrick provided the following review:**

- William Mainus confirmed the company have undertaken a review of services throughout Aberdeenshire including those in the Buchan corridor to be implemented on 19 August 2024, removing nine coaches from the Buchan fleet. Proposed timetables are available on the website for all services, including on the Fraserburgh/Peterhead to Aberdeen corridors, Peterhead/Fraserburgh Town service and Peterhead – Stuartfield/Maud. He also advised that service 69 (Peterhead – Fraserburgh) will be extended to cover the current service 74 (Rosehearty – Fraserburgh via Sandhaven) and coaches have been removed from the route. Paper copies of the proposed revisions are available at the meeting.
- Craig Elrick advised that the pending revisions will bring improvements to services in the area, acknowledging that some revisions implemented last August 2023 have not worked as well as Stagecoach would have liked, hence the proposed revisions and also looking into the accessibility on some routes.

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

- Claim, that at times, the Stagecoach app does not display the correct real time information, such as a cancelled journey, coupled with staff unaware of non-operation or late running of journeys when contacted by passengers. It was also raised that the website is not user friendly and difficult to source relevant information.

William Mainus advised the company app can experience issues for various reasons whilst tracking vehicles. However, the company is looking to undertake an update on both the app and website over the summer to provide information on cancelled journeys which will be managed by staff employees to provide more accurate real-time information to passengers.

- Concerns raised regarding the location of bus stops on the A90 (Crimond), where the road has experienced frequent flooding due to elevated levels of rain.

Jim Bowe confirmed that this would be investigated, and improvements undertaken if appropriate.

- Request for the provision of a bus stop and timetable case outside Aberdeenshire Council owned Inverugie House, Peterhead.

Jim Bowe confirmed that this would be investigated and would look to provide a temporary bus stop with a timetable display case in the interim.

#### **5. Peterhead – Aberdeen via Ellon/Newburgh**

- Query as to the proposed level of frequency in Newburgh on service X63 (Peterhead – Aberdeen) as from 19 August 2024.

William Mainus confirmed the service will continue to operate peak journeys, with an hourly interpeak service.

- Claim regarding frequently late running and non-operation on the corridor over the last few months, resulting in passengers unable to travel to/from work and access essential services.

Craig Elrick acknowledged the service has experienced a difficult operational period but improvements in reliability has improved. He advised that each vehicle is put through a 28-day inspection undertaken by the engineering team, where mechanical issues will be rectified.

It was mentioned at the meeting that reliability had recently improved on the corridor.

- Claim regarding frequent late running and non-operation on service X61 (Peterhead – Aberdeen), coupled with a claim of an aggressive driver on the 1830 hours ex Peterhead on 24 May 2024. The complaint was submitted to the company, and it was felt the response provided was unsatisfactory.

Craig Elrick apologised for the lower than expected service on the corridor over the last few months and advised the complaint would be investigated and a response provided.

- Request for additional Sunday journeys between Aberdeen and Peterhead to serve those in the social care sector travelling to/from work, starting at 0730/0830 hours. It was raised that care workers also utilise service 69 (Fraserburgh – Peterhead) at similar times.

Craig Elrick advised of the first Aberdeen departure at 0955 hours on service 61 (Peterhead – Aberdeen via Ellon) arriving in Peterhead at 1126 hours. He welcomed the feedback and advised further revisions would depend on patronage, but this would take this into consideration at the next service review.

- Query as to whether the early morning Saturday departure from Peterhead on Service X63 (Peterhead – Aberdeen via Newburgh) serving the bus stop located at Collieston road end and arrives in Aberdeen at 0830 hours would continue to operate for those travelling for work.

William Mainus confirmed that due to passenger demand, the early morning Peterhead departures will operate as service 61 via Cruden Bay, Ellon and Newburgh. The first Peterhead departure on service X63 is at 0830 hours.

- Query as to whether the departure at 0830 hours ex Aberdeen – Peterhead via Cruden Bay (Monday to Friday) will operate via Balmedie from August.

William Mainus confirmed there would be 0615 hours, 0800 hours, and 0900 hours Aberdeen departures via Cruden Bay, with alternative journeys on services 61/X63 (Peterhead – Aberdeen) operating via Balmedie and Cruden Bay.

- Query regarding a reduction in evening services to Newburgh for those attending theatre or other facilities in Aberdeen.

William Mainus advised of departures from Aberdeen at 1830 hours, 2200 hours, and 2325 hours.

## **6. Fraserburgh – Aberdeen via Mintlaw**

- Request for provision of a Monday to Friday journey departing Strichen to arrive in Fraserburgh prior to 0900 hours for those attending college or work.

Craig Elrick confirmed a departure at 0720 hours ex Strichen but will investigate whether a later departure is possible and if so, update the timetable.

- Claim regarding frequently late running and non-operation on the corridor.

Craig Elrick acknowledged and apologised for the below level of performance that is expected of the company over the last few months in the Buchan area. However, improvements have

been made, with 99.6% mileage operated last month. All vehicles undergo a 3-week, 28-point inspection by the engineering team, whereby any issues are rectified.

- Query as to the first Monday to Friday departure from Ellon to Fraserburgh on service X67/X68 (Aberdeen – Fraserburgh) from 19 August 2024.

Craig Elrick confirmed the continued operation of the 0700 hours ex Aberdeen (service X67: Aberdeen – Fraserburgh via New Leeds), arriving at Market Street (Ellon) at 0735 hours to Fraserburgh.

## **7. Ellon – Aberdeen**

- Query as to whether any of the journeys on the corridor are supported by Aberdeenshire Council on service X65 (Ellon – Aberdeen)

Susan Watt confirmed that there are no journeys receiving Council support on the corridor.

- It was raised whether the company can guarantee that coaches will not be allocated on the Aberdeen – Ellon corridor.

William Mainus confirmed that he cannot provide an assurance as coaches may be allocated to cover breakdowns or late operations.

- Request for service X65 (Aberdeen – Ellon) to operate via Newburgh providing an increase frequency to the settlement, as previously served by service 62 (Aberdeen – Ellon), highlighting that Foveran, which has a smaller population has a two hourly frequency.

William Mainus advised that there were no plans to re-route service X65, which will be renumbered service 62 as from 19 August 2024 and confirmed that service revisions have been based on current passenger demand, along with boarding and alighting locations.

## **8. Peterhead – Fraserburgh**

- Query as to whether the 0445 hours ex Peterhead – Fraserburgh (Monday to Friday) has been withdrawn from 19 August 2024.

Craig Elrick confirmed it has been retimed to depart slightly earlier at 0439 hours.

- Request for all journeys to be routed around Crimond estate rather than only serving the main road, which results in 5 bus stops not being served, highlighting those with restricted mobility experience difficulties walking to/from the main road.

William Mainus advised there are currently no plans to re-route those journeys, but this would be kept under review.

- Request for journey re-timings on the corridor to allow Crimond pupils to attend Peterhead Academy, with school opening times at 0840 hours and closing times at 1540 hours (Monday and Tuesday) and 1450 hours (Wednesday to Friday), coupled with whether there are any planned revision to the route within Peterhead.

William Mainus confirmed that this would be investigated with possible re-timings in the afternoon to accommodate the school closing times on Wednesday to Friday but highlighted the difficulties on Mondays and Tuesdays due to scheduling of vehicles. He advised that revisions would be implemented where possible and there was no revision to the route.

- Request for an accessible low floor hopper type vehicle to serve the smaller settlements on the corridor during the interpeak.

Craig Elrick confirmed that the company no longer have these types of smaller vehicles in their fleet. He advised that coaches have now been removed from the corridor and replaced with low floor E200 vehicles.

- Request for journey re-timings departing Rosehearty to arrive in Fraserburgh earlier to allow for connections with the mainline services to/from Aberdeen.

William Mainus advised that proposed morning departures appear to miss connections and would investigate and retime where possible in the peak.

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

- Various discussions were held throughout the meeting on the accessibility of the Xpress vehicles allocated to the Peterhead/ Fraserburgh – Aberdeen corridor, relating to only two seats being provided downstairs and issues accessing the stairway, resulting in those with restricted mobility experiencing difficulties in accessing seats, resulting in some passengers being unable to travel on the services since the vehicles were introduced, coupled with whether these coaches are DDA compliant and when they will be replaced.

Craig Elrick advised that following a public meeting held several years ago, modifications had been made with additional handrails and bells being installed, as well as improvements to the stairways. He confirmed that the vehicles meet the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) but acknowledged the difficulties experienced by some passengers and the company has learned from this.

William Mainus advised the Xpress vehicles will continue to operate on the corridor for up for the next two years, whilst alternative vehicles are being sourced and a business case put forward to head office. He confirmed that some coaches have already been removed. He advised of the bus industry recovering from covid and the difficulty in sourcing a vehicle which suits all passenger needs and provides sufficient seating capacity, with costs around £500,000 per vehicle.

- The matter of accessibility for those with buggies, etc., was also raised.

Craig Elrick highlighted the challenge operators can face with the accommodation of buggies when this conflicts with space allocated for wheelchairs.

- It was raised that previous meetings were held with Stagecoach to highlight difficulties experienced by passengers whilst travelling on coaches, following which Stagecoach agreed to organise a disability training day to be attended by passengers and drivers but this has yet to be held.

Craig Elrick confirmed he welcomed constructive feedback and has been available to attend various meetings and previous bus forums. However, unfortunately it was not possible to hold a meeting at the depot due to the company's health and safety policy and had suggested a consultation.

- Councillor Beagrie confirmed that questions after the meeting can be submitted to Susan Watt or Stagecoach.