PUBLIC HYBRID BUS FORUM MEETING

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VIEWMOUNT, STONEHAVEN and ONLINE

MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2026

NOTE OF MEETING

In Attendance representing Aberdeenshire Council and Local Operators:

Councillor S. Dickinson (Chair of Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee) (co-chair)
Councillor G. Carr (Vice-Chair of Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee) (co-chair)
Marcin Kaminski (Business Development Manager, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Daniel White (Duty Manager, Aberdeen, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Kerryann McMillan (Duty Manager: Aberdeen Depot, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Dean Smith (Operations Manager, Stagecoach South Scotland) (online)
Tim Capper (Head of Network, Ember) (online)
Ker Corbett (Head of Business Development, Scottish Citylink) (online)
Ian Smith (Senior Partner: Smith & Sons Coaches)
Susan Watt (Principal Officer: Local Bus Services, Aberdeenshire Council)
Darren King (Principal Officer: DRT, Fares & Ticketing, Aberdeenshire Council)
Blair Keen (Principal Officer: Information and Infrastructure, Aberdeenshire Council) (online)
Michael Reid (Senior Transport Officer: DRT, Fares & Ticketing, Aberdeenshire Council) (online)
Melissa Barclay (Senior Transport Officer: Local Bus Services, Aberdeenshire Council)

1. Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Dickinson welcomed everyone in the room and those attending online to the meeting. It was advised that the meeting would be recorded for note-taking purposes only and would then be deleted. The format and agenda were then explained, along with introductions provided.

2. Aberdeenshire Council Bus Services Update

Susan Watt provided the following update:

- She referred to Appendix A and advised which services operate on the A90 / A92 (South of Aberdeen) corridor, those supported by Aberdeenshire Council, along with services which are wholly commercial listing days of operation and general daily frequency.

1. **Service X7** (Dundee – Aberdeen via Inverbervie and Stonehaven; Monday to Sunday) hourly service operated commercially by Stagecoach.
2. **Services X7, X8, X9, 8S** (Aberdeen – Portlethen/Newtonhill/Chapelton/Stonehaven; Monday to Sunday) two journeys per hour Monday to Saturday, with an hourly Sunday service operated commercially by Stagecoach.
3. **Service 9** (Laurencekirk – Montrose; Monday to Saturday) is fully supported except for one AM commercial journey departing Montrose operated by Shorts Travel Limited.
4. **Service 24A/24C** (Stonehaven Town Service; Monday to Saturday) mostly supported Monday to Friday, along with the commercial Saturday service operated by Stagecoach.
5. **Service 21/21A** (Stracathro- Dundee via Edzell Woods; Monday – Sunday) hourly service operated commercially by Stagecoach.
6. **Service 26** (Stonehaven - Luthermuir/Laurencekirk via Auchenblae and Drumlithie; Monday to Friday) is fully supported and operated by Smith & Sons Coaches.
7. **Service 29** (Edzell Woods - Gannochy Bridge – Laurencekirk; schooldays only) is a registered supported school service operated by Smith & Sons Coaches.
8. **Services 70A/70B/70C** (Newtonhill – Portlethen Academy; schooldays only) are three registered supported school services operated by Stagecoach.
9. **Service 107** (Aberdeen/Stonehaven – Montrose via Gourdon and Johnshaven; Monday to Saturday) five return peak and inter-peak journeys operated by Stagecoach of which three return are supported.

10. **Service 727** (Stonehaven/Newtonhill/Portlethen – Aberdeen Airport via Aberdeen Union Square and P&J Live Arena; Monday to Sunday) hourly service operated commercially by Stagecoach except for two early morning Saturday departures.
11. **Service M6** (Aberdeen – Glasgow via Edinburgh Airport; Monday to Sunday) four return journeys operated commercially by Scottish Citylink serving A90/A92 located bus stops at Portlethen, Drumlithie and Fordoun.
12. **Service M9 (**Aberdeen – Dundee; Monday - Sunday) four return journeys operated commercially by Parks of Hamilton serving A90/A92 located bus stops at Portlethen and Drumlithie.
13. **Service E1** (Aberdeen – Edinburgh via Dundee; Monday to Sunday) hourly service serving A90/A92 located bus stops through pre-booking and operated commercially by Ember.
14. **Service E17** (Aberdeen – Perth via Stonehaven; Monday to Sunday) hourly service serving A92 located bus stops through pre-booking and operated commercially by Ember.

£2 Single Fare Cap:

- An update was provided on the planned £2 Single Fare Cap which was trialled in Highland and Moray in early 2026, followed by the Glasgow area in August 2026. The next phase of the rollout is planned for the North-East in April 2027.

  The scheme caps fares at £2 for eligible journeys within each participating area. Bus operator participation is voluntary and subject to an agreement with Transport Scotland. Existing National Entitlement Cards providing concessionary travel for disabled people, those aged under 22 and those aged over 60 will remain unchanged. Aberdeenshire Council welcomes the scheme with the aim for patronage growth.

  More information can be found on the Transport Scotland website through the attached link: £2 Bus Fare Cap | Transport Scotland

Darren King provided the following update:

- He advised of the Council operated In-house A2B dial-a-bus services in the Kincardine and Mearns area, primarily for residents who have mobility issues or find it difficult to use local bus services or have no access to a bus service.

  There are various rural A2B services serving Laurencekirk, Inverbervie, Catterline, Stonehaven, St Cyrus, Gourdon, Johnshaven, Drumlithie, Auchenblae, Fettercairn, Edzell Woods, Chapelton, and Luthermuir travelling to Montrose, Portlethen, or Newtonhill and the Town services in Portlethen (Wednesday) and Stonehaven (Wednesday, Thursday & Friday).

  Information and details to book the service is available on the Council website: A2B dial-a-bus services - Aberdeenshire Council. Or passengers can email a2bdialabus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or call (01467) 535 333.

3. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Marcin Kaminski provided the following review:

- There are currently no plans for major network revisions with the commercial team finalising the festive period timetables, which will be published shortly on the Stagecoach website: Aberdeenshire Bus Service Updates | Stagecoach.

- Stagecoach has invested in a new ticketing platform, Ticketer, which is expected to be introduced across North Scotland between April and June 2027. The new system will provide faster boarding, improved ticket printing capabilities and enhanced contactless "tap on, tap off" functionality. It will also support more accurate service performance monitoring and reporting.

- Stagecoach are upgrading its vehicle tracking and real-time information systems. While the existing system relies primarily on GPS technology, the new platform will utilise multiple data sources to improve the accuracy and reliability of live service information provided through the Stagecoach app and other passenger information channels. In response to a query about the installation programme, he explained that the installation work would be carried out overnight. Engineers would remove vehicles from service to complete preparatory wiring ahead of the upgrades, helping to minimise disruption to operations.

- New Real Time Information (RTI) screens have recently been installed at Union Square Bus Station through the Bus Infrastructure Fund (BIF), supported by Aberdeenshire Council. The upgraded screens provide brighter displays and improve live departure information. In addition, e-paper displays have been installed at each stance, enabling passengers to view real-time departure information directly at their boarding location.

Dean Smith provided the following review:

- In relation to service X7 (Aberdeen - Dundee via Stonehaven), Stagecoach expects the new replacement fleet to be introduced on the corridor within the next three to four months. The investment is expected to improve service reliability and deliver improved accessibility for customers travelling along the corridor.

4. <u>Ember Update</u>

Tim Capper provided the following review:

- A routine timetable revision has recently been implemented on service E1 (Edinburgh - Aberdeen via Dundee). The changes were primarily focused on improving journey times and stop arrangements on the southern section of the route, particularly around the Edinburgh area, along with the introduction of additional stops in Forfar. No changes were introduced to the northern section of the route.

- With regards to the service E17 (Aberdeen - Perth via Stonehaven), there are currently no planned timetable or route changes.

5. <u>Scottish Citylink</u>

Ker Corbett provided the following review:

- Scottish Citylink has operated long-distance services between Aberdeen and the central Scotland for many years but had not traditionally served bus stops within Aberdeenshire. As part of the introduction of service M6 (Aberdeen - Glasgow via Edinburgh Airport), a number of Aberdeenshire bus stops have been incorporated along the A90/A92 trunk road at Fordoun, Drumlithie and Portlethen as from 24 October 2026.

6. <u>Physical Accessibility Matters</u>

- Concerns raised regarding the accessibility on the stairs on the X7 (Aberdeen – Dundee via Stonehaven)

  Dean Smith acknowledged previous comments raised at the bus forums and advised the introduction of the new replacement fleet in the coming months will improve accessibility for passengers with mobility issues with less steep steps.

- Concerns raised regarding the safety of passengers, in particular those with mobility issues, having to cross the A92 dual carriageway to access the bus stops for the long-distance services instead of serving Portlethen Town, coupled with a request for these services to consider diverting services into the settlement to improve accessibility.

It was raised that passengers should be using the underpass, instead of crossing the A92.

Dean Smith advised that Stagecoach had investigated serving Portlethen but due to current passenger demand levels and operational considerations, this was currently not viable. He acknowledged accessibility challenges and advised the introduction of the replacement fleet may provide an opportunity to review this in the future, subject to operational and vehicle suitability assessments.

Tim Capper advised that Ember is not considering routing services through Portlethen, as the additional routing would have a significant impact on journey times.

Ker Corbett similarly advised that Scottish Citylink is not currently considering such a diversion, citing journey time implications and current passenger demand levels.

- Query raised regarding the long-distance services not serving bus stops in Stonehaven coupled with whether an additional stopping facility could be considered on the outskirts of the town.

  Susan Watt advised Ember service E17 (Aberdeen – Perth) and Stagecoach service X7(Aberdeen – Dundee) currently serves Stonehaven. Aberdeenshire Council have held discussions on a possible additional stopping facility on the outskirts of Stonehaven Town.

  Blair Keen advised that discussions are ongoing with planning colleagues regarding a proposed bus stop located just off the AWPR roundabout north of Stonehaven. He further advised if the development progresses, an assessment will be undertaken to determine whether appropriate bus infrastructure can be incorporated to facilitate service provision by bus operators.

7. <u>Stonehaven – Aberdeen via Newtonhill and Portlethen (Services 8S, X8, X9 & 727)</u>

- Compliments were provided for service X9 serving the top of Stonehaven Town providing additional travel opportunities for residents.

- Concerns raised regarding the reliability of service X8 with several reported issues of buses arriving 2 to 3 minutes early, particularly at Brickfield Road (Stonehaven). It was noted that, on one occasion, the service arrived approximately 18 minutes ahead of schedule.

  Kerryann McMillan advised the Town timing points are listed as only Barclay Street and Forest Park, so timings for bus stops located in between are estimated. Dates and times were requested to be investigated.

- Query raised regarding the journey planning feature on the Stagecoach app. In relation to a journey from Newtonhill to Stonehaven, the app suggested passengers alight service 727 at the northbound stop at A92 Cammachmore, then cross the dual carriageway, where no pedestrian crossing is available, to connect with the southbound service X8 to Stonehaven.

  Marcin Kaminski advised the Stagecoach app's journey planner uses Google Maps technology to identify most efficient travel options, which may include a combination of walking and bus journeys. He noted the issue raised, advising journey planning issues should be reported to the Stagecoach Customer Services team at that time, who can escalate concerns to the technical team via customer.services@stagecoachbus.com

  Post meeting: Following investigations, the technical team have identified and are working on resolving similar issues.

- Query regarding the northbound bus stop located on the A92 at Portlethen, coupled with request for improvements to the pathway connecting Hillside to the bus stop.

Blair Keen advised that several paths along the corridor are currently being reviewed, including those owned by both Aberdeenshire Council and private landowners, with opportunities for improvements being considered.

- There were several requests for timing changes on the following services:

    - Request for service X9 to provide an evening service after 5pm till around midnight to serve the top of Stonehaven Town highlighting those with mobility issues are currently restricted.

    - Request for additional early afternoon and evening journeys via Skateraw Road, Newtonhill. Concerns highlighted passengers with mobility issues are currently required to travel to Chapelton Park & Choose to access bus services.

    - Request for retiming of 1608hrs (service X7) at Mackie Academy to Chapelton Park & Choose to accommodate out-of-zone school pupils travelling home after school closes at 1515hrs. Service X9 departs slightly earlier but does not serve Newtonhill.

    - Requests to review operation of service 727, along with services X8 and X9, highlighting duplication of journeys between Stonehaven and Newtonhill, coupled with route and timetable queries to provide faster journeys to accommodate passenger travel needs, along with potential to retime journeys to improve connections with service X7 at Chapelton Park & Choose.

Marcin Kaminski advised service 727 is a frequent service extended to Stonehaven to bridge gaps with journey provision on services X8 and X9. The points regarding re-timing of service 727 to connect with the X7 were noted however this would not be possible to connect these services as the 727 timings are dictated by the Aberdeen Airport section.

- Claim regarding journeys on service 727 not serving the bus stop located at Portlethen Academy. It was advised that not all journeys serve the bus stop and asked for date and times to be provided after the meeting.

8. <u>Aberdeen/ Stonehaven – Montrose via Gourdon and Johnshaven (service 107)</u>

- Query raised requesting more detailed audio announcements in relation to named bus stops to address confusion for passengers as to the next bus stop. Examples included announcing "West Park, Inverbervie" rather than simply "West Park", or "Dunnottar Castle" instead of "Dunnottar".

  Marcin Kaminski advised that next-stop announcements are sourced from the National bus stop database. He welcomed specific examples of bus stops that can be emailed to the Customer Services team at customer.services@stagecoachbus.com where additional location detail would be beneficial and confirmed these could be reviewed.

- Safety concerns raised of overhanging branches located on the brae at the bridge heading into Johnshaven where, at times, the double deck vehicle is being struck. The issue was repeatedly reported to Aberdeenshire Roads throughout the summer.

  Susan Watt advised where the matter has been reported to Aberdeenshire Council, Roads officers will investigate to determine whether the vegetation is the responsibility of the Council or a private landowner and then take the appropriate action.

9. **<u>Aberdeen – Dundee via Stonehaven (Service X7)</u>**

- Query regarding the accuracy of the Real Time Information screens at Union Square Bus Station along with the Stagecoach app, highlighting delayed services are not reflected in the information provided, coupled with whether the new tracking system would improve real-time updates.

Marcin Kaminski advised that real-time information can be affected by connectivity issues and operational changes resulting in displayed information may not always reflect the actual status of a journey.

- Request for operators to work more collaboratively to provide enhanced and coordinated services, particularly Ember service E17 and Stagecoach service X7 on the A92 route.

  Marcin Kaminski and Tim Capper advised service coordination can be challenging due to operational factors such as network connections, vehicle charging requirements and driver scheduling.

10. Aberdeen – Edinburgh via Dundee (Service E1)

- Compliments on the newly installed northbound bus shelter located on A90 at Drumlithie road end and the southbound bus stop. Request for a southbound bus shelter was raised, coupled with repeated concerns regarding the condition of the access footpath to the northbound layby, along with the path located across the reservation to be cleared.

  Blair Keen advised it is not possible to install a southbound shelter due to the steep land drop-off constraints and private land ownership. The northbound footpath, along with the central reservation path is maintained by AMEY. Despite numerous requests for the northbound path to be cleared a response is awaited.

- Concerns raised regarding reliability issues since the service extended to serve Edinburgh Airport, coupled with request for alternative journeys to not serve the airport to address timings issues.

  Tim Capper advised the delays has been recognised and will be assessed.

11. Aberdeen – Perth via Stonehaven (Service E17)

- Query for the service to serve the newly relocated bus stops located at Benholm.

  Tim Capper advised the request would be considered as part of the next service review.

- Request for the service to serve Chapelton Park & Choose instead of the current Newtonhill bus stop locations citing condition of the pedestrian access path and maintenance issues.

  Tim Capper advised this had previously been raised and investigated. Due to the additional time required to serve Chapelton Park & Choose this would provide limited passenger benefit and a poorer overall journey experience.

12. **Aberdeen – Glasgow via Edinburgh Airport (Service M6)**

- Request for the service to be re-routed to serve Stonehaven thus providing a direct travel option to the Central of Scotland.

  Ker Corbett noted the comment and will be considered.

13. **Aberdeen – Dundee (Service M9)**

- Query raised regarding timing inconsistencies between timetables and online journey planners, coupled with concerns about the pre-booked 09:37 arrival at Drumlithie road end was operated by a white McLeans coach, instead of Parks of Hamilton vehicle, creating confusion for passengers and the driver did not stop.

  Ker Corbett advised that all Scottish Citylink and Parks of Hamilton services serve A90, Drumlithie Road End bus stop. The four journeys referenced relate to Parks of Hamilton

services only, while additional journeys are operated by Scottish Citylink. He confirmed the matter of the non-stopping coach would be passed to Parks of Hamilton for investigation.

14. Laurencekirk – Montrose (Service 9)

No comment

15. Stonehaven – Laurencekirk/ Luthermuir (Service 26)

- Susan Watt provided an update regarding previous requests for the service to additionally serve the A90 Drumlithie Road End. Following a site visit with Smith & Sons, it was determined that over a three-month trial period the supported service will accommodate stopping arrangements at the northbound bus stop. However, due to safety concerns of serving the southbound bus stop, alternatively the driver will stop on a hail and ride basis at the entrance to Candy Farm, situated on unclassified road to Drumlithie when safe to do so. The new trial stopping arrangements aim to provide improved interchange opportunities with services operated by Ember, Parks of Hamilton and Scottish Citylink.

16. Stonehaven Town Service (Services 24A/24C)

- Query raised regarding the future of the Stonehaven Town Service and whether there are plans to withdraw the service.

  Susan Watt advised there are no plans for the partly supported Monday to Friday Town service to be withdrawn. The commercial Saturday journeys on service X9 are also not planned for withdrawal.

- Request for an enhanced frequency on the Stonehaven Town Service and extend operations into the evening.

  Susan Watt advised that, due to current budget constraints, Aberdeenshire Council is unable to consider a Monday to Friday evening service.

  Marcin Kaminski advised that it was not viable to provide an evening service due to expected limited demand. He noted alternative bus services may provide alternative journeys depending on requirements of individual passengers.

17. AOCB

- Repeated concerns raised regarding the condition and maintenance of the pedestrian steps and pathway leading to the northbound bus stop located on the A92 opposite the Newtonhill entrance. It was highlighted that Amey had cleared the vegetation as a goodwill gesture but queried future maintenance programmes, along with the request for the vegetation on the near the flyover to be cut back.

  Susan Watt welcomed the vegetation works undertaken by Amey. She advised of ongoing discussions to establish responsibility for maintaining the path and steps, highlighting the work of Transport Officers to determine ownership which appears to be under AMEY. She noted Transport Scotland had been contacted, but no response has yet been received confirming responsibility for maintenance.

- Query raised whether bus operators have considered installation of onboard CCTV to assist to deter anti-social behaviour on public transport.

  Daniel White advised most vehicles are equipped with both audio and visual CCTV systems.

- Concerns raised regarding the removal of the Real Time Information display at Chapelton Park & Choose following repeated vandalism, noting that it was the fourth such incident this year. It was queried whether there is a limited threshold of incidents before a screen is permanently removed. It was highlighted that Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council would be happy to provide support should this issue continue.

  Blair Keen acknowledged and thanked the offer of assistance. He advised the display screen has been removed for repair and will be reinstated but highlighted the continued damage to the infrastructure was concerning.

18. <u>Close of Bus Forum</u>

Councillor Dickinson brought the meeting to a close and thanked everyone for their attendance.