

## **BUS FORUM MEETING**

**MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 07 MAY 2025**

**LEARNING PLAZA, BANCHORY ACADEMY, BANCHORY and ONLINE**

[In Attendance representing Aberdeenshire Council, Stagecoach Bluebird and Premier Coaches \(Kintore\):](#)

**Councillor G. Blackett (Aberdeenshire Council) (co-chair)**

**Councillor J. Goodhall (Aberdeenshire Council) (co-chair)**

William Mainus (Commercial Director, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Craig Elrick (Operations Manager, Stagecoach North Scotland)

Daniel White (Assistant Manager, Stagecoach East Scotland)

Gordon Henderson (Transport Manager, Premier Coaches (Kintore)) – online

Susan Watt (Principal Officer, Local Bus Services, Aberdeenshire Council)

Heather Dey (Principal Officer, DRT, Fares & Ticketing, Aberdeenshire Council) - online

Blair Keen (Principal Officer, Information and Infrastructure, Aberdeenshire Council) - online

Charlie Haigh (Senior Transport Officer, Local Bus Services, Aberdeenshire Council)

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

Councillor Blackett welcomed everyone in the room and attending online to the meeting. She advised that the meeting would be recorded and explained the format and agenda of the Meeting, and that the minutes would be available on the Council website after the meeting. Introductions were made.

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

**Susan Watt provided the following update:**

She firstly thanked everyone for coming along to the meeting. She explained that the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) have held bus forum meetings for over twenty years and highlighted a decline over the years which was particularly impacted by the Covid pandemic which had affected attendance. Following a review of bus forums conducted in 2023 an online Aberdeenshire wide bus forum was held, where around eighty people attended with positive comments received on the revised format. She advised this led to two hybrid bus forums held in 2024, in north and south Aberdeenshire which were well attended and following comments received it has resulted in the meeting tonight and Inverurie Community Campus last Wednesday. She welcomed feedback on the format and any other comments for future meetings by emailing at [public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

She then referred to the financial sheet listing a summary of A93/A944 bus routes detailing frequency and operational information, along with the annual cost and mentioned each service:

- Services 5 & 6** (Westhill/Elrick – Aberdeen; Monday to Sunday) operated commercially by Stagecoach Bluebird.
- Service X6** (Westhill/Elrick – Aberdeen; Monday to Friday) one return am and pm journey operated commercially by Stagecoach Bluebird.

3. **Services 201/202** (Aberdeen – Braemar/Ballater/Torphins via Banchory; Monday to Sunday) operated mostly commercially by Stagecoach Bluebird with some supported journeys mostly west of Banchory.
4. **Service X18** (Alford - Aberdeen via Westhill; Monday to Saturday) operated commercially by Stagecoach Bluebird to provide placement journeys to operate service 218 in Alford.
5. **Service 218** (Alford – Aberdeen via Westhill; Monday to Saturday) supported peak and inter-peak journeys with some commercial placement journeys operated by Stagecoach Bluebird.
6. **Services 220/X20** (Alford/Kemnay – Aberdeen; Monday to Sunday) operated commercially by Stagecoach Bluebird with some supported peak and inter-peak Monday to Saturday journeys and most Sunday journeys.
7. **Service 421** (Inverurie – Alford; Monday to Saturday) supported peak and inter-peak service with a return commercial placement journey operated by Premier Coaches (Kintore).

Susan Watt advised that all contracts in south Aberdeenshire including those listed on the financial spreadsheet provided in the room and on-line were procured last year for a further five-year period and implemented in August 2024 with only slight revisions to some journeys.

**Charlie Haigh provided the following update:**

He confirmed the Council operates A2B dial-a-bus services in Banchory and Westhill areas which provide residents with a door-to-door bus service during school times for those with mobility difficulties and disabilities or where there is no suitable bus service available.

He advised in March 2025 the PTU undertook a review of A2B services operating in Banchory and Westhill areas looking at vehicle usage and the level of passenger demand, which has resulted in a reduction of buses in Banchory from two to one vehicle with one bus continuing to operate in Westhill.

He then advised of the following changes to be implemented:

- Banchory Town A2B: reduced from five days to four days per week, operating Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays between school hours, to be implemented from 6 May 2025.
- Westhill Town A2B: remain at five days per week with reduced operating hours on a Monday and Friday, to be implemented on 12 May 2025
- Inchmarlo retirement village to Banchory A2B: reduced from two days a week to operating on a Tuesday only, implemented from 6 May 2025.
- Kirkton of Durris/Kirkton of Maryculter/Drumoak to Banchory A2B: service withdrawn from 6 May 2025 due to very low demand with an average of 1.6 passengers per journey.
- Dunecht/Echt/Garlogie to Westhill A2B: Monday and Friday service operated on a six-month trial basis will be reduced to a return shopper service with one return journey due to low demand, to be implemented from 12 May 2025.

- Dunecht/Echt/Garlogie service to Banchory A2B: service to be withdrawn due to very low demand with an average of 1.6 passengers per journey and implemented from 12 May 2025.

He advised revised timetables will be available on the Council website and revisions communicated by letter to all affected A2B users. He concluded further information is available is available by emailing on [a2bdialabus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:a2bdialabus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) or telephone: 01467 535333.

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

#### **William Mainus provided the following review:**

He advised that following a review of commercial services last year, significant revisions were implemented in August 2024, with a recent review resulting in additional service revisions being implemented on 7 July 2025 with limited revisions in this area.

Service 5/6/X6 (Westhill/Elrick - Westhill): revised minor running time revisions at peak times, along with a new night bus service operating on Friday and Saturday nights on the corridor.

Service 201 (Braemar – Aberdeen via Banchory) and 202 (Tarland/Torphins – Aberdeen via Banchory): minor re-timings due to reliability and to resolve the turning issue in Tarland of the supported early am journey with the commercial placement journey operating from Westhill as service 206 (Aberdeen – Tarland via Westhill). Aberdeen City Council are currently procuring night bus services on the service 201 route but won't be operated by Stagecoach due to driver availability after midnight. Bike racks are currently being fitted internally in double deck vehicles which will be available to the public in the coming months.

Services X20/220 (Aberdeen – Alford via Kemnay): minor re-timings along with an additional Saturday journey at 1210hrs ex Kemnay – Aberdeen to bridge a two-hour gap in the timetable.

- It was queried what are the proposed revisions on service 202 (Torphins/Tarland - Aberdeen).

William Mainus highlighted only minor re-timings, and the removal of the placement early am and evening pm journey to remove the requirement to undertake the turning manoeuvre in Tarland.

- Query regarding the reliability of the Deeside corridor referring to breakdowns and late running, coupled may relate to the high mileage undertaken by vehicles on the route.

William Mainus confirmed that in some instances older buses can be more reliable than new vehicles, highlighting electric vehicles carry different and more challenging issues in terms of reliability. He advised all vehicles go through a 21-day inspection programme, which will pick up any issues, alongside an 'airline' style servicing to remove dated components to prevent breakdown. He also advised the average age of vehicles on the Deeside corridor was nine years and programmed for a refurbishment within the next two years. He concluded the main challenge with reliability was due to staff shortages.

### **4. Physical Accessibility Matters**

- Query whether the bike racks on service 201 (Braemar – Aberdeen via Banchory) would accommodate folding electric bikes.

William Mainus confirmed the company are in the process of fitting bike racks to all double deck vehicles allocated to the corridor and his understanding was they should accommodate electric bikes depending on weight, along with mountain and road bikes. He advised the company will be advertising the bike racks in the coming months but emphasised that due to vehicles allocated to service 202 (Torphins/Tarland- Aberdeen) it was not possible to install racks on the corridor.

- Query as to how passengers will be made aware of journeys operated by a single deck or double deck vehicle for wheelchair and bike access on service 201.

William Mainus advised that the company where possible will endeavour to allocate double deck vehicles to the corridor as from the implementation of the service revisions on 7 July 2025 but highlighted that at times, due to operational issues such as a breakdowns it is not possible to guaranteed this and therefore not possible to list these journeys on a timetable.

## **5. Westhill/Elrick - Aberdeen (services 5/6/X6)**

- Request from Elrick Community Council for either services 5/6 to be extended to serve the turning area on Westhill Drive at Blacklaws for a trial period and asked if a meeting could be held with Stagecoach to discuss further. They referred to their survey distributed to 577 local households which received a very good response, and results are listed in the document provided to Susan Watt. It highlighted a change in the demographics within Westhill with an ageing population who struggle to walk to/from the centre to catch services to Aberdeen. Responses show residents wish to travel by bus to Aberdeen centre to attend leisure facilities such as theatre or shopping, etc, highlighting the avoidance of bus gates and Low Emission Zones. (LEZ)

William Mainus explained there is no leeway within the current timetable to accommodate the additional time to serve the turning area, so any extension would require the allocation of an additional vehicle at a cost of around £220,000 per year, with 2,200 passengers per week required to cover the costs but previous patronage only showed 200 passengers travelling from the area. He advised he would not re-route the service but was happy to hold a meeting to discuss the matter further.

- It was raised from the floor that support is provided for the extension but highlighted the continued expansion by developers on the west of Westhill results in residents enduring a 20-minute loop around the town and asked this be considered prior to any extension to the service.

William Mainus agreed this would be taken into consideration.

- Query regarding the current consultation on the reduction of speed limits from 30mph to 20mph in built up urban areas in Aberdeenshire and queried whether Stagecoach has taken this into consideration within their timetables, highlighting service 5/6 (Westhill – Aberdeen) in Westhill and Elrick.

William Mainus advised the company base their timetables around twelve miles per hour in built up areas and highlighted a similar speed limit change in Inverness. He explained this may affect frequency and corridors would be reviewed for any financial impact.

## **6. Braemar/Ballater/Torphins (services 201/202)**

- Query as to why some journeys on the Deeside corridor frequently seem to 'disappear' highlighting the Crathes area for buses operating in both directions, although they appear on the company's app, but don't turn up at the bus stop, then disappear from the app.

William Mainus explained drivers enter trip numbers into the ticket machine prior to commencing each journey which alerts the app and real-time facilities along the route. However, at times on the route the signal can be periodically lost due to the location but was unaware of any issues in the Crathes area. He advised these issues can arise from driver input error, breakdowns or cancellations but controllers will update real-time information as issues arise. He asked for times and dates of any future issues.

Craig Elrick advised of two forms of tracker on Stagecoach buses, GPS (AVL system) which tracks buses every 20 seconds and drivers inputting trip numbers into ticketing machines. He explained issues may arise with the software or with signal issues in areas such as Banchory and Ballater.

- Request for some journeys to be re-instated via North Deeside Road (Banchory) instead of via Hill of Banchory to serve those residing in Pantoch and Silverbank Caravan Park travelling to/from Aberdeen, coupled with people mistakenly standing at unserved bus stops on this part of the route. It was raised Pantoch has an elderly population with only access to Banchory Town A2B, coupled with concerns regarding emails sent to Stagecoach on this matter but have not received a response.

William Mainus confirmed the service was removed from North Deeside Road due to low usage and highlighted the continued construction of housing developments in the Hill of Banchory area resulting in additional patronage, coupled with the company needs to take a balanced approach with those residing west of Banchory requesting faster journey times to/from Aberdeen and not serve the top of Banchory. He advised that this would be investigated along with unanswered emails sent to the company.

**Post Meeting Update:** Stagecoach advised that following an investigation due to passenger demand it was unable to serve North Deeside Road but would consider this at the next service review. PTU advised that bus stops not currently served by service 201/202 will only have A2B service information displayed.

- Request for additional early pm journeys to operate via Woodside Road and Raemoir Road, in particular 1335hrs ex Braemar - Aberdeen (Monday to Friday: service 201) highlighting the only current option is 1429hrs and 1629hrs ex Braemar (service 202), coupled with request for additional pm journeys from Aberdeen which currently only provide a two hourly service. It was raised the difficulty for some passengers to walk from the nearest located bus stop on North Deeside Road to Raemoir Road.

William Mainus advised they would investigate whether any additional Monday to Friday journeys to Aberdeen could be re-routed but there was insufficient time to divert journeys from Aberdeen. He also advised that passengers travelling west of Banchory frequently request faster journeys to/from Aberdeen which needs to be considered when revising journeys.

**Post Meeting Update:** 1335hrs ex Braemar to Aberdeen (Monday to Friday) will be rerouted via Raemoir Road (Banchory) at 1459hrs as from 7 July 2025.

- Concerns raised regarding insufficient seating capacity available on afternoon departures from Aberdeen due to people travelling wholly within the city, resulting at times those travelling west of Aberdeen unable to board the vehicle to travel home, coupled with the volume of city stops served on the routes results in longer journey times. It was highlighted City passengers can travel on the alternative service 19 (Tillydrone – Peterculter) operated by First Aberdeen.

William Mainus advised that city passengers contribute to the 30-minute service between Aberdeen and Banchory being commercially viable but acknowledged the volume of stops within Aberdeen results in additional journey time. He advised that this would be reviewed within a wider future project.

- Request for an Aberdeen departure at 2220 hrs (Monday to Saturday) for those attending the theatre.

William Mainus explained the limitation of retiming evening journeys due to current scheduling and passenger usage with current Aberdeen departures at 2015hrs, 2145hrs and 2335hrs being part or wholly supported. He advised that passenger surveys would be required to gauge the general opinion of retiming journeys with an additional journey not possible.

**Post Meeting Update:** Stagecoach have advised it is not possible to re-time journeys within the current review but would be considered for any future revisions.

- Query regarding the timetable for the proposed night buses on the corridor.

William Mainus advised that he was aware of the proposed Friday and Saturday evenings service being procured but had no further details.

Susan Watt advised that there had been no update provided from Aberdeen City Council on the procured service but would provide an update once the outcome had been announced.

- Query whether the proposed revisions to service 202 (Torphins/Tarland - Aberdeen) would result in Torphins being removed from the route.

William Mainus advised that there are no plans to withdraw journeys to/from Torphins.

## **7. Alford – Aberdeen via Westhill (service 218/X18)**

- Query as to why service X18 only provides limited journeys with departures from Aberdeen at 0520hrs (Monday to Friday) and Alford at 0042hrs (Monday to Saturday).

William Mainus confirmed service X18 operates commercial placement journeys to position buses to operate the service 218 to/from Alford.

## **8. Alford/Kemnay – Aberdeen (services 220/X20)**

- Concerns regarding, at times connections are missed in Kemnay on the am and pm journeys between service 220/X20 (Alford/Kemnay – Aberdeen) operated by Stagecoach and service 421 (Alford – Inverurie) operated by Premier Coaches, resulting in passengers not using these journeys.

William Mainus advised that drivers are instructed that the 0835 hrs ex Kemnay – Aberdeen (service 220) must connect with the 0804hrs ex Alford - Kemnay (service 421), along with the 1445hrs ex Aberdeen (service 220) must connect with 1545hrs ex Kemnay to Alford (service 421). He was not aware of any connecting issues and asked for dates and times of these issues.

Gordon Henderson advised that he was unaware of any connections being missed and asked passengers to contact the company on (01467) 642409 providing dates and times so the journey can be investigated through their tracking system.

## 9. Alford/Kemnay – Aberdeen (service 421)

- Gordon Henderson advised the company were aware of accessibility issues raised when they commenced operation of the service in 2024, but this has been resolved with the allocation of a low-floor vehicle and no further issues have been raised.

## 10. AOCB

- Request regarding the Council in-house Monday to Friday service 212 (Tarland – Torphins via Lumphanan) to be extended to serve Aboyne which has additional amenities to Torphins and located closer for those residing in Tarland, coupled for the service to operate via the lower road instead of parts of the B9119 and A980. It was highlighted at times service 212 has to depart Torphins prior to the arrival of service 202 due to late running leaving people stranded in Torphins.

Susan Watt explained the driver of service 212 is restricted due to other Council commitments with operating a school contract and the requirement to meet driver hours regulations. She advised that following a previous request, an investigation highlighted the limitations due to time constraints and it was not possible to connect with the mainline service in both Torphins and Aboyne. She agreed that this would be investigated. She also advised that service 212 will wait up to 10 minutes after the scheduled departure time providing a 17-minute departure after service 202 arrives in Torphins.

**Post Meeting Update:** Following revisions to Aboyne Academy opening times, the 1410 hours ex Torphins (service 212) requires to depart at the scheduled time providing a reduced wait to 7-minutes on arrival of the 1403hrs on service 202. The 1010hrs and 1210hrs departures remain unchanged.

- Request for re-instatement of the service operating between Ballater/Braemar to Pitlochry/Blairgowrie via Glenshee.

William Mainus advised the company is considering operating a service between Aviemore and Perth via Braemar, Lecht and Blairgowrie commencing in Easter 2026 until the end of summer/October. He will confirm the service as soon as details have been confirmed.

- Request for a service to operate between Lumphanan and Aboyne.

William Mainus advised that this would not be commercially viable.

- Query whether the proposed revisions implemented on 7 July 2025 would result in fare increases.

William Mainus confirmed that the company had raised fares by 10% on 27 April 2025 and there were no plans to introduce further increases.

- It was raised that passengers with queries must provide dates, times and specific details of the issue at the time of the incident to allow operators to investigate and provide a detailed response, coupled with passengers may wish to include your local councillor into the email so this can be chased up if required.

- Repeated concerns regarding complaints emailed through Stagecoach customers service have not received responses.

William Mainus apologised and advised passengers should provide detailed complaints listing date, time, service number, description of issue and ticket if available through the company's office located in Perth on [customer.services@stagecoachbus.com](mailto:customer.services@stagecoachbus.com) where a response will be provided.

Craig Elrick explained staff at the customer centre will categorise the priority complaints/comments and forward to the relevant local managers for further investigation. He advised that Stagecoach would welcome both positive and negative feedback from passengers and advised the customer service team can be contacted by calling 0345 241 8000.

Gordon Henderson advised Premier Coaches would welcome feedback through their company's email address on [info@premiercoaches.co.uk](mailto:info@premiercoaches.co.uk) or by telephoning on (01467) 642409.

- Concerns raised regarding journeys operating earlier than the scheduled time resulting in passengers missing their journeys home but no details were provided.

William Mainus advised that journeys should not operate early and asked for dates and times of those journeys.

## **11. Close of Bus Forum**

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