PUBLIC HYBRID BUS FORUM MEETING

COMMITTEE ROOM, FORMARTINE HOUSE, ELLON and ONLINE

WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2026

NOTE OF MEETING

In Attendance Representing

Aberdeenshire Council, Stagecoach Bluebird, Watermill Coaches and Victoria Coaches:

Councillor I. Taylor (Chair of Formartine Area Committee) (co-chair)
Councillor D. Beagrie (Chair of Buchan Area Committee) (co-chair)
Marcin Kaminski (Business Development Manager, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Gregory Pearce (Duty Manager, Banff and Buchan, Stagecoach North Scotland)
Barry Sutcliffe (Depot Controller, Watermill Coaches)
Jordan Reid (Watermill Coaches)
Ryan Mowatt (Director, Victoria Group)
Sarah-Jayne Morrice (Victoria Group)
Susan Watt (Principal Officer, Local Bus, Aberdeenshire Council)
Blair Keen (Principal Officer, Information and Infrastructure, Aberdeenshire Council) (on-line)
Michael Reid (Senior Transport Officer, DRT, Fares and Ticketing, Aberdeenshire Council)
Melissa Barclay (Senior Transport Officer, Local Bus, Aberdeenshire Council)
Roddy Aiken (Transport Officer, Local Bus, Aberdeenshire Council) (on-line)

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

   Councillor Taylor 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:

- The recent procurement exercise resulted in the award of 34 North replacement contracts as listed on the corridors north of Aberdeen referring to Appendix 1. These are run by four operators providing services under 19 contracts covering 12 routes, including the Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) contract, at a total cost of approximately £1.3 million per annum. Constraints on the revenue budget for supported services led to the withdrawal of two contracts in the area:

- Service 452 (Fraserburgh - Inverurie via Tarves): Wednesday shopper service.
- Service 76/77 (Fraserburgh Town Service): Monday to Saturday evening service only.

She referred to Appendix A, advising of services which operate on the A90 (North of Aberdeen) corridor, whether supported by Aberdeenshire Council or commercial, along with the days of operation and general daily frequency.

1. **Service 50** (Ellon – Newburgh; Monday - Friday) mostly fully supported service operated by Watermill Coaches.
2. **Service 52** (Ellon Town Service; Monday to Saturday) fully supported service operated by Watermill Coaches.
3. **Service X60/61/X63** (Peterhead – Aberdeen via Hatton Village, Cruden Bay and Newburgh; Monday to Sunday) operated commercially by Stagecoach.
4. **Service 62** (Peterhead/Ellon – Aberdeen via Foveran and Balmedie; Monday to Saturday) operated commercially by Stagecoach
5. **Service 66** (Peterhead – Mintlaw/Stuartfield/Maud via Old Deer; Monday to Sunday) operated Monday to Saturday commercially by Stagecoach, with Sunday fully supported and operated by Victoria Coaches.
6. **Service X67/68/X68** (Fraserburgh – Aberdeen via Mintlaw and Ellon; Monday to Sunday) operated commercially by Stagecoach except for three evening supported journeys.
7. **Service 69/69A** (Peterhead – Fraserburgh/Rosehearty via St Combs and St Fergus; Monday to Sunday) operated mostly commercially by Stagecoach, with some supported Monday to Sunday journeys.
8. **Service 76/77** (Fraserburgh Town Service (Broad Street Circular); Monday to Saturday) fully supported service operated by Watermill Coaches.
9. **Service 81** (Peterhead – Boddam; Monday to Saturday) fully supported service operated by Watermill Coaches.
10. **Service 82** (Peterhead Town Service (Meethill); Monday to Sunday) operated commercially by Stagecoach Monday to Friday, with Saturday journeys supported. Sunday fully supported service operated by Victoria Group.
11. **Service 82A** (Peterhead Town Service (Chapel Street – Meethill/Boddam); Monday to Saturday) fully supported and operated by Watermill Coaches (Monday to Friday) and by Victoria Group (Saturday).
12. **Service 83** (Peterhead Town Service (Chapel Street – Buchanhaven/Waterside); Monday to Sunday) fully supported and operated by Watermill Coaches (Monday to Saturday) and Victoria Group (Sunday).
13. **Service 84A/84C** (Peterhead Town Service (Chapel Street – Upper Grange); Monday to Saturday) mostly supported and operated by Watermill Coaches.
14. **Central Buchan A2B Dial-A-Bus** (covers Mintlaw, Strichen, New Leeds, Fetterangus, New Pitsligo, New Deer, Auchnagatt, Maud, Old Deer, and Stuartfield area; Monday to Saturday) fully supported service operated by Kininmonth Cabs.

£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

- Query regarding the potential impact of the £2 single Fare Cap on Stagecoach services

  Marcin Kaminski advised the implementation of the trial scheme in Highland and Moray has been very positive, with passenger growth on certain routes. However, some routes growth has been slower than expected but they will continue to monitor routes.

Michael Reid provided the following update

- He explained Central Buchan A2B Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) contract had expired and procured along with a conventional fixed-route bus service. Following consultation with users, evaluation of the benefits each type of bus service can deliver in the area and consideration of costs, the decision was made to renew the DRT service awarded to Kininmonth Cabs for a further five-year period. Additional funding from NESTRANS enabled the introduction of early morning journeys to improve access to employment. Work is underway to introduce a 24/7 online booking platform to complement the existing telephone booking service.

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

3. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Marcin Kaminski provided the following update:

- 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.

- He advised that delivery of the 17 new replacement vehicles intended for the Buchan corridors had been delayed. He acknowledged the frustration expressed by those in attendance and by passengers. Although the vehicles were expected to arrive towards the end of 2026, no confirmed delivery date had yet been received, and he did not wish to provide a timeframe that could not be guaranteed.

- 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.

4. Physical Accessibility Matters

- Concern raised that a regular wheelchair user had been refused travel on service 62 (Peterhead/Ellon – Aberdeen) due to the wheelchair's dimensions not meeting vehicle requirements. The issue was reported to customer services, but no alternative travel options were provided. The reliability and accessibility of the service was discussed, and as requested by the passenger, for certain journeys to be operated by a low floor vehicle.

  Susan Watt referred to correspondence about a regular passenger who used an electric wheelchair to travel between two points on the service. A driver had refused the passenger boarding due to concerns of wheelchair's dimensions. She asked whether Stagecoach could arrange a depot visit with the family to establish which vehicles could accommodate the passenger's wheelchair.

  Marcin Kaminski explained that electric wheelchairs exceeding the 300kg weight limit could not be safely accommodated. He advised that all buses complied with Public Service Accessible Vehicle Regulations (PSVAR). He offered to arrange a depot visit to investigate the matter further and requested the passenger's details to be arranged post-meeting.

  Post-meeting: Buchan depot operations team have reached out to the passenger to arrange a visit.

- Query raised whether the Stagecoach app could display the type of vehicle operating on each journey to assist passengers with mobility needs or carriage of bicycles.

  Marcin Kaminski advised this is not currently possible as vehicle allocations can vary on each journey. However, this would be further investigated with revisions to the app being discussed.

- A query was raised whether Stagecoach had consulted disability groups. Concerns were also raised about accessibility on the Buchan corridor, including difficulties with suitcases and buggies on the stairs of the interdeck vehicles allocated to the route, along with request for carriage of bikes to be considered.

  Marcin Kaminski advised the company has held discussions with disability organisations. He advised that groups/passengers can contact the Customer Services team with queries or requests for depot visits being arranged by emailing customer.services@stagecoachbus.com He advised there were no plans to accommodate bikes on the corridor, but this has been noted for future consideration.

5. Fraserburgh – Aberdeen via Mintlaw and Ellon

- Concern raised regarding the seating capacity of the new replacement vehicles planned for the corridor.

Marcin Kaminski advised the new replacement vehicles are expected to have slightly less seating capacity seats than the current inter-decks but should meet passenger demand under normal operating conditions. He noted capacity issues generally arise when vehicles break-down and the replacement vehicles are expected to improve reliability.

- Request for restricting Buchan corridor services to passengers travelling beyond Aberdeen City as Aberdeenshire-bound passengers at times were unable to board at King Street and Ellon Road due to capacity issues, coupled with introducing limited stopping arrangements along King Street.

  Marcin Kaminski advised express services on the Buchan corridors have limited stopping arrangements within Aberdeen. He explained passenger usage demonstrates demand for journeys within the city and drivers cannot refuse travel to these passengers. He also highlighted their contribution to the commercial viability of the services.

6. <u>Peterhead – Aberdeen via Ellon or Newburgh</u>

- Concern raised regarding the reliability, condition and suitability of vehicles operating on service X60, coupled with clarification on whether drivers carry out vehicle checks before leaving the depot.

  Greg Pearce explained drivers complete a First Use Report before a vehicle enters service. Any defects are recorded and assessed by engineering staff to determine whether the vehicle is fit for operation. He advised all vehicles are subject to a four-weekly service maintenance programme, along with MOT testing. Marcin Kaminski added drivers can refuse to operate a vehicle if they have safety concerns, in which case a replacement vehicle would be sought. Where no suitable replacement is available, the service may be cancelled.

- Request for daytime Saturday journeys on service 61 (Peterhead/Ellon – Aberdeen) operating between Newburgh and Ellon similar to the Sunday service provided.

  Marcin Kaminski explained the express service X60 (Peterhead – Aberdeen via Ellon) operates throughout the day on Saturdays, and re-routing the service to additionally serve Newburgh would increase journey times and raise complaints with only a limited expected number of passengers would travel.

9. <u>Peterhead – Fraserburgh/ Rosehearty</u>

- Request for improved connections between Strichen, Fraserburgh and Sandhaven/ Rosehearty, highlighting passengers currently wait approximately 1.5 hours between journeys.

  Marcin Kaminski explained that there were scheduling challenges in providing connections with other services. He noted that service 69 is partly supported by Aberdeenshire Council and its timetable is also influenced by school and college travel requirements, which limits the flexibility to amend journey times.

10. Peterhead – Mintlaw/Stuartfield/Maud

- Discussions were held on current transport provision in New Deer, Stuartfield and Maud, highlighting limited services available resulting in restricting travel. Requests raised for additional journeys to serve Maud and New Deer, along with extended operating hours including an evening service.

  Susan Watt highlighted service 66 (Peterhead – Mintlaw/Stuartfield) was operated commercially by Stagecoach from Monday to Saturday, along with the council-supported Sunday service which additionally serves Maud. She also highlighted the supported Central Buchan Demand Responsive Transport provided a Monday to Saturday service, along with the Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus (Buchan Dial a Community Bus) providing alternative transport options in the area.

  Michael Reid advised an evening DRT services and a potential New Deer to Turriff shopper service are being explored, subject to demand and external funding.

  Councillor Beagrie queried whether further marketing on the DRT was required.

  Ryan Mowatt suggested reviewing the supported Sunday service 66 to extend coverage for Maud across all return journeys.

11. Fraserburgh, Peterhead & Ellon Town Services

- Councillor Beagrie acknowledged the positive feedback regarding Watermill Coaches and Victoria Group operating the Peterhead Town Services which were implemented in August 2026.

  Jordan Reid advised they have received positive passenger feedback regarding the reliability and performance of the Town services listed. He referenced a complaint regarding fares being more expensive following a Peterhead Town grasshopper ticket that is no longer available following the procurement exercise with Monday to Friday service 82 operated commercially by Stagecoach. He confirmed on-going discussions with Stagecoach.

  Ryan Mowatt advised of positive feedback of the supported Sunday services 82/83 and also mentioned of the complaints regarding duplicate fares with no agreement in place with Stagecoach.

12. Service 52 (Newburgh – Ellon)

- Request for a daytime Saturday service to be re-instated on the corridor.

  Susan Watt advised the Council had previously supported a Saturday daytime service. However, following service withdrawals arising from constraints on the revenue budget for supported services in 2023, service 52 was still procured. The Monday to Friday service was awarded but the Council was unable to secure a Saturday service due to operators having insufficient vehicles and driver resource available but noted the very low patronage.

12. A.O.C.B

- Query regarding antisocial behaviour on services and what measures can be taken to address it, highlighting those travelling with U22 entitlement cards.

  Marcin Kaminski advised Stagecoach works closely with Police Scotland, along with onboard CCTV to assist with identifying antisocial behaviour. However, offenders can be difficult to identify where evidence is limited, and passengers cannot be refused travel based on their clothing.

  Greg Pearce explained the challenges for drivers and limited radio communication on some routes. Drivers can stop, if safe to do so, and radio the depot for assistance should issues arise on board, which may result in contacting Police Scotland for assistance.

  Susan Watt advised the U22 National Entitlement Card can only be withdrawn in cases of fraudulent use, although Transport Scotland is considering further measures to address antisocial behaviour.

  Councillor Beagrie suggested inviting a representative from Police Scotland to attend a future forum to discuss the issue.

14. Meeting closed

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