

**Meeting of the Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Council**

**Minute of Public Meeting & Outcomes  
regarding bus services to Bunchrew, Lentrane, Kirkhill, Kiltarlity,  
Beaulie, Muir of Ord, Dingwall and connecting services**

**7pm to 8pm, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022  
Kiltarlity Village Hall  
IV4 7HH**

**Chaired by:**

Drew Hendry, M.P.

**Community Councillors present:**

Cameron Kemp, Chair

Lindsey Stout, Secretary

Ally MacNeil

Linda Bell (representing Kiltarlity Community Council)

**In attendance:**

William Mainus, Head of Business Development, Stagecoach

John Cryans, Operations Manager, Stagecoach

Councillor David Fraser

28 Members of the Public, with fair representation for Kirkhill, Kiltarlity and Beaulie.

**Apologies**

Apologies were received from Community Councillor Norman Grant (Chair, Kiltarlity Community Council) and Councillors Chris Balance, Helen Crawford and Emma Knox.

**Issues raised:**

**5.15 transfer service to Kiltarlity**

Passengers stranded at Kirkhill when this service does not arrive, including families with young children, school age children, young people and the elderly. Duty of care to passengers and to safeguarding of children. A member of the public talked about walking home from Kirkhill to Kiltarlity via the dangerous road to Brockies Lodge. Concerns that Winter is coming, there is no shelter at Kirkhill for the vulnerable elderly, passengers with no taxi service locally would have to walk this dangerous road in the dark.

Maintaining the service to Beaulie from Kiltarlity, for doctors' appointments.

There is no way to get in touch with Stagecoach to say that there are passengers stranded at

Kirkhill.

Alternatively, the bus runs but the bus driver does not pick up passengers from Kirkhill. Cancelled buses, with no way to know that the bus is not coming.

A member of the public asked why the changes are on the paperwork but not on the duty board, so that the drivers know that this is a connecting service to Kiltarlity.

Response from Stagecoach representatives: there is a need for static drivers (always the same drivers for the route) who are aware of the connecting service. The issue was rectified. then the duties changed. "We can certainly improve on that" (William Mainus).

If there is a breakdown, an engineer should arrive with a replacement vehicle. "We do not leave passengers stranded. (William Mainus)."

John Cryans said that "we don't want anybody walking that route at any time of day under any road conditions."

There will be a No. 28 service running almost every hour to Kirkhill. The Kiltarlity service will not be a connecting service after Christmas and will be a fixed service. Another operator is supplying a timetable. After Christmas the service that comes to Kiltarlity will be tendered. On initial letter – not awarded yet.

Councillor David Fraser said that the Council has not yet awarded the contract for after January and once it's awarded, local people will have clarity on which company is running the service on this route. He also asked what will be done between now and Christmas if people are stranded at Kirkhill if a driver has forgotten to wait or if there is a breakdown.

### **Cancelled buses**

Cancelled buses with no warning leading to missed medical and wellbeing appointments.

Cancelled buses and lack of reliability leading to job losses and changes to people's availability for work, reducing their availability to work, leading to people dropping out of work and a reduction in the job opportunities they are able to take up.

People being unable to use prepaid tickets because the service does not arrive and being unable to reclaim the cost.

Services running late, meaning that people using a connecting service miss their connection and are late to work. Morning services were not getting people in to work until 10 a.m. Issues going in to work – cannot rely on a service – don't know if can get home. Issues with the reliability of the bus service in returning from town in time to collect children from school.

Response from Stagecoach: William Mainus said that it is disappointing. The bus station is too small and there are not enough supervisory staff. Abandoned buses are causing an issue and he will look into it.

Drew Hendry said that there needs to be a conversation with the community on the departure points for each stance.

Drew Hendry also asked for a response from Stagecoach on the policy for refunding the cost of tickets and how people would go about making a claim. John Cryans replied that people should go through the bus station. Drew Hendry asked for the policy, to share with the community.

John Cryans said that when it is feasible to send out a bus depends on the priority of the route. Lack of drivers, especially since Covid, has meant more cancelled buses.

A member of the public asked why there have been so many cancellations of the Number 28, the same time e.g. 5pm for several days in a row, affecting return from college or work. William Mainus asked for dates and times for these instances in order to follow it up.

Another member of the public commented that it used to be possible to catch a bus that passed through Tomnahurich Street and asked for the route to be reinstated.

### **Breakdowns**

On one occasion passengers were left in a bus whilst the engineer collected the driver in a van. William Mainus said, "we will follow that up. We use contractors to pick a bus up." Drew Hendry asked for a date in order to follow the incident up.

### **Cancelled late service**

The last No. 28 bus currently runs at 8.55 from Inverness and this means that local people cannot take the bus home from the theatre, the cinema, music events, restaurants and the pub.

The bus service is unreliable, may not turn up and people have to ring relatives to collect them. Some people are waiting for hours in Inverness to return home because they cannot afford a taxi and do not have anyone able to collect them. Safety of young women is a concern. The bus station is a cold place to wait when the building is shut. Cost of taxi home from Inverness is £30 minimum.

Lack of information about cancelled services – the bus station is closed and the other bus drivers do not know when the next bus will be.

Buses arriving and departing from the wrong stance because of empty buses blocking access to the correct stance. Some drivers will let you know but some drivers are not letting people who are waiting know that their bus has arrived at a different stance. People with visual impairment rely on buses leaving from the correct stance or being told, because they cannot see the board.

A number of people relied on the late service to get home from work and two have had since to give up work. Lack of a late bus means that those working in hospitality cannot take the bus home from work if they finish late at night.

Response from Stagecoach: the late service was a local authority tender, was a subsidised service

which is no longer supported. It is not a commercial service because not enough people were using it. If the local authority do not support it, it is not viable.

Drew Hendry said that he would look into the Council withdrawing funding from the late service. A member of the public asked what criteria are applied in regards to withdrawing a service.

William Mainus said that Stagecoach will reinstate the 10.15pm service, with an earlier service running at 8.15pm. Since Covid, Stagecoach has not reinstated all its services and is currently running at 85% of pre-Covid services. It will not be possible commercially to reinstate the 11.30 late service; this will unfortunately continue to affect those returning from late shifts in hospitality. The 11.30pm service was originally timed to tie in with the last train so that people returning by train to Inverness could get home but it was underutilised.

### **Cancellations that day not being advertised/changes to timetable not being advertised**

John Cryans explained how routes are prioritised when planning for capabilities and cancellations are decided and advertised on Twitter that morning and also on the Stagecoach website.

A member of the public asked how many people used Twitter and said that there must be a better way of communicating with people (an app?) and a way of communicating with Stagecoach when there are stranded passengers.

William Mainus said that, "since Covid we haven't been printing timetables and have perhaps been relying too much on information online. We need to get back to the old methods of printing out timetables."

Drew Hendry asked for more detail from Stagecoach on using different channels for better communication with the public.

### **Bus size and age when using small single track roads**

A member of the public said that there was a problem with the size of buses entering small country lanes at Fanellan and Hughton. The priority for this community should be smaller, newer buses.

There had also been an increase in the cancellation of services. Are buses cancelled because of a lack of drivers?

Response from Stagecoach: William Mainus said that there have been bus driver shortages.

Stagecoach do not have much in the way of smaller, diesel buses. By Christmas, Stagecoach will have 73 new vehicles.

### **Sunday services**

A member of the public said that he works in the hospitality industry and as well as not being able to get home after his 10pm shift, he cannot take up work on a Sunday.

Another member of the public asked that if the Government considers it greener not to use a car, why there are only three return services on a Sunday?

Response from Stagecoach: William Mainus said that we will see if there is a need for more services and put it on if there is. There will be no late 10.15pm service on a Sunday.

A member of the public asked how do we gauge the interest in increased Sunday services if people do not currently use the Sunday services? Is there a funding imbalance prioritising Inverness services over rural ones?

Active travel – what happened to the official policy of allowing bicycles on buses? During the Black Isle Million Miles Project, buses carried bikes.

William Mainus said that Sunday services are currently planned by looking at the usage Monday to Saturday.

William Mainus said that bicycles cannot be taken on buses. They drip oil and people might fall. It also means taking seats out to make more room. Racks on the back of buses did not work because mud and water sprayed up over the bicycles.

### **Action Points**

Drew Hendry M.P. to request further information from Stagecoach on improvements and to pass it to Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Council to pass on to the public and the other community councils involved.

There has been various other correspondence with Drew Hendry M.P. on the specific (individual) issues raised, which have already been dealt with and passed to Stagecoach.

Stagecoach Assurances:

- Respond to the community on what they will do in the event of a breakdown to avoid stranding.
- Communicate on looking at more appropriate, newer buses for routes.
- Provide details on how people get refunds for missing services.

Drew Hendry's Actions:

- Talk to the Highland Council about the withdrawal of funding for the late service.
- Talk to the Highland Council about contract details.
- Write to Stagecoach C.E.O. on communications – they use social media to communicate cancellations, but not everyone uses it and other methods need to be implemented.