



# Lochaber Transport Forum

*Co-chruinneachadh mu ghoireasan - siubhail Lochabair*

## Bus User's Group

Minutes of meeting

11.30, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Duncansburgh MacIntosh Church Hall, Fort William

**Present;**

Brian Murphy – Chairperson	BM
Benny MacDonald – Lochaber Transport Forum	BMcD
Arthur Cowie – Lochaber Transport Forum	AC
Peter Knight – Scottish Citylink	PK
John Barnes – Friends of the West Highland Lines/Lochaber Transport Forum	JB
Greig MacKay – Bus User's Scotland	GMcK
Stewart Grant – Bus user	SG
Iona Grant – Bus user	IG
Julie McDonald – Bus user	JMcD
Christine Hutchison – Kilmallie CC	CH
John Fotheringham – Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge & Achnacarry CC	JF
Sally Morris – Bus user, Kentallen	SM
C. A. Duncan – Bus user	CAD
Donnie MacGillivray – Shiel Buses	DoMcG
David MacGillivray – Shiel Buses	DaMcG
Donald Stewart – Bus user	DSt
J. Rossmorris – Bus user	JR
Irene Salter – Bus user	IS
Ian Langley – West Coast CRP & bus user	IL
W MacPhee – bus user	WMcPh
Lesley Williams – bus user	LW
Nan Cockburn – bus user	NC
Maureen Dempsey – bus user	MD
Mike Cooper – Highland Council	MC
David Summers – Highland Council	DSu
Ewan Standing – bus user	ES

**1. Welcome**

The Chairperson opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. He asked for introductions around the room.

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JF asked to speak before the meeting started to say he was sorry to hear of the death of Councillor Billy MacLachlan, Spean Bridge. Councillor MacLachlan had attended several Transport Forum meetings prior to his illness.

## **2. Apologies;**

Donald Cameron – MSP

Councillor Allan Henderson – Highland Council

Tony Dobson – Sunart Community Council/Lochaber Disability Access Panel

Flora McKee – Voluntary Action Lochaber

Graeme Leslie – Stagecoach

Kath Small – Ballachulish Community Council

Councillor Andrew Baxter – Highland Council

## **3. Confirmation of previous minutes**

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 05<sup>th</sup> December 2017 were approved by John Fotheringham and seconded by Arthur Cowie with no amendments.

## **4. Matters arising from the minutes**

There were no matters arising.

## **5. Bus Services**

### **• Stagecoach**

As there is a lot of uncertainty around current services BM asked David Summers from Highland Council to explain the operating procedures and details of how journeys are provided.

DSu – HC provide contracted bus services for schools and some other routes with most fixed for five years. Some started on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 with schools beginning January 2017. Decisions on who is awarded contracts are mainly taken on price though quality does have a smaller bearing. Other journeys are operated commercially and left to bus companies to set.

In Lochaber all school journeys are contracts but operators are expected to provide extra commercial services out with school times. Stagecoach have contracts for Kinlochleven School and Kinlochleven evening services, some services to/from Roy Bridge, Gairloch/Fort William and Fort William/Corpach (evenings only). Other journeys by Stagecoach are commercially operated. Shiel Buses provide contracted services to other schools, journeys in West Lochaber and Fort William/Corpach (daytime). Stagecoach will be ending the commercially run 45 service, Fort William/Caol, on 25<sup>th</sup> March. As there is no Sunday service this will stop Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March.

There have been no other decisions made by Stagecoach yet though they are considering closing the Depot in Caol. Ending contracts requires 90 days notice.

HC Officers have met Stagecoach representatives to discuss matters. Since April 2017 they have reduced the fleet of vehicles because of changes to contracts which may not now be viable.

BM – I'm quite angry Stagecoach haven't attended this meeting and we don't know what is happening.

There was discussion on what will happen to HC contracts if Stagecoach withdraws.

DoMcG - as there's been no decision made Shiel Buses can't comment on what may happen. We can't work with the current contract prices set by Stagecoach.

There was discussion on how serious it will be for people in rural areas such as Kinlochleven/Balachulish, Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge if services stop. Several people are annoyed Stagecoach aren't present and they are being told by drivers the depot is closing.

**DaMcG offered to look into some services to Caol to provide journeys at certain times.**

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**PK offered to look into the 919 service providing a link for Roy Bridge. This had previously available at certain times.**

DSt asked if HC can take over the contracted services. Are there contingency plans?

DSu – we'll certainly be discussing contracts with Shiel Buses and other companies. We may have to rearrange budgets to provide the best level of service we can afford. We'll also have to look at non-contracted services in Kinlochleven. I'll be speaking to Argyll & Bute Council regarding connections with Ballachulish.

HC can't provide the journeys directly but are busy with a contingency plan. There are future plans going through the Scottish Parliament to allow Councils to operate bus services.

DSt – it seems the standard and quality provided with contracts can be very poor because it's mainly cost based. This is a good time to make improvements, communities are being cut off.

WMcPh asked what will happen to Inverness services if Stagecoach cancel contracts and close the depot. Also, who owns the new coaches on the 919 route?

PK – the coaches are owned by Stagecoach. We have other operators who may take over contracts and provide a depot.

JMcD - has the cost benefits of providing bus transport to rural villages been taken into account? This affects many businesses and peoples livelihoods.

AC – can HC minibuses be used to provide services?

DSu – it is feasible to introduce minibus routes, there are some operating in remote areas. Previously we could add services but this stopped a few years ago as budgets reduced. I don't have any more details at present but we do understand the cost benefits of making transport available.

SG asked if minibus transport would be accessible for wheelchairs.

DSu - not at present but when we provide contracts we have to make them accessible.

There was discussion on what Community Transport (CT) can provide where villages have minibuses.

DSu – HC want to support Community Transport, it has to be organised by the community. If they operate regular daily journeys there is a big commitment to find drivers, voluntary or otherwise.

CT minibuses require permits which are classed as Section 19 and Section 22. Section 19 is not for public usage therefore suitable for isolated villages. Section 22 is for public services and can be set up using CT minibuses. A reinterpretation of the legislation is currently going through a consultation at Westminster. I'll be attending a meeting regarding this in Edinburgh next month.

SG – we prefer low floor buses rather than coaches on the Kinlochleven route as they are more accessible. Details were given of various operating problems with Stagecoach vehicles.

JMcD – I'm very concerned contracts were given mainly on price. HC must have known this was too low to provide a good service. We can't get to this situation again. Shiel Buses could have provided better for a little more. All complaints are with Stagecoach.

LW – we should write down the minimum we require.

JF – our Councillors should be doing this, I know they have spoken to HC.

BM – we've had lots of complaints at meetings. What does HC look for when providing contracts?

DSu – there are legal requirements in law and requirements within contracts.

**I can provide the Transport Forum with details.**

DSt – I'm happy DSu has answered most of the questions he's been asked but contracts should not be given on price alone.

- **Shiel Buses**

DoMcG – we'll continue our services as usual, if and when there are changes we'll look at what's available. Taking over all journeys immediately if Stagecoach were to pull out is very expensive.

MD – I'd like to say Shiel Buses provide a very good service for this area and the drivers are very helpful. Many at the meeting were in agreement.

- **Citylink**

PK gave details of 919 summer services due to begin on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Coaches will depart Fort William at 7:30, 8:30, 11:30, 14:00, 15:30 and 17:30. Departures from Inverness will be 9:00, 11:00, 13:00, 15:00, 17:15 and 20:15. There are some alterations to times from last summer.

BMcD gave proposed changes to the 918 service which he received from West Coach Motors. They are adjusted to continue connecting with the 919. Departures from Fort William will be 11.30 and 17.40. Departures from Oban will be 9.50 and 15.55.

There are no changes to Fort William/Glasgow services.

There was discussion on the standard of road surfaces. PK said new coaches are being damaged by lack of road maintenance. DoMcG said Shiel Buses have spent £14,000 on windscreens over the last eight months due to loose gravel and poor road conditions.

## **6. AOCB**

GMck gave an overview on the recent Citizens Advice Scotland survey into bus use.

This didn't give a full understanding of the current situation. Results went by postcode and not by company. The Bus Bill currently going through the Scottish Parliament is a lot more in depth. Some areas such as East Lothian and the borders are actually bucking the trend which has otherwise seen a reduction in bus usage. Commercial services may not work so well here.

BM – are there any positives for Lochaber from the Bus Bill?

GMCK – the bill will help Local Authorities to provide services directly.

DSt asked about Council money for contracts. DSu explained this comes from Council budgets and general income such as rents and taxes, 80% is spent on school contract and 20% on other bus contracts. There is about £15m spent in total throughout the region.

IL asked if there has been any work done to provide shuttle buses for the cruise ships this summer. This was raised at a previous meeting.

DaMcG – we haven't looked at this yet.

DST – once again I have to mention there are no Councillors or MSP's attending today. I have previously suggested moving Forum meetings to a Friday to allow others to attend meeting.

**BM – we can do this for the next couple of meetings and see who will attend.**

## **7. Dates for future Forum Meetings.**

Following a request to change the day of meetings, the next Bus User's Group Meeting has been **moved to Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June** in the Duncansburgh Church Hall.

Before this there is a full Transport Forum Meeting. This has been **moved to Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May**, also in the Duncansburgh Church Hall.

## From meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018

### **8. Confirmation of previous minutes**

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018 were approved by John Fotheringham and seconded by Arthur Cowie.

There was one amendment. Chris Evans said she attended the meeting but her name is not on the list of those present. BMcD later checked the attendance list and it was not signed by Chris Evans though her name is on notes made at the meeting.

### **Contact details**

Complaints to Highland Council, telephone; 01349 886606, email; [public.transport@highland.gov.uk](mailto:public.transport@highland.gov.uk)

Scottish Citylink have a call centre operating 24/7 365 days a year call centre which also deals with complaints, telephone; 0141 352 4444 or email, [info@citylink.co.uk](mailto:info@citylink.co.uk). It's useful to have the coach service number. They work with many operators and pass on complaints to them.

Peter Knight can also be contacted directly, email; [p.knight2@citylink.co.uk](mailto:p.knight2@citylink.co.uk)

Stagecoach can be contacted with complaints Monday to Friday, 9.00 – 17.00 through the main office in Inverness by telephone – 01463 233371, by email – [highland.enquiries@stagecoachbus.com](mailto:highland.enquiries@stagecoachbus.com).

The contact phone no. for Fort William is – 01397 702373.

The disability helpdesk is, telephone – 01463 258933, by email – [highland.disabilityhelpdesk@stagecoachbus.com](mailto:highland.disabilityhelpdesk@stagecoachbus.com)

Shiel Buses can be contacted by telephone in Acharacle – 01967 431272, Fort William – 01397 700700, email – [info@shielbuses.co.uk](mailto:info@shielbuses.co.uk).

Complaints to West Coast Motors go to head office in Campbeltown by telephone – 01586, email – [enquiries@westcoastmotors.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@westcoastmotors.co.uk).

Complaints can be taken further by contacting Bus Users Scotland, the link to their website is; <http://www.bususers.org/scotland/about-us>. They can also be contacted through Greig Mackay, Deputy Director, Bus Users Group Scotland, Hopetoun Gate, 8b MacDonald Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4LZ. Greig Mackay [greig.mackay@bususers.org](mailto:greig.mackay@bususers.org) The telephone no. is: 0300 111 0001.