

BULLETIN FOR FORMARTINE AREA COMMITTEE MEMBERS - 8 AUGUST 2019

BUS PASSENGER SURVEY: AUTUMN 2018

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 Note the outcome of the autumn 2018 Bus Passenger Survey.

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The 2017 annual Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) undertaken by Transport Focus was funded by the main national operators and therefore concentrated on services provided by Stagecoach North Scotland across both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, and First Aberdeen in the City. Supplementary funding from Nestrans enabled the results for Aberdeenshire to be extracted retrospectively, but only allowed a comparison to be made with the Nestrans area as a whole.
- 2.2 The 2018 BPS in Scotland was based upon the six Regional Transport Partnership areas, as it had been in autumn 2016. The financial contribution from Nestrans allowed a geographical split between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City to be undertaken.
- 2.3 The BPS asks passengers to rate their journey experience commencing from their time of arrival at the bus stop and also includes: the punctuality of the bus; their time on the bus; the bus driver; overall journey satisfaction; and, value for money (fare payers only) ratings. The survey was conducted between 10 September and 12 December 2018, excluding the October school half term holiday period (13 to 28 October), and comprised 628 users in Aberdeenshire.
- 2.4 A list of the services covered, including those operated by Stagecoach, Bain's Coaches, and M W Nicoll Coaches, is provided in Appendix A. On receipt of the survey results by the Council, it became apparent that responses from passengers using Stagecoach Service X17 (Elrick / Westhill - Aberdeen) had been included in the Aberdeen City results but not in those for Aberdeenshire. Whilst Transport Focus have confirmed that only those passengers travelling within Aberdeen City were interviewed, this was clearly an oversight as this is a key Aberdeenshire service. Steps have been taken to ensure this is not repeated in future surveys.
- 2.5 Benchmarking of local satisfaction levels was undertaken for each service delivery category against those for Aberdeen City and, as is normal practice, an average across six comparable English rural authorities covered by the same 2018 Transport Focus BPS. In 2018 these rural authorities were Cornwall, County Durham, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire and Worcestershire. All the benchmarking results are detailed in Appendix B.
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- 2.6 For the first time, Transport Focus also provided information by ‘type of passenger’ for four service delivery categories in both Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, and these are outlined in Appendix C.
- 2.7 The principal finding of the autumn 2018 BPS was that Aberdeenshire bus users showed an increased level of satisfaction with the overall service for a second consecutive year, and also increases in satisfaction in 29 of the 34 aspects of bus service delivery, compared with the autumn 2017 BPS.
- 2.8 Comparisons between 2017 and 2018
- 2.8.1 Overall positive satisfaction with *Bus Service Delivery* increased by 4%, with the most significant increases (i.e. +5% or more) being recorded in the categories of *Punctuality* (+12%), *Length of Time Waiting for a Bus* (+9%), *Value for Money* (+8%), *Information at Bus Stop* (+8%), *Information inside the Bus* (+6%), and *On Bus Journey Time* (+5%).
- 2.8.2 It is encouraging to see increased positive satisfaction with *Punctuality*, *Length of Time Waiting for a Bus* and *On Bus Journey Time*, this perhaps being partly a result of reduced congestion in some areas of Aberdeen City, as a result of completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route. On the other hand, the only category for which a significant drop in positive satisfaction levels was displayed (i.e. down from 65% to 61%) related to *Frequency*, perhaps reflecting operator responses to declining bus patronage on some routes and the consequences of action taken by Aberdeenshire Council to maintain spending on supported buses within the approved 2018/19 Revenue Budget allocation.
- 2.8.3 Increased positive satisfaction levels relating to *Value for Money* (up from 55% to 63%) and *Information inside the Bus* (up from 66% to 72%) are welcome. Whilst 2018 levels are still not particularly high, it suggests that positive progress has been made.
- 2.8.4 Regarding the other indicators, positive satisfaction levels increased by up to 4% in 23 categories, remained unchanged in 3 categories, and decreased by 1% in *Safety of the Driving* (92% to 91%).
- 2.9 Comparisons with Aberdeen City
- 2.9.1 The Aberdeenshire results compare favourably with those for Aberdeen City in 26 of the 34 categories, with overall positive satisfaction with *Bus Service Delivery* being high in both authorities (91% Aberdeenshire; 89% Aberdeen City).
- 2.9.2 Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire were significantly higher than those in Aberdeen City in seven categories, namely *Punctuality* (+15%), *Length of Time Waiting for Bus* (+10%), *Information at Bus Stop* (+10%), *Personal Safety at Bus Stop* (+9%), *Greeting/Welcome from Driver* (+9%), *Interior Cleanliness/Condition of Bus* (+8%), and *Value for Money* (+8%). It can be assumed that buses in the City are more likely to be affected by congestion on a greater percentage of their routes, whilst the difference relating to bus stop information is harder to explain, given that it is provided in a standardised format across the Nestrans area and the ratio of publicity cases to bus stops in Aberdeenshire is similar to that in Aberdeen.

Bus drivers in Aberdeenshire continue to receive higher positive satisfaction levels than their counterparts in the City, not just in terms of their greeting/welcome to passengers, but in all seven categories relating to their behaviour.

- 2.9.3 Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeen City were higher than those in Aberdeenshire in four categories, namely *Frequency* (+8%), *Ease of Getting on the Bus* (+6%), *Provision of Grab Rails on Bus* (+4%), and *Ease of Getting off the Bus* (+3%). Service frequencies are, of course, higher on the majority of routes within the City, these being wholly operated by easy access low floor buses.
- 2.9.4 Regarding the other indicators, positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire exceeded those in Aberdeen City by between 1% and 7% in 20 categories. Levels were identical in the remaining 3 categories.
- 2.9.5 Regarding the information by passenger type for four service delivery categories, as outlined in Appendix B, in Aberdeenshire those aged 60 and above show the highest levels of satisfaction in the three categories which apply to all passenger types, with those aged 35-59 the least satisfied with *Availability of Seating/Space to Stand* and *Amount of Personal Space*.
- 2.9.6 Also in Appendix B, the most significant differences between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City are in the positive satisfaction levels relating to *Value for Money* in the aged 35-59 category (Aberdeenshire 67%; Aberdeen City 55%), and regarding *Amount of Personal Space* for both the aged 60 and over (Aberdeenshire 88%; Aberdeen City 78%), and passengers with a disability categories (Aberdeenshire 83%; Aberdeen City 70%)

2.10 Comparisons with the English Rural Authorities

- 2.10.1 The Aberdeenshire results compare favourably with the average across the six benchmark English rural county authorities in 25 of the 33 applicable categories, with overall positive satisfaction with *Bus Service Delivery* being high in both cases (91% and 89% respectively).
- 2.10.2 Positive satisfaction levels in Aberdeenshire were significantly higher than the English rural authorities' average in seven categories, namely *Punctuality* (+11%), *Information at Bus Stop* (+10%), *Overall Satisfaction with Bus Stop* (+9%), *Length of Time Waiting for the Bus* (+7%), *Personal Safety at Bus Stop* (+7%), *Freedom of Litter at Bus Stop* (+7%), and *Route/Destination Information on Bus* (+6%).
- 2.10.3 The English rural authorities, on average, scored significantly higher than Aberdeenshire in only one category, namely *Provision of Grab Rails on Bus* (+8%).

3 **Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 The report is submitted to this Committee for its information and interest.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the purpose of the report is simply to advise the Committee of the outcome of the BPS and it does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 No risks have been identified as relevant to this matter at a Corporate or Strategic Level and there are no direct staffing or financial implications.
- 4.3 There will be no differential impact on town centres arising from this report and therefore a Town Centre First Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

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Report prepared by Neil Stewart, Principal Officer
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