

Eric Guthrie, Aberdeenshire Council, presented on policy in his area.

- Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) was discussed. The A-2-B service has been introduced in Aberdeenshire, using various community dial-a-bus schemes which spreads the benefits of investment.
- The now defunct Heather Hopper service was mentioned, which used to join Tomintoul to Blairgowrie, with Tomintoul and Ballater as hubs, and the possibility of bringing it back. Any new service could attract private sponsorship. Some councils have a history of revenue support for the service, some do not. The ScotExec Kickstart programme is unlikely to help, as any service must be viable without subsidy after 3/4 years: Heather Hopper would not be. There was broad support to reintroduce and improve this service, perhaps extending the season's run from June-September to Easter-October.

Action: CNPA to continue discussions for 2006 season with councils and Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) NesTrans & HiTrans

- DRT can address issues such as the reality/perception of near-empty buses.
- Integration is important in any existing or reintroduced service. EG stated that councils and RTPs work together through regional forums to minimise bad connections. There are also area bus forums run in each area to discuss improvements.
- The 2001 census did not request transport user information from non-employed people, and it was felt that this excluded large groups of people. The Scottish Executive do undertake a national transport survey which would fill some gaps.

Action: Councils asked to feedback for 2011 census

- EG stated that the Scottish Executive and councils do support rural services, with school services especially receiving more support than councils receive in revenue support.
- An effort has been made to include taxi drivers in new DRT schemes, but not all will buy into it. It was suggested that we may need more licensed taxi drivers, as some have other work during the day.
- Operators do not always market the timetables widely enough; some post offices have had limited deliveries over the years.

Action: CNPA to discuss with councils possible improvements to delivery of

timetables to community shops and Post Offices in the Park

- Public Transport users will soon be able to access bus information from their mobile phones in Aberdeenshire. These numbers will be advertised on bus stops.
- Baby stroller access and storage on some buses is inadequate. Often wheelchairs and strollers have to share the same space. This can put off some parents from using buses. EG said that efforts are made, with new low floor buses etc.
- The need to improve joint ticketing with attractions, cross-Park ticketing and marketing were highlighted. The links between subsidised and commercial routes were now more connected – previously 2 tickets may have been required.
- Mobility & Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) looks at public transport and infrastructure issues & conflicts. EG mentioned that MACS has been out to help Aberdeenshire with their work.
- The design of some new Turbostar trains is unsuitable for the blind, with dirty cycle areas positioned next to seats for the disabled. Some rethink of train areas is required.

Maggie Lawson presented on Community Transport in the CNP

- The main funder for Badenoch & Strathspey Transport Company is the Rural Community Transport Initiative.
- To use B&STC services you must: live in B&S, have no access to transport or be unable to use public transport. Aviemore has less need due to its good connections so is ineligible for the car scheme, but a shopping project and community bus are both used in the town.
- Employment journeys are generally ineligible, but travel to work interviews is allowed
- There is no minimum age, but most users are over 70
- Some school age children use the service, but most hire a bus to get to youth centres.
- B&S varies from the Deeside side of the Park. B&STC is well organised and funded, supplying cars for 700 clients and with a range of other schemes. Deeside tends to concentrate on community buses only.
- B&STC are always looking for new drivers, as some retire from driving or become clients.
- B&STC does runs for Scottish Ambulance Transport, and some leeway is given to others needing transport to other medical clinics. Their work for SAT is infrequent and generally covers odd routes and overflow clients, around 1 a day. B&STC have a funding agreement with SAT.
- ML stated that long-term financial viability is helped by B&STC running training courses, and this reduces the subsidies required.
- B&STC model was considered transferable, but every area has different needs and will run different models.

- It was agreed that community schemes should be additional to taxis and public transport, and not replace them. ML agreed that most B&STC journeys are new and would not happen without the scheme.
- The point was made that often volunteers get as much out of the service as the clients, in social interaction and putting something back into the community.
- Grantown Dial-a-bus is another example of DRT in the Park. Very early days, less than a week in. Cultural step-change required in passengers, so demand is expected to rise from a present low base. It has been modelled on the Durnoch and other schemes. Most journeys are 70p or below, concessions are free. Some felt that marketing could be improved upon locally.
- Donside has a community car scheme for services to a day centre.
- The use of community newsletters is important in spreading the awareness of community schemes
- Inter-community & inter-agency links are vital to spread best practice and knowledge.
- Speyside Car Scheme first started 4 years ago and has recently been re-launched.

Bob Edwards (Highland Council for HiTrans) & Peter Cockhead (NesTrans) presented on RTPs and the national transport review

- RTPs are funded annually, and this is bad for long-term planning.
- 3 RTPs in the CNP area: NesTrans & HiTrans will carry on after the national transport review, and a new RTP will be established for Central & Tay and will cover the Angus Glens.
- New RTPs will have Boards made up of councillors and non-councillors
- The issue of private sector involvement was brought up, and PC stated that the existing transport forums consist of 100 bodies, including private businesses. These forums help shape Trans policies.
- Scottish Enterprise Grampian & Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce both sit on the present NesTrans board. The new NesTrans Board will consist of 4 council members and 2 non-council members, so may continue as at present.
- Observers also attend Board meetings, and it is possible that this could include users groups, private businesses, freight operators, environmental lobbyists and the business lobby.
- The issue of co-ordinating the CNPA's Park and Local Plans with the councils' review of Local Transport Strategy (LTS) was discussed. Strategic objectives and actions were being developed by the CNPA for the Park Plan. Informal contact between councils, RTPs and CNPA exist already, but a more formal officers group will shortly be formed to discuss the issues raised here and policy linkages. Efforts will be made to ensure duplication of research and surveying does not occur as councils review their LTSs and CNPA develop their policy.

Action: CNPA to establish more formal links with council/RTP officers

- 45% of those in affordable housing have no access to their own transport. It is therefore important to make public transport accessible for existing and new affordable housing. Most planning applications do include a transport assessment, and efforts are made to lever in private funds from developers to contribute to infrastructure and service planning.
- Aberdeen airport is an important gateway to the CNP. PC said that the airport had improved greatly, with new routes, more relaxed flight restrictions, and better bus connections. It was pointed out that some airport signage may not be present or standardised.
- Recent research has shown that cyclists like using public transport, and routes need to be delivered. The Cairngorms Explorer was welcomed for linking cycling to public transport.
- The make-up and role for the new National Transport Division, to be based in Glasgow, still needs to be finalised. Strategy issues may stay with the ScotExec.
- The 3 models of RTPs were discussed. It is generally up to each area to decide which model they prefer, but strategy will be developed first and NesTrans and HiTrans will then decide which model to adopt.

John Thorne May 2005