

North East of Scotland Bus Alliance

Quality Partnership Agreement 2017

1. Purpose of the North East Quality Partnership Agreement

- 1.1. Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, First in Aberdeen and Stagecoach Bluebird have been involved in a Quality Partnership for public transport since its inception in April 1998. Nestrans, the Regional Transport Partnership for the North East, joined the Quality Partnership in 2007 and a further update to the agreement was signed by all five partners in 2010.
- 1.2. The new North East Scotland Bus Alliance covers the whole of the Nestrans region, encompassing both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council areas and is open to all bus operators of local bus services operating within the region. It establishes a new Bus Alliance Board responsible for the establishment of joint objectives and targets, overseeing, monitoring, providing resources and committing to the aims of the Passenger Charter.

Passenger Charter

The North East of Scotland Quality Bus Partnership has defined objectives for improving public transport in the north east of Scotland. To help bring these about it has set itself a range of challenging targets. The partners have committed to the following:

Bus operators in the Partnership will provide a modern, accessible and quality fleet. They will also ensure that drivers go through recognised customer care and disability awareness training. Operators will individually strive to ensure that their ticketing strategy is focussed on customer value for money, to increase the bus market, to fund future investment and ensure the long term viability of services.

Public sector partners will implement infrastructure and traffic management measures that will benefit buses by improving reliability and/or reducing current journey times. This will include more schemes that will give people using buses greater priority. They will also provide quality and accessible passenger waiting areas. Public sector partners shall seek to support socially necessary routes in relevant areas through conventional scheduled services and demand responsive services and they will ensure that an increasing proportion of these routes are provided using quality and accessible vehicles.

Bus operators and public sector partners will work together to provide a wide range of passenger information services and multi-operator ticketing initiatives that promote ease of understanding. These will help to provide seamless interchange opportunities. A key outcome is customer satisfaction. The partners will also participate in an annual passenger satisfaction survey, the results of which will be published in an annual report, and they will consult with members of the public and communities in an effort to seek feedback on services and facilities provided.”

2. Objectives

- 2.1. The Agreement is intended to support delivery of the Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy and Bus Action Plan, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council's respective Local Transport Strategies, and lock in the benefits of significant investment in recent and imminent infrastructure improvements including the opening of the Diamond Bridge in 2016 and the opening of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and Balmedie-Tipperty improvements in 2018.
- 2.2. The Quality Partnership has set the following overarching objectives for bus travel in the north east:
1. To increase the number and proportion of people travelling by bus across the region;
 2. To improve the operational performance of bus services;
 3. To improve customer satisfaction with the overall level of service across the region;
 4. To reduce emissions from buses contributing to improved local air quality and reducing carbon emissions.
 5. To improve access to public transport for all, reducing the equalities gap across the region by reducing barriers including cost and physical access.
- 2.3. It will be one of the first tasks of the new Bus Alliance Board to agree SMART¹ targets for these objectives.
- 2.4. The mechanisms by which the above objectives and targets can be achieved will include reducing journey times; improving journey speeds; improving service frequencies; providing a punctual and reliable service as well as quality infrastructure and information to encourage mode shift and improve accessibility; by improving the fuel efficiency of the bus fleet, utilising greener technologies; and, by reducing lost mileage and re-investing the savings made through more reliable bus operation back into enhanced bus services.
- 2.5. Improving journey time reliability and reducing journey times will be a key focus of this agreement in order to make savings that can be re-invested back into the network in a way that creates future growth.

3. Key Deliverables

- 3.1. A number of significant infrastructure schemes and other improvements have been completed in the last 5 years or are currently under construction and will provide

¹ SMART: Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound

significant benefits to the movement of traffic and buses across the City Region. Together these form a significant investment on the part of the public sector partners and the participating bus operators. They include:

- Removal of the restriction on the A96 at Inveramsay Bridge in 2016 through creation of a new 1.5km road link at a cost of £10.2m.
- Opening of the Diamond Bridge in 2016 and the creation of a new link from the north of the city at a cost of £22.3m.
- Construction of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and Balmedie – Tippetty dualling with the aim of removing traffic from and reducing congestion within the City as well as improving journey times and reliability on the key route north towards Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh (overall estimated project cost £745m).
- An investment of £303,667 to create a direct access for buses to the Kingswells Park and Ride from the A944, opened in 2016, and making it easier for a wider range of services to serve the site.
- An investment of £15.2m to construct a new 1,000 space park and ride site at Craibstone on the A96 and the Dyce link road. The project was completed in February 2017.
- An expansion of the Ellon Park and Ride facility at a cost of £292,000 in 2013/14 to provide additional parking spaces and controlled access to the site.
- Extension to the operating hours of bus lanes on Great Northern Road to better reflect peak traffic conditions. These changes came into effect in June 2015 (£1,200).
- Decriminalisation of bus lanes enforcement in March 2013 following an investment of around £350,000 in bus lane cameras and back office systems.
- The closure of Broad Street to all traffic except for buses, cyclists and pedestrians as part of the wider City Centre Masterplan.
- Investment of £160,000 in an upgraded Aberdeenshire Electronic Ticket Machine back-office facility in February 2017 to assist small operators across the region and in the delivery of smart ticketing initiatives
- Completion of a bus interchange hub at Fyvie in 2016 at a cost of £114,000
- Construction of a bus turning circle at Dyce rail station (£426,000)

3.2. Other improvements to the quality of provision have included:

- Bus operator improvements including the installation of Ticketr machines, investment in the vehicle fleet, website and app developments, introduction of contactless payment methods and investment in new fuel technologies.
- Investment of £614,000 to introduce real time passenger information across Aberdeenshire in 2015 and subsequent extension of real time information to cover all services across the region and improvement of at-stop screens (£35,000).

- Joint working to improve at-stop timetable information (£271,000 over the last 5 years).
 - Investment of £19m from a number of industry and public sector partners in the Hydrogen bus project including a fleet of 10 new hydrogen fuelled vehicles and refuelling station.
 - £17.5 million revenue support for bus services by Aberdeenshire Council over the last 5 years and £658,000 support by the City Council over the last 5 years.
 - Investment in bus shelters and timetable provision.
- 3.3. Work is also progressing on a number of projects that will be progressed over the coming years, including:
- Extension of the Park and Ride site at Ellon;
 - Modelling of the network on the B9119 Queens Road between Aberdeen Crematorium and Springfield Road to identify improvements for buses travelling along this corridor;
 - Wellington Road multi-modal study;
 - Review of the road hierarchy in the city;
 - The City Centre Masterplan and Roads Hierarchy review which will significantly change the way in which traffic moves through and around Aberdeen City Centre, including buses.
 - CIVITAS PORTIS – a four year European funded project of which one strand is focussed on “Collective Travel” and reducing the mode split of car travel on the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverurie;
 - Investment in park and ride mini-hubs on the A947 and A93 corridors.
 - Dualling of the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness, delivered by Transport Scotland (including looking at the junctions of the A96 at Inverurie and the AWPR).

4. Statutory Quality Partnership and Enhanced Partnership Agreements

- 4.1. As well as aiming to improve quality standards across the region in line with the Partnership objectives and targets, the purpose of this refreshed voluntary agreement is to set an agreed framework for the development of Statutory Quality Partnership agreements on individual route corridors.
- 4.2. The concept of Enhanced Partnerships is contained within the Bus Services Act in England and the Scottish Government is currently considering these in the context of Scottish legislation. The partners will consider the appropriateness of any new partnership models as they develop. By signing this voluntary agreement, the partners are committing to the proposed structure and management arrangements of such agreements and the proposed implementation programme.

The rationale for setting up Statutory Quality Partnerships or Enhanced Partnerships

- 4.3. Annual monitoring of the quality partnership standards and targets has been carried out over the last five years. Whilst progress has been made towards a number of the infrastructure and vehicle targets, for example the proportion of accessible vehicles and availability of information at bus stops, the key indicators for bus patronage and journey times are moving in the wrong direction and away from the targets set. Customer satisfaction with the overall level of service has decreased in recent years, particularly in relation to punctuality and length of waiting time at the stop.
- 4.4. Travel to work and education statistics also show that objectives to encourage mode shift away from private car to more sustainable modes of transport are not being achieved with, at best, mode split remaining fairly static and the proportion of people using the bus for the journey to work declining from 17% to 12% in the City and remaining at 5% in Aberdeenshire between 2005/06 and 2015. Although declining bus patronage is, to a certain extent, a national trend, the following data from the 2015 Scottish Household Survey shows the proportion of people travelling to work and education by bus in Aberdeen is lower than other cities in Scotland.
- Aberdeen: 11%
 - Glasgow: 17%
 - Edinburgh: 27%
 - Dundee: 20%
- 4.5. The recent Passenger Focus surveys also show the north east to have lower levels of passenger satisfaction than other areas across Scotland.
- 4.6. These trends demonstrate the need for more to be done to challenge the dominance of the private car and increase the attractiveness of bus travel.
- 4.7. It was agreed by all partners that a new approach was needed and Statutory Quality Partnerships (or if applicable in the future, Enhanced Partnerships) identified as a mechanism providing for a greater level of commitment from partners to deliver necessary improvements for buses when compared with current voluntary agreements.
- 4.8. This agreement also sits within the wider context of ongoing work to deliver the City Centre Masterplan and to lock in the benefits of the AWPR (including reviewing the road hierarchy in Aberdeen and the way traffic moves through and across the city). The management and provision of parking is also key to encouraging greater bus use, particularly for access to the city centre. Statutory Quality Partnership agreements could include consideration of how demand management measures can be used to reduce car use and encourage travel by public transport and how funding can be directed to prioritise improvements.
- 4.9. Aberdeen City Council is currently undertaking a strategic car parking review which will assist in identifying measures that can feed into future sQP agreements.

Facilities to be provided through a Statutory Partnership

- 4.10. A statutory Quality Partnership (sQP) agreement will be required to set out the specified facilities to be provided by the authorities and the standards to be met by the bus operators. Legislation on sQPs states that the scheme may include facilities provided before any proposals to form a quality partnership have been considered if they are provided no more than 5 years before the scheme is proposed or for more than 5 years but less than 10 years before the date the scheme is proposed, where the consent of all operators using the facilities has been obtained.
- 4.11. In return for the facilities provided by the transport authority(ies), bus operators are required to operate their services to specified standards which must be linked to the aims and objectives of national, regional and local bus policies. Under the current legislation, specification can be made on standards of minimum frequencies and vehicle requirements but not on maximum frequency, the timing of services or the levels of fares.
- 4.12. Further to the above improvements already delivered and identified in Section 4, it is anticipated that sQP or EP agreements could include the following key principles:

<u>Local Authority / Nestrans</u>	<u>Bus Operators</u>
Potential improvements to bus priority measures and additional bus priority (e.g. bus lanes, bus gates, bus only turning restrictions, traffic signal priority and sequencing, urban traffic control), to be identified through corridor studies.	Commitment to run a minimum frequency on defined corridors (with consideration of exclusions for special services like registered school services).
Demand management measures to reduce car movements in certain areas and improve priority for buses.	Service stability (e.g. a limited number of timetable changes per year)
Improvements to bus stop infrastructure (e.g. bus shelters, bus interchanges, bus boarders, build outs, raised kerbs, dropped kerbs).	Minimum vehicle standards (e.g. maximum age, accessibility, emissions).
Improvements to passenger safety and security (e.g. CCTV, bus shelter lighting)	Enhanced monitoring of service performance (e.g. journey times, reliability and punctuality)
Enhanced monitoring of service performance (e.g. journey times, reliability and punctuality) through real time information systems and data sharing.	Enhanced customer engagement (e.g. commitment to consult with passengers/communities on service changes and participate in Area Bus Forums).
Enhanced customer engagement (e.g. commitment to monitoring bus passenger satisfaction and Area Bus Forums)	Potential to link fares rises to other factors.

Enforcement (e.g. additional bus stop clearways, parking, waiting & loading restrictions, and bus priority enforcement).	Customer service and staff training (e.g. disability and dementia awareness training)
Improvements to passenger information (e.g. at-stop information, real time disruption information and branding materials)	Continued development of smart, integrated and cashless ticket products
Continued development of smart and integrated ticket products	Targeted marketing and promotion.
Pursue an increase in personal travel planning with and by employers / households on the corridor.	
Implementation of planning policy that supports the mode hierarchy of walking, cycling and public transport movements over car.	

5. Statutory Quality Partnership corridors and programme for delivery

5.1. Initial corridors for delivery of Statutory or Enhanced Quality Partnership agreements and for which work is already progressing (see programme for implementation in Appendix A) are:

- A944 / B9119 Queens Road Westhill to Aberdeen;
- A96 Inverurie to Aberdeen; and
- A956 Wellington Road to Stonehaven.

5.2. Future corridors / areas for delivery are:

- City Centre;
- A90 north and A956 King Street corridor ;
- A93 Deeside corridor;
- A947 corridor; and
- A90 south corridor.

5.3. This programme is guided by a range of studies that are currently being progressed in the short to medium term and will help to identify specific improvements that can be made for buses on each of the corridors.

5.4. The agreements for each of these corridors will cover:

- The rationale for a SQP from all parties, linked to wider bus policy.
- Objectives and targets of the SQP.

- Details of all the facilities to be provided by the transport authority.
 - Setting out the current condition of the infrastructure – status survey.
 - Setting a sQP minimum standard for stopping places etc.
 - Identifying new infrastructure / priority measures.
- Details of the specified standard of local services which operators are required to provide.
- Date from which the scheme will come into operation.
- Duration of the scheme.
- Who is responsible for the delivery of the different facilities and standards.
- Who is responsible for the maintenance of the different facilities.
- Timescales for the delivery of the different facilities and standard over the duration of the scheme (including details of any phasing of improvements).
- A written undertaking from the operator to the Scottish Traffic Commissioner that they will provide services to the specified standard when using the facilities.
- Details of any Traffic Regulation Orders that require to be included with the scheme.
- Exclusions from the scheme and conditions that may be attached.
- A mechanism for dispute resolution.
- Monitoring and reporting arrangements.

6. Membership and Governance of the Quality Partnership Board

Governance and reporting on both the voluntary and statutory elements of this Partnership agreement will be critical and both will require a robust governance structure and the establishment of a Quality Partnership Board by which actions will be agreed, progress reported and that is able to resolve any disputes that may arise. The Scottish Government's Best Practice guidance on the development of sQPs recommends that a sQP Board be established and that the Chair of this Board could be given to an independent figure that could assist in the resolution of disputes. In line with these recommendations, the following structure is proposed:

Figure 1 – Proposed Quality Partnership Structure



The Chair of the group will be independent of the partner organisations.

This is a voluntary agreement and it is intended that all decisions will be taken by consensus. The partners will however agree an appropriate process for dispute resolution for Statutory Quality Partnership Agreements.

Each member will commit a practical level of resource to the partnership in order to:

- Commit to attendance at Partnership meetings and, if unable to attend, provision of an appropriate substitute;
- Provide support and delegated authority to collaboratively agree targets and a delivery programme;
- Provide support and delegated authority to resource the delivery of the agreed plan;
- Resolve or mitigate any issues or conflicts among partners and stakeholders;
- Resolve any issues or conflicts with other areas of work within this programme and other work programmes / projects;
- Make resources available for planning and delivery purposes;
- Provide input, recommendations and agreement to the joint decision making process to meet the Partnerships objectives; and
- To validate and critique the financial implications and business case of the above tasks.

The Partnership Board will report directly to the Nestrans Board in the first instance with issues arising referred to the two Councils thereafter. The two Councils and Transport Scotland will remain the relevant roads authorities and issues relating to roads consent will require to be submitted to the relevant roads authority for approval.

It is proposed that meetings of the Quality Partnership Board will be held quarterly and the first tasks of the new Board will include the setting of SMART targets, development of an action plan and agreement of a dispute resolution procedure.

Nestrans will provide secretariat support to the new Bus Alliance and support to the Chair.

7. Data Sharing Agreement

A data sharing agreement is currently in place between the partners of the existing Quality Partnership and was reviewed and agreed in 2015. One of the first tasks of the new Quality Partnership Board will be to review this to ensure it remains fit for purpose and to extend it to new partners.

APPENDIX A

Programme for implementing corridor SQP / EP agreements

Study input and SQP programme	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
<i>B9119 Queens Rd modelling study</i>										
Aberdeen to Westhill via Queens Rd SQP										
<i>Civitas Portis 2ABZ2 Collective Travel</i>										
Aberdeen to Inverurie via A96 SQP										
<i>Wellington Road STAG part 1</i>										
<i>Wellington Road STAG part 2</i>										
A956 Wellington Road SQP										
Further corridors to be considered										

Key	
Study to identify options	
Timeframe of SQP	

Minimum standards at the global level based on current quality partnership standards & targets but more ambitious and specific targets contained within each of the statutory corridor agreements.