



Auchterarder Town Bus Service - a *community transport* solution

*Briefing Note for Community Transport Forum (Perth and Kinross)
05 September 2019*

The Auchterarder Town Bus Service is a local bus service - operated by a private sector bus operator - but one which has been planned, procured, funded and is managed by a community organisation, Auchterarder Community Bus Group (ACBuG).

Identifying the transport problem

Auchterarder Community Bus Group (ACBuG) was formed in early 2017, by a number of community-based groups and individuals, to address concerns about a lack of public transport provision within the residential areas of Auchterarder.

ACBuG directly engaged with local residents about the transport problems being faced. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to every household in Auchterarder in autumn 2017 (see Appendix A).

In total 228 responses were received, of which 64% were from people aged 60 or over (see Appendix B). The returns provided a substantial amount of base data that has informed the subsequent planning of a transport solution.

For a not insignificant proportion of the local community carrying out relatively straight forward daily activities, such as shopping or going to a medical appointment, was difficult or even impossible. Social isolation was clearly seen to be a real issue for some residents.

How would the transport needs be met?

ACBuG recognised the considerable financial pressures being faced by the public sector; with increasing demands on available budgetary resources. As a result, it was unrealistic to expect Perth & Kinross Council to invest in a major new public transport initiative in Auchterarder without potentially cutting existing subsidised bus services.

It was clear to ACPuG that this was as an excellent opportunity for Auchterarder residents to directly address how best to tackle the inequality issues and identify ways of financially supporting an appropriate transport response.

Gaining Charitable Status

An important initial step involved ACPuG applying to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

ACBuG met the charity test and the legal requirements for being a SCIO and was entered in the Scottish Charity Register on 30 August 2018, charity number SC048669.

The organisation's purpose is '*to provide a public transport service for those inhabitants living in Auchterarder and surrounding area that supports the advancement of community development*'.

The Trustees run and manage ACPuG according to an approved Constitution (Single Tier).

Being a SCIO allows ACPuG to apply for grants from a variety of trusts and public/third sector funds, many of which are not available to the Council.

Transport planning

ACBuG Trustees had considered what type of transport solution we should look to provide, with a review of potential car and minibus based transport solutions undertaken.

How the local residents would access the service, how the transport resource would be supplied, user cost and staffing implications for ACBuG were all important considerations.

Ultimately we concluded that the traditional *community transport* model of buying a minibus and looking to recruit volunteer drivers would not deliver what we wanted.

We decided to be more innovative, with our goal being to contract a PSV-licensed bus operator to deliver a publicly available Town Bus Service.

The financial implications of this outcome were recognised at the outset; with an initial estimate of the annual operating cost being set at £100k.

However ACBuG considered the potential benefits to be significant in terms of:

- hours and days of operation
- no need for pre-booking
- many users receiving free travel

ACBuG then set about:

- Specifying, tendering and awarding a bus contract
- Applying for funding from a number of trusts and organisations

Tendering

To ensure ACBuG could demonstrate best value to potential funders, we formally tendered the Town Bus Service, even though it is not a pre-requisite for charities.

Additionally, it also ensures that the successful bus operator is contractually required to meet our operational standards; in terms of service quality, customer care etc.

The Conditions of Contract and General Specification were informed by those used by Perth & Kinross Council.

Engaging with the wider community continued, with feedback influencing the final operational plans for the bus service (including days of operation, routes and timetables).

A low floor, wheelchair accessible, vehicle - that is able to penetrate the residential areas - was specified.

Two four-year transport contracts were subsequently awarded in May 2019 to Auchterarder based bus operator, Docherty's Midland Coaches - who will deliver the specified Town Bus Service.

Funding

Operating a transport scheme - and particularly a local bus service - is clearly expensive. Thus a great deal of effort has been made in applying for funding.

ACBuG is exceedingly grateful for the financial support received to date from key funding partners without whom we would not have been able to start the Town Bus Service:

- Auchterarder Community Facilities Fund (managed by the Council)
 - Robertson Homes
 - Muir Homes
 - Stewart Milne
- Friends of St Margaret's
- Community Investment Fund
- New Transport Initiatives in the Community Fund

So far, ACBuG has raised £190k out of a revised four year funding target of £320k-£360k.

Decisions about three other funding applications are still to be received.

Launch of the Town Bus Service

The two bus routes comprising the Town Bus Service were successfully registered with the Scottish Traffic Area Office, thus enabling the Town Bus Service to commence operations on Monday, 05 August 2019.

It operates six days a week (Mon - Sat) with an hourly frequency. The timetable has been constructed to make it easy to understand, whilst at the same time facilitating different travel requirements. The base timetable is tailored to clinic times at St Margaret's Health Centre.

The use of 'hail and ride' rather than fixed bus stops along most of the routes is intended to facilitate passenger access.

In terms of fares, a low flat fare covers the whole route; being set at £1.20 single.

Timetables leaflets were designed and printed. They have been widely distributed throughout the community, including door-to-door in the main residential areas. The Town Bus Service has also been promoted in local papers and through social media.

Initial operational experience

Given that the Auchterarder Town Bus Service is a completely new transport solution, there were clearly various operational risks.

In general, however, the routing and timetables have proven to be robust - with the service operating reliably. The drivers have proven to be very good ambassadors for what the Town Bus Service is trying to achieve.

From the outset, usage has been steady and is now showing encouraging signs of growth. The highest daily total of users to date has been 35 passengers; with nearly 500 users in the first four week period.

Partnership Working

What has been evident throughout this project has been a willingness and enthusiasm of people to work with us, including staff from the Council (Planning and Public Transport Unit), the Community Council, the health centre/hospital, the Action Partnership and other voluntary and public sector groups (such as PKAVS and OSCR - the charity regulator).

Local public interest is also high. An ACBuG Coffee Morning in the Aytoun Hall in late July 2019 - to promote the Town Bus service - had over 200 people attending.

The Future

The activities of ACBuG are managed by a Board currently comprising of six Trustees, all of whom are volunteers. There are no plans to appointment paid staff.

At the outset, ACBuG established an initial four-year 'Business Plan', with the first eighteen months concentrating on planning, procuring, introducing and managing the Town Bus Service; embedding it as a key resource in the local community. Thereafter the focus will be on ensuring its financial stability, primarily through fundraising.

The bus service runs with no restrictions, being open to all members of the community, and the resultant fares income will also help contribute to its sustainability.

Receiving feedback from bus users and other local residents - which is being actively encouraged - will also be fundamental to the future operation of the bus service.

What will success look like?

Clearly one of the indicators of the success of the Town Bus Service will be passenger usage - and statistics in terms of passenger numbers, travel patterns etc are already being collated.

However ACBuG intends to 'get underneath the aggregated statistics' to better understand who is using the service - and the associated community benefits that are being achieved.

The advantage of operating a registered local bus service is that there is the flexibility to change it. Should the performance of elements of the overall Town Bus Service not meet either user or ACBuG expectations, timetable and/or route changes will be considered. Also, any evidence of unmet or new community demand will be investigated to see if it is viable to accommodate it.

Given the rapid expansion of Auchterarder, in addition to addressing social issues, the Town Bus Service will hopefully facilitate some modal shift and help reduce local car traffic in the centre of the town.


Looking ahead, ACBuG trustees, stakeholders and the wider community need to continue their proactive partnership working, whilst also adding in an objective assessment of the 'community benefits' of the Town Bus Service.

Andrew Warrington
Chair, ACBuG

05 September 2019

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

AUCHTERARDER TOWN BUS SERVICE - SURVEY



A number of community based groups and individuals have been working together to look at how best to establish a Town Bus Service for Auchterarder, similar to those already operating in Crieff and Blairgowrie.

We have found that many local residents currently find it difficult to access the Town Centre, St Margaret's Health Centre, and clubs/societies held in the community halls. A Town Bus Service would aim to make the Town more accessible to all, and help people to be more independent. It would also provide an option for current car users experiencing parking difficulties.

The proposed service will aim to complement, and not compete with or replace Service 19, or any existing service. It is not anticipated the Town Bus Service will provide school transport to/from The Community School of Auchterarder at the main school start/finish times, or serve Gleneagles Station.

We are very keen to get an understanding of the likely demand for a Town Bus Service and the way in which it should operate. Please take 5 minutes to complete this form if you have any views on a possible Town Bus Service for Auchterarder.

One form should be completed for each member of your household then returned to Ballot boxes at either Health Centre, Spar Shop, Post Office, Davidson's Pharmacy or Aberuthven Shop, no later than 31st October 2017

Alternatively, go on-line and complete the survey electronically at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7W853WD

Section 1: About You Age: ☐ Under 11 ☐ 12 – 17 ☐ 18 – 24 ☐ 25 – 59 ☐ 60 – 74 ☐ 75+

Please enter your postcode:

Do you have any illness or disability that affects your ability to travel? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please give us some idea of your requirements:

Section 2: Do you/have you ever used existing local bus services (such as Service 19)?

☐ I currently use regularly

☐ I currently use occasionally

☐ I have never used in the past

☐ I have never used in the past but would consider using a Town Bus Service

☐ never used in the past and would not consider using a Town Bus Service

☐ never used in the past and would not consider using a Town Bus Service

Section 3: Which of the following are issues affecting your ability to use the existing bus services?

Please tick all that apply:

☐ The current bus services do not go where I need them to

☐ The existing bus route is too far away from my house

☐ There are no bus services on my road

☐ The bus service does not operate at the times I need it to

☐ The bus service is not regular enough for me to use it

☐ The timing of the bus service does not allow me enough time before having to return

☐ The timing of the bus service gives me too much time at the destination before being able to return

Section 4: What types of journey might you want to make on a Town Bus Service?

Please provide details of the types of journey you may want to make, so that we can consider what the timetable might look like.

One option we may consider is to have a 'demand responsive' type option rather than have a fixed timetable on every day.

Start Point	Destination	Reason	Day/ time out	Day/ time back	Frequency
e.g. Abbey Road	High Street	Shopping	Sat 9am	Sat 10am	Weekly
e.g. Sydney Crescent	St Margaret's HC	Doctor's appointment	?	1 hour later	Ad-hoc

Section 5: Other Comments ...

Would it be useful if some journeys on the Town Bus Service were timed to tie in with specific buses on Service 19/20 from Aytoun Hall/Co-op? If so, at what times?

The Town Bus Service would charge fares, with National Entitlement Cards valid to provide free travel for pass holders. What would you consider would be an acceptable fare for the service - either single journey or day ticket?

Section 6: If an Auchterarder Town Bus Service were to be introduced, do you think you would use it?

☐ I would use regularly

☐ I would use occasionally

☐ I would never use

☐ I would never use

In what way do you feel the Town Bus will improve quality of your life and if you have any other comments or suggestions about a Town Bus Service, please provide them below.

Thank you for completing this survey for Auchterarder Town Bus Group.

As they arise, updates on Town Bus will be published in Lang Toon Times.

Appendix B: Snapshot of Results from Auchterarder Town Bus Service Survey

- 228 responses to the questionnaire, of which 64% were aged 60 and over.
- 17% have an illness or disability that affects their ability to travel
- 17% not local bus users but would consider using a Town Bus Service
- Which of the following are issues affecting your ability to use the existing bus services?

	Responses	
The current bus services do not go where I need them to	28.81%	51
The existing bus route is too far away from my house	24.86%	44
There are no bus services on my road	40.11%	71
The bus service does not operate at the times I need it to	51.41%	91
The bus service is not regular enough for me to use it	44.63%	79
The timing of the bus service does not allow me enough time before having to return	20.90%	37
The timing of the bus service gives me too much time at the destination before being able to return	20.34%	36
	Answered	177

- If an Auchterarder Town Bus Service were to be introduced, 94% of respondents said they would use it regularly or occasionally.
- 155 respondents specifically commented on the potential quality of life benefits of a Town Bus Service