

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION STRATEGIES – ANGUS, A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

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1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2004, Atkins was appointed by Angus Council to prepare a Public Transport Information Strategy in accordance with Sections 33 to 35 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001, local authorities have a duty to determine what local bus information should be made available to the public and the way in which this information should be made available.

The main objectives of an Information Strategy are to:

- Ensure that accurate, comprehensive public transport information is available to existing and potential passengers;
- Define the 'required' level of information and identify how this should be provided;
- Identify who is responsible (local authority/operator) for each element of information provision;
- Define who should meet the cost and how costs should be apportioned; and
- To set out a staged programme for the delivery of the 'required' information.

However, Angus Council did not merely wish to produce a Public Transport Information Strategy in isolation but alongside this wanted to conduct a Best Value Management Review of their public transport information provision. The approach therefore included:

- A review of existing public transport information provision;
- A review of good practice;
- Benchmarking with other local authorities;
- Public consultation
 - face to face interviews;
 - customer satisfaction surveys;
 - young persons forum;
 - focus group with community representatives;
 - focus group with operators; and
- Formulation of Strategy

What was evident at the outset was that there is no single "one fits all" formula for public transport information provision which can be applied consistently across the country. Existing bus users who are familiar with public transport may prefer comprehensive publicity, while current non-users or people who use bus services occasionally may prefer a concise and more specific set of information for the journey. Furthermore, the level of involvement of local authorities in providing this local bus service publicity varies greatly across the country.

This paper sets out some of the work undertaken in developing Angus Council's Public Transport Information Strategy and proposals included in the implementation programme for the next 10 years. The emphasis of the information strategy is on providing a good working relationship between the local authority, the public transport operators and the general public.

The role of the Consultant was to help guide the review process and work in partnership with the Local Authority to provide a clear concise strategy.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

In terms of national policy, sections 33 to 35 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 deal with bus service information. The three sections have been briefly summarised below:

Section 33 – Information about Bus Services.

Local Authorities should determine what level of local bus information should be made available to the public and the way it is delivered. Before making such a determination the authority shall consult:

- The Traffic Commissioner;
- Such organisations appearing to the authority to be representatives of users of local services; and
- Such other persons as the authority thinks fit.

Section 34 – Duty of an Authority to make Information Available.

If a local authority is unable to make satisfactory arrangements in connection with section 33 of the Act, they shall:

- Make available appropriate information throughout the Local Authority area;
- Recover from the operator(s) reasonable costs incurred by the Local Authority to make information available; and
- Require an operator to provide information to allow the Local Authority to perform their duty in terms of supplying information.

Section 35 – Bus Information: supplementary

In carrying out their functions under sections 33 and 34 of the Act, Local Authorities shall:

- Act in a manner which is, in the opinion of the authority, most economic, efficient and effective; and
- Not act in such a way as to discriminate (whether directly or indirectly) against any operator, or class of operator, of local services.

3. ANGUS – A REVIEW OF INFORMATION

In developing a Public Transport Information Strategy for Angus the starting point was to conduct a review of the current information provision within the Council area.

A summary of the results is provided below.

INDIVIDUAL TIMETABLE LEAFLETS

As an authority, Angus Council is in a fairly unique position as it currently produces timetable leaflets for almost all local bus service routes operating through its area. The Council is responsible for the design, production, funding and distribution of these publications.

The majority of the leaflets are A5 in size and include a travel map showing the route of the identified services. Most also include town maps showing the position of stops serving the specific routes. These timetable leaflets are distributed through the ACCESS network, local libraries, local Council offices and tourist information centres. Large print timetables of all the local routes in local community languages are available on request as are extracts in audio and Braille format.

TELEPHONE INFORMATION

The Council is a member of the Traveline scheme which offers a national telephone enquiry service for members of the public. In addition, the Council offers local public transport information via a number of local offices and ACCESS centres while operators in general maintain their own enquiry lines.

WEB-SITE INFORMATION

Angus Council has a good standard of web-based information and provides the following information on its website:

- Transport News;
- Timetable Information;
- Local Maps;
- Trips by Bus;
- Information on Community Transport;
- Information on Concessionary Transport; and
- Information on School Transport.

ENQUIRY OFFICES

Angus provides a number of ACCESS (Angus Council Community Enquiry Services) offices in the Council area. These offices provide a single point of contact for all Council services, including public transport information. These offices are located in:

- Brechin;
- Carnoustie;
- Kirriemuir;
- Montrose; and
- Monifieth.

The offices all stock an array of public transport information published by the Council, and are readily available from publicly-accessible racks or carousels. A reference set of all the documents is also held in a binder and is available to the public for checking.

AREA WIDE MAPS

Angus Council produces an area wide public transport map and guide, indicating service information between the majority of towns and villages within Angus, and including

services travelling across the boundaries into Aberdeenshire, Dundee and Perth & Kinross.

TOURIST LEAFLETS

A number of tourist related leaflets have been produced by the Council. The leaflets describe a selection of places that people can visit by bus and train in a day from each of the Angus Towns and from Dundee, along with appropriate timetables and fares.

BUS STOP FLAGS, POLES AND CASES

The Council have approximately 690 fixed bus stopping places marked with flags. Of these marked stops 212 have shelters with 190 owned by Angus Council and 22 owned by Adshel.

The Council is currently responsible for the funding, maintenance and provision of flags, poles, cases and the majority of bus shelters. A private company (Adshel) provides a small number of shelters in return for advertising opportunities along the major transport corridors of the region.

BUS STOP TIMETABLE INFORMATION

The Council has 295 bus stops with information displays (representing 44% of all stops) throughout the local authority area and is responsible for the funding and replacement of all timetable information. The information is usually replaced on the day prior to the service change.

REAL-TIME INFORMATION

Real-time passenger information (RTI) is currently operating on the Dundee-Carnoustie route, with 11 displays at key locations on the route. This was funded initially by the Scottish Executive following a joint Public Transport Fund bid by Dundee City Council and Angus Council.

Angus Council is currently looking to extend RTI coverage within Angus, utilising capital grant funding from the Scottish Executive. It is likely that the main transport corridors and public transport facilities would benefit from increased RTI coverage.

ON-BUS INFORMATION

At present approximately 98% of existing services have information screens indicating the service number and destination of the bus. This will increase to 100% by 2006. The number of buses where timetable information is available on-board to passengers is variable, with the majority of urban services travelling between Angus and Dundee not supplying timetables.

VISUAL MAPPING

Angus Council provides a visual mapping service for people with special needs, in particular those with learning disabilities. The aim of this service is to provide users with a photographic route of a journey coupled with specific information, allowing them to become confident in travelling alone.

CONCLUSIONS

The initial review of current public transport information provision within Angus showed that publicity for local transport services is provided in a fairly comprehensive manner, with the local authority and operators taking a reasonably well co-ordinated approach. However, there is a need for a combined strategy which targets users and non-users in different ways. It is desirable to retain existing users, but it is also important to grow the market and target non-users.

4. REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICE

A review was undertaken of relevant guidance relating to best practice on information provision. The main references being:

- 'Legibility of Timetables Books and Leaflets, Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), 1996.
- Slevin R., 'Bus Services: Provision of Information', Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO), 2001.
- 'Printed Public Transport Information – A Code of Good Practice', Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO), 2003.

Draft and final public transport information strategies prepared for other local authorities were also consulted. These included the documents for Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Fife, Lancashire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Warwickshire.

This review fed in recommendations to the final strategy.

5. BENCHMARKING

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken with other Scottish local authorities. The aim of this was to establish how Angus Council compared in the availability of roadside information cases, printed timetable, maps, websites, promotion of Traveline and SMS text provision.

Overall, Angus Council was found to compare favourably with other similar local authorities. However, it was recognised that roadside timetable provision was of an average standard and this was an area which the Council agreed they could improve upon. It was identified that only two local authorities in Scotland currently promote SMS text provision and Angus Council saw this as an area of future development.

6. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Consultation was seen as a key part of the strategy, and was designed in a way that would establish the views of a full range of stakeholders including both users and non-users. The consultation was undertaken in two distinct phases. The first phase included a number of face-to-face interviews with members of the public, undertaken at key locations in Angus, on bus customer satisfaction surveys and a young people's forum. In a second phase key stakeholders including local operators and community representatives were invited to a number of focus groups held in Forfar.

The results of the first phase of the consultation indicated that the majority of people were fairly pleased with both the quantity and quality of public transport information

available in Angus, but the Traveline service was not well known or used. The provision of real-time information was considered a useful tool as part of a strategy to encourage modal shift.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Angus Council undertook customer satisfaction surveys in Sept 2004 of approximately 123 people. A summary of the responses are provided below:

- 88% of respondents found it easy to find information about local bus services;
- 97% of passengers found bus timetables either useful or very useful;
- 98% of respondents indicated that the bus was usually or always on time;
- 92% of passengers found that the condition of the buses was acceptable, and that 97% found the buses to be clean;
- 99% found the drivers attitude to be helpful; and
- 95% of respondents found that the bus shelters and stops to be adequate.

The results of the face to face interviews undertaken by Atkins mirrored closely the results of the customer satisfaction surveys which showed that people were generally happy with the standard of information provision currently available.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S FORUM

A forum was organised by Angus Council to try and gauge the opinion of younger people (between the ages of 12 and 18) in the area on a number of topical issues. Public transport was one such issue covered and a summary of the results is provided below:

- 33% of young people thought that public transport provision in Angus was satisfactory and 8% thought that provision was either good or very good;
- 56% used public transport either every day or 2-3 times per week. 13% of young people never used public transport;
- 15% of young people were either very satisfied or satisfied with the level of public transport information currently available in Angus. 68% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with public transport information provision;
- 81% of young people get their transport information from either printed timetable leaflets or printed information at bus stops. No-one used Traveline;
- The three most popular methods of providing information were: printed timetable leaflets, SMS texting or printed timetable information;
- 69% of young people had not heard of Traveline; and
- 65% of people thought that having a web address for public transport on the bus stop flags was either necessary or very necessary.

Overall, it was clear from the Young People's Forum that the expectations of this age group were particularly high in relation to all service areas they were questioned on not just public transport. However, they strongly regarded public transport to be 'not cool'.

The results of the second phase of the consultation period, which involved meetings with focus groups, resulted in a number of comments of which the following are a selection:

- The community groups indicated that local customers were more comfortable dealing with local ACCESS offices as opposed to national call centres;

- The Angus Council web-site was found to be generally good;
- There was confusion over the difference between Transport Direct and Traveline;
- The work Angus Council is doing with disability groups was commended;
- The area map was found to be good and should not be made more complicated;
- In terms of bus-stops, flags and poles the emphasis should be on the bus logo and the service number. However the flag should have a common name and dedicated SMS text number;
- In terms of information cases, it was agreed that the present coverage (44%) in Angus should be incrementally improved over time, with the long term aspiration being close to 100% coverage;
- Expenditure on public transport services was considered more important than capital expenditure, however recognising that the Scottish Executive had awarded capital provision for public transport projects, the group considered the provision of real-time information as a good use of this money.
- Lighting at bus stops was considered to be important; and
- Electronic stop indicators inside the buses were thought to be a good idea.

In addition, local operators indicated that they would consider sharing the costs of providing additional public transport information on buses and would also consider offering support to the Council in terms of updating timetables within bus stop information cases.

These focus group meetings proved to be extremely worthwhile in raising issues for consideration when formulating the public transport information strategy and many ideas from these groups were taken forward into the final strategy.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF ANGUS COUNCIL'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMATION STRATEGY

The information gathered in the consultation phase of the study was used to construct the framework for the strategy. This document was developed under headings for each element of information provision. The strategy document provides objectives, standards and appropriate targets for implementation.

The key objectives in the strategy document were to make the public more aware of where public transport information could be found and to make the information more easily available to both users and non-users of public transport. This would hopefully encourage more people to use the bus on a regular basis.

The information strategy was set out by theme and consisted of recommended standards and delivery mechanisms. The proposed implementation of these measures was separated into immediate, short, medium and long term as outlined below:

- Immediate Measures – Measures that could be implemented in the next 12 months;
- Short Term Measures – Measures that could be implemented in the next two to three years;
- Medium Term Measures – Measures that could be implemented in the next five years; and
- Long Term measures – Measures that could be implemented in the next ten years.

TELEPHONE INFORMATION

Traveline is seen as the main delivery mechanism for telephone information. As such Angus Council will continue to supply Traveline all timetable information in electronic format at least 10 working days in advance of the service change. In addition, all operators of supported bus services will be required to be members of Traveline.

The main measures to be adopted by the Council are as follows:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ The Council will consider additional methods of promotion of the Traveline facility.
- ◆ To continue to promote the Traveline telephone information service on all relevant promotional material.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ To promote the Traveline number so that it becomes the main number for public transport telephone enquiries.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ To increase the awareness of Traveline by providing the contact number on all bus stops, buses and bus shelters, and by displaying the number on all marketing and promotional material.

Long Term Measures

- ◆ To assist in the development of Traveline through the provision of real time information.

WEB-SITE PROVISION

Internet based information must be both easy to use and accessible to help foster confidence in the system and encourage greater use. The user's first experience of using a public transport based web site is crucial in terms of encouraging the user to visit the web site again. In order to ensure the highest standard of web-based information provision, the following measures will be adopted:

Short Term Measures

- ◆ The Council will undertake a review of its existing web-site provision and assess the content and quality of the existing provision, based on the Best Practice Guide on Public Transport Information Web Sites – Institution of Logistics and Transport, 2001);
- ◆ Bus operators that provide their own web-sites will be encouraged by the Council to review their provision of information based on the Best Practice Guide on Public Transport.
- ◆ The Council will ensure that a link to Transport Direct will be provided from the existing Angus Council web-site;

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ The Council will encourage bus operators to provide links to Transport Direct from their web-sites.

ENQUIRY OFFICES

Local Council offices and ACCESS Offices offer additional points of contact for local transport information, and can provide local timetables and relevant contact numbers for local residents who may feel more comfortable visiting a Council office rather than phoning a national helpline. Local offices should be encouraged to provide local transport information where appropriate. These centres are preferable to operator specific facilities, in that they can give more comprehensive information about all bus services together with other transport provision as required. In relation to enquiry offices the following measures will be adopted:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ To provide training on the provision of public transport information using internet-based systems to all ACCESS staff.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ To retain and enhance public transport information provision at the ACCESS offices in the Angus area; and
- ◆ To encourage local bus operators to offer web-based information at bus stations and operator run enquiry offices.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ To promote the use of the Traveline and Transport Direct.

Long Term Measures

- ◆ To provide real time information data which will link into Traveline and Transport Direct.

INDIVIDUAL TIMETABLE LEAFLETS

There should be printed timetable information for every bus service within the Council's area. The information strategy sets out the standard publicity has to. It also allows the operators the choice of producing this themselves or letting the Council undertake this role. In Angus, currently almost all local bus service timetables are produced and paid for by the Council. Operators are happy to continue this arrangement however recognise that a financial contribution will be required from them in order to meet the additional costs of widening the availability of timetables including on-bus provision.

The main measures to be adopted in relation to timetable information provision are:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ To reassure potential users, a new timetable will be printed no longer than 12 months after the previous one and will carry a supplementary notice giving an "effective from" date and advising no change;
- ◆ The existing timetables produced by Angus Council will be coded to help identification and replacement by members of the public; and
- ◆ The contact details for Traveline will be included on all timetable leaflets.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ The Council will continue to produce and distribute printed timetable information for the majority of bus services in Angus and will investigate ways of improving the presentation, clarity and distribution of the information;

- ◆ The Council will continue and enhance the existing work being carried out with learning disability groups; and
- ◆ The Council will discuss the distribution of timetable leaflets on buses with local operators.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ The timetable leaflets will indicate which routes have access to low floor accessible vehicles.

Long Term Measures

- ◆ Fare related information will be provided on timetable leaflets.

AREA WIDE MAP

Area public transport maps are generally perceived as the index for local bus service travel for many potential users. The Angus map was generally seen by the public and operators as being a good quality publication.

In future, additional measures to be adopted include:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ The Council will update the area wide map on an annual basis; and
- ◆ Details on how to complain about failures in service or to submit comments will be included in the new edition of the map.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ Angus Council will discuss the production and delivery of the map with local operators; and
- ◆ The Council will review the tourist related destinations on the area wide map.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ The map will clearly indicate which of the services are non-stop or express services.

Long Term Measures

- ◆ Information on the provision of Park and Ride sites in Angus and the immediate area, along with the number of parking spaces will be incorporated into the area map.

BUS STOP FLAGS, POLES AND CASES

Angus Council currently provide all bus stop poles, flags and cases and ensure the maintenance of these to a high standard. As part of the strategy bus stop flags will be re-designed to provide more comprehensive information including details on Traveline and the SMS texting service. In addition, the Information Strategy seeks to provide a long-term plan for the incremental provision of additional timetable cases with the ultimate aim of displaying a case at every bus stop. It is however recognised by all parties that the Council will require additional resources in order to provide this and operators have agreed to provide staff resources in this regard.

Immediate Measures

- ◆ The Council will review the design of the existing bus stop flags, poles and cases in the Angus area; and
- ◆ The Council will undertake an audit of all the flags, poles and cases in the Angus area

Short Term Measures

- ◆ The Council in collaboration with local operators will re-design the standard Angus Council bus stop flag; and
- ◆ Existing flags, poles and cases in the Angus area will be electronically entered into a Geographical Information System to help with identification, monitoring and maintenance.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ In collaboration with operators the Council will include selected fare information to key destinations on selected bus routes; and

Long Term Measures

- ◆ The Council will work towards providing public transport information at all recognised stops in Angus.

REAL-TIME INFORMATION

The strategy concludes that real time information should be encouraged on as many routes as possible, but will normally be restricted to strategic bus corridors. Partnerships between local authorities and operators should be considered at an early date to make real time information available to as many people as possible. Information should be made available over as many media as possible including the internet, WAP phones, telephone and SMS messaging to mobile phones.

As part of the strategy the following measures will be adopted:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ To review the existing provision of RTI services in Angus and to investigate the provision of additional RTI services.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ To develop the implementation of RTI along selected routes within Angus where funding can be obtained.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ To roll out the provision of RTI to additional routes and interchange points within Angus where funding can be obtained.

Long Term Measures

- ◆ The Council in association with local operators will look at providing RTI information across as many media as possible including the internet, telephone and SMS messaging via mobile phones.

ON-BUS INFORMATION

The availability of on bus-information is viewed as important by bus users and in order to extend the current provision in Angus the following measures will be adopted:

Immediate Measures

- ◆ The Council will review the existing provision of on-bus information and explore with operators the distribution and cost of supplying this information on the main routes throughout Angus.

Short Term Measures

- ◆ Where practical the Council with support of local operators, will provide accessible, on-bus information on selected routes throughout Angus;
- ◆ A customer care strategy will be implemented by the public transport operators to a recognised industry standard, with annual refresher courses.

Medium Term Measures

- ◆ The Council with the support of operators will ensure that all buses will carry displayed, publicly-available timetables for the services that they are operating.

8. CONCLUSIONS

All Local Authorities in Scotland have a duty to prepare public transport information strategies and Angus Council are one of the first Scottish Local Authorities to produce such a strategy document.

The reasoning behind the introduction of an information strategy is to set out clear objectives on the provision of public transport information and to outline key responsibilities such as who is responsible for information provision and who pays for the distribution and delivery of this information. This process can also help clarify Local Authority responsibilities and help identify any historical funding issues that may have developed in the past.

We believe that the strategy document should be used to clarify the existing relationship between the Local Authority and the local operators and that it should help to identify any gaps in the market that are not being utilised to their full potential.

Preparation of the Angus Council Public Transport Information Strategy showed that there was merit in conducting a benchmarking exercise as this enabled the Council to establish how the standard of information in their area compared with other parts of Scotland. This assisted the Council in identifying and setting targets as part of the strategy.

Similarly, the feedback from the consultation exercises undertaken with individual bus users, community groups and operators proved to be invaluable in identifying factors which would assist users in accessing and interpreting public transport information. We would strongly urge other Authorities to consult as widely as possible in the preparation of their strategies.

The strategy produced by Angus Council will be implemented in partnership with the local bus operators. It is intended that an authority/operator working group is established, along with an agreement between the authority and the operators in terms of an appropriate structure for funding.

The effectiveness of the strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis, primarily through regular customer satisfaction surveys throughout Angus. The information collected will assist the Council in developing their policies. These will feed into associated documents including Angus Council's Local Transport Strategy.

Angus Council intend to introduce a monitoring programme to ensure that the delivery of this information strategy is carried out in an effective and efficient manner. There are a number of indicators which will be used to assess the effectiveness of the information strategy, although it must be noted that the aims of the strategy will be influenced by a wide range of initiatives, from the operators, central government and indeed those introduced by the Council themselves.

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