

Bus Survey Report

Kincardineshire Development Partnership¹ (KDP) wishes to encourage economic development and believes that the public transport system is a vital part of that aim. During April and May of 2015, KDP conducted a survey of users of the 7, 7A, 7B, 7C and X7 bus routes, on behalf of the K&M Bus Forum, to find out what users are looking for from their bus service. KDP wishes to thank all those who took part in the survey.

Routes 7, 7A, 7B, and 7C operate between Aberdeen Union Square and Stonehaven with some buses terminating at Portlethen or Newtonhill. Express bus route X7 operates between Aberdeen Union Square and Dundee or Perth. The survey also sought to gain opinion on a suggested circular bus service linking Stonehaven, Muchalls, Newtonhill, Chapelton, Cammachmore and Portlethen.

The survey was divided into four basic sections: two sections were to gather opinions on how well the current bus services fulfil the needs of bus users, a third section on the suggested circular service and the final section asked for comments about the bus services in general.

Summary

Most users want to travel to and from Aberdeen and as quickly as possible, while other users are looking for a town service within their own community and the two do not mix well.

About 30% of bus travel was reported as being for commuting or attending appointments. Many users reported reliability problems in that buses did not run at the time given on the timetable, were full when they arrived or they just did not stop at all. If the Scottish Government and local authorities want more people to use public transport, then users must be able to rely on the service to reach their destination on time and trust the bus operators to serve their customers efficiently.

Users from the villages like Cammachmore, Muchalls and Bridge of Muchalls have to cross the A90 on foot to reach a bus stop. This is just not safe for anybody, let alone someone with a disability or someone with a child in a buggy. KDP asked for comments on a circular bus service that would attempt to solve this problem by entering the villages. The suggestion met with a very mixed response as there was a great deal of concern that other services would be cut back to provide this service.

Many users reported that the X7 service as excellent, but there needs to be a more frequent service, especially at peak periods as the bus is often full. X7 operates with a mixture of old and new style buses. The new style buses have accessibility problems and some users reported the combination of steep narrow steps and lack of seating on the lower deck as being very dangerous.

The results of this survey will be reported back to the K&M Bus Forum, Stagecoach Bluebird, Aberdeenshire Council, NESTRANS and K&M Community Planning.

Response

A total of 221 people responded to the survey either via Survey Monkey or by post. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the geographic and demographic spread of the bus users that completed the survey.

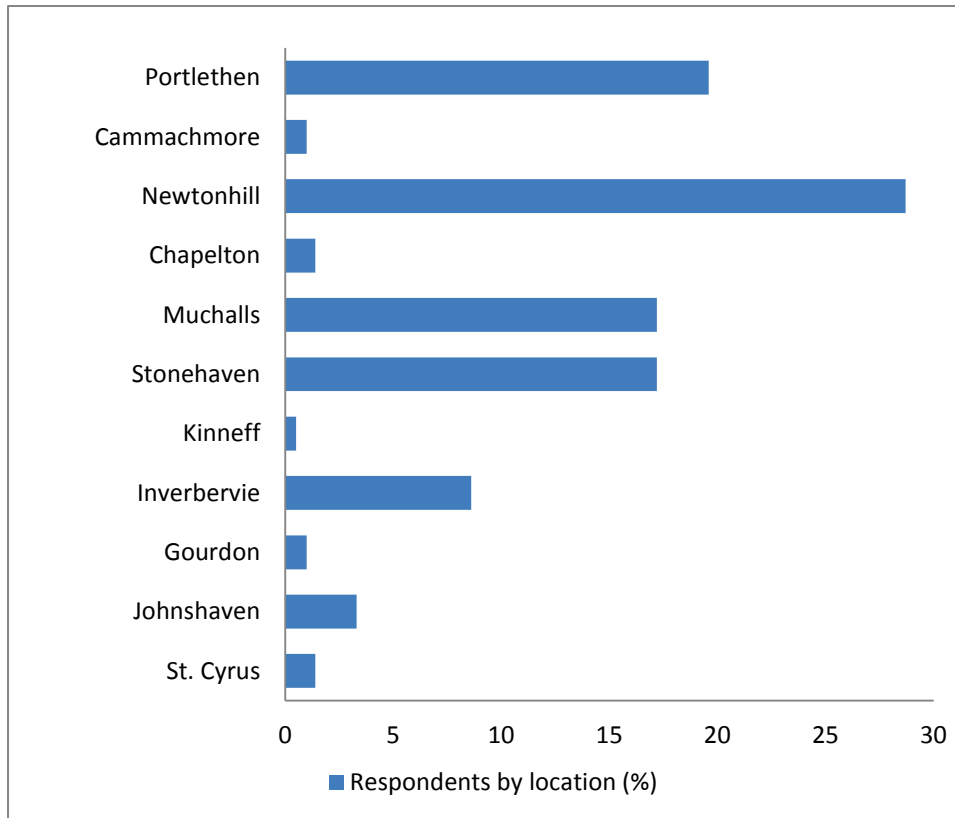


Figure 1 Geographic spread of respondents

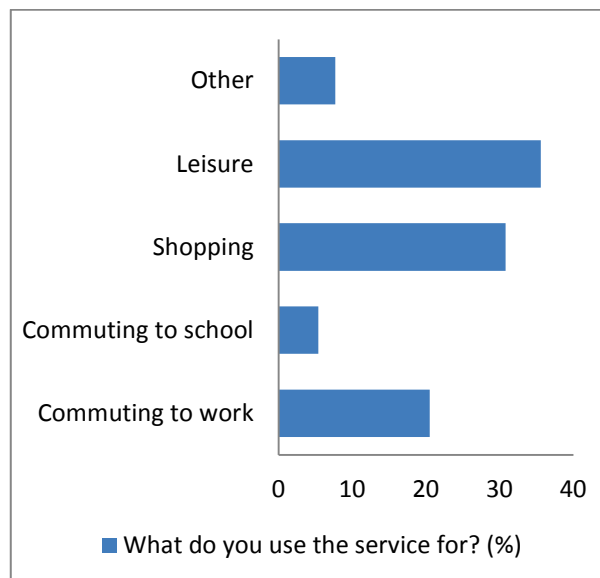
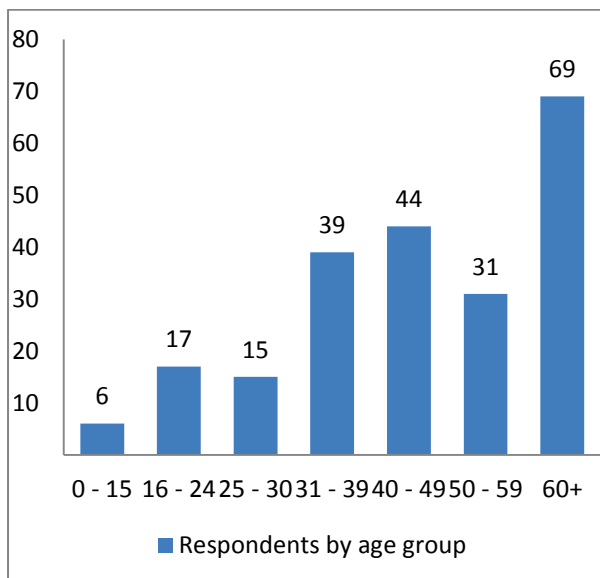


Figure 2 Demographic spread of respondents and main uses of bus journeys

7, 7A, 7B, 7C Services

Approximately 30% use the service on a daily basis, but this figure increased to 40% when asked if they would use the service if there were more buses each hour. 23.5% of users rated the service as being unsatisfactory while 5.5% rated it as excellent.

The majority of comments were regarding the failure of buses to keep to the published timetable. This is especially important for users who need a reliable service to get to work or to attend appointments. There are also some large gaps in the published timetable, for example there are no buses leaving Aberdeen Union Square between 7:15 and 8:40 with the exception of an X7 at 8:20.

Another very important issue that was raised was the cost of tickets. One person wrote:

"It is incredibly disappointing that while a Stonehaven-Aberdeen return costs £6.00, a Stonehaven-Newtonhill return costs £5.60. Why, when I am travelling 1/3 of the distance and less than 1/4 of the time - than I would were I travelling on to Aberdeen - do I have to pay almost 95 per cent of the price? This stops me from using the service much more regularly."

Some users asked for more stops in Newtonhill and Portlethen, while others want a faster service to and from Aberdeen. A solution may be to offer a town service where a service terminates, for example only buses terminating in Newtonhill include St. Michael's Road in their route, whereas buses coming from Stonehaven do not, similarly for Stonehaven and Portlethen.

X7 Express Bus between Perth and Aberdeen

Approximately 17% of those who use the X7 use it on a daily basis. 47% of respondents asked for the frequency of service to be increased to have a bus every 30 minutes, especially during peak times.

Of the 145 respondents who said that they use the X7, 123 (85%) reported that the bus had, at some point, been full when it arrived or had not stopped at the bus stop when they were waiting.

Several users said that the X7, as an express bus, should not stop so many times in Aberdeen as it is often used by people to travel within Aberdeen while passengers for places beyond Stonehaven are left at the bus stop with a one hour wait for the next X7.

It is known that the new style X7 buses present problems for some passengers, so we asked "If the new style of X7 bus creates physical difficulties for you, then what could be done to improve it?". Quite a number of people reported problems with the steps being too narrow and too steep for elderly passengers, disabled passengers and passengers carrying bags or small children; there needs to be more seats on the lower deck. The staircase does not have sufficient headroom. It was also reported that the dark glass in the windows causes problems for partially sighted passengers, especially at night. It was reported that passengers have tripped down the toilet stairway as this cuts into the gangway between the seats.

Several users praised the new style of bus, but it is clear that the design of the vehicle is that of a tour-bus and does not suit normal start-stop bus operations.

Circular Bus Service

Residents of Portlethen, Newtonhill and Stonehaven have been asking for a more frequent 'town' service within their communities, for example St. Michael's Road in Newtonhill presently has one return bus per day. Whole sections of the community are being deprived of access to public transport. KDP asked for opinions on a proposed circular bus service between Stonehaven and Portlethen operating several times a day and stopping at:

- Stonehaven town centre
- Stonehaven Hospital
- Muchalls
- Newtonhill Skateraw
- Newtonhill St. Michael's Road
- Chapelton
- West Cammachmore
- East Cammachmore
- Portlethen Berrymuir Road
- Portlethen Medical Centre
- Portlethen ASDA

Approximately 25% of those who said they would use the proposed circular service (167) would use it on a daily basis. There are very mixed reactions to this proposal with those living in Cammachmore, Muchalls or Bridge of Muchalls welcoming the opportunity to be able to catch a bus without having to cross the A90 on foot. Meanwhile, others are worried that existing services to Aberdeen would be reduced as a consequence of the introduction of a circular bus service.

Bus services in general

There were many complaints about timetabling with two buses covering the same route scheduled to arrive within minutes and then a gap of an hour before the next one.

There is a very poor service from Newtonhill to Aberdeen in the morning peak period with no buses between 7:47 and 8:53. There are X6 and X7 services available from the stop on the A90, but these sometimes arrive full or do not stop. Stonehaven and Portlethen have railway stations to provide an alternative, Newtonhill does not. This may explain the proportionally greater response from Newtonhill when compared to other settlements.

One user wrote: "Top priority of bus services should and must be for workers to get to and from work. Many low paid workers cannot afford a car and completely depend on the bus service for a living. This must NOT be forgotten!"

1. Kincardineshire Development Partnership (KDP) is a community-led and community focused independent not-for-profit voluntary organisation. Its objectives are to promote, encourage and enable sustainable community development and economic growth in the area known as Kincardine & Mearns. Visit our website at www.kincardineshiredp.org