

Cowal Area Local Bus Services

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides members with information on work which is ongoing and relates to issues around the supported bus service 489 which runs between Toward and Glenfinart. In addition the report considers the withdrawal by West Coast Motors of the commercial service 80 between Dunoon and Hunters Quay on 17 November 2014 and its effect on service 480 which runs between Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal.

1.2 Options which have been considered are as follows

- Rescheduling service 489 to include Argyll Street in its southbound journeys.
- Rescheduling service 480 to its original timetable to provide two journeys an hour between Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal and once an hour round Milton. This would mean no service from Hunters Quay Holiday Village or on Alexandra Parade.
- Maintaining the 480 as an hourly service between Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal, merging Milton and the Ardenslate loop. This means a reduction from a half hourly service to an hourly service between Upper Kirn and Dunoon ferry terminal.
- Provide a half hourly service 480 between Hunters Quay Holiday Village, Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal, dropping Milton, and reducing Ardenslate Road to an hourly service provided by service 489.
- Diverting all Portavadie, Rothesay, Inveraray and Carrick Castle journeys via Ardenslate Road and Alexandra Parade. (Services 478, 479, 484 and 486)
- Replacing Service 80 with a supported bus service at a cost of £34,334 per annum.

1.3 Work is currently ongoing with the local operator taking account of passenger numbers and how to minimise inconvenience to service users, and also how to

make best use of available vehicles and driver time achieving best value for the council.

1.4 There is currently no additional budgetary provision to address costs that may arise from any major service alteration.

1.5 **Recommendation;** Members are asked to:-

- (i) Approve a route change to Service 489 to loop round Argyll Street, Dunoon on southbound journeys to Innellan and Toward with minimal additional cost.
- (ii) Agree to take no further action on the withdrawal of Service 80 by West Coast Motors as there is no budget available to meet the annual cost of £34,334 necessary to reinstate the service.
- (iii) Agree to leave the present service 480 unchanged.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The report examines areas of concern relating to local bus services in the Cowal area, the new service 489 between Toward and Glenfinart, which replaced services 482, 483, 485 and 485A, and the withdrawal on 17 November 2014 of the commercially operated service 80 between Hunters Quay Holiday Village and Dunoon Ferry Terminal.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to:-

- (i) Approve a route change to Service 489 to loop round Argyll Street, Dunoon on southbound journeys to Innellan and Toward with minimal additional cost.
- (ii) Agree to take no further action on the withdrawal of Service 80 by West Coast Motors as there is no budget available to meet the annual cost of £34,334 necessary to reinstate the service.
- (iii) Agree to leave the present service 480 unchanged.

4.0 DETAIL**4.1 Service 489 Toward to Glenfinart****4.1.1 Background**

In response to requests from residents in South Cowal for improved access to Western Ferries at Hunters Quay, and to a lesser extent Benmore Garden, the council took the opportunity when retendering services to combine services 482, 483, and 485 (Dunoon - Toward and Dunoon- Glenfinart) providing a through route from Toward to Glenfinart, service 489. The proposals were presented to the Cowal Transport Forum on 18 October 2013 and 28 February, 2014.

4.1.2 The retendered services, which were introduced in April 2014, resulted in a saving to the Council of £54.4k over the three year life of the contract. The exercise also provided the opportunity for the Council to rationalise services and introduce efficiencies.

4.1.3 **Issues arising from the introduction of the new service.**

Complaints were received from service users in relation to:

- The running time on the service being too tight within the town, and ferry connections being missed, particularly by buses coming from the north.
- Passengers for Toward who could no longer board a bus in Argyll Street for their return journey.
- The loss of the loop round Ardenslate Road which is now being operated by service 480 independently of the Toward service.

4.1.4 **Adjustments**

In view of the foregoing, the new timetables were adjusted from 13th August 2014, giving buses from Glenfinart and Toward additional time into Dunoon to ensure ferry connections. Also, to compensate for the service 489 no longer travelling along Argyll Street bus shelters were installed at both the Co-op and John Street stops and will be installed at both the stop opposite the swimming pool and at the old ferry terminal when CHORD works are carried out in the area.

4.1.5 **Implications of further change**

We are advised by the operator that passenger revenue is up by around 9% on the new 489 service which would indicate that more through journeys are being made. It is also clear from the meeting of the Cowal Transport Forum held on 5 September 2014, that the majority of parties are happy with the amendments to the timetable introduced in August. Therefore, while it would be possible to revert to the original service timetables there is the risk that such a change could promote complaints from users who have found the new arrangements more suitable.

4.1.6 The operator points out that both the former service 482/483 (Toward) and 480 (Upper Kirn) were very tight for running time and point out that both these issues were resolved following the service changes in April 2014. Operationally, therefore, the operator would not like to return to the former timetables on either of these routes.

4.1.7 Unfortunately, there would be also be an additional cost in reverting to the previous timetables and this could only be quantified by retendering the local services. We estimate that this could cost £60,000 per annum.

4.1.7 The council is currently in discussion with the local operator looking at options for

rescheduling services which will alleviate the issues raised by service users relating to pick up in Argyll Street on southbound journeys, and an alternative timetable is being drafted for approval.

4.2 Withdrawal of Service 80- Hunters Quay – Dunoon

4.2.1 Background

Service 80 between Hunters Quay and Dunoon was operated commercially without financial support from the council whereas service 480 operates over the same route and is funded by the council. Between the two services the frequency over the route was every half hour.

4.2.2 This service originally operated between Upper Kirn, Victoria Road and Dunoon but was enhanced and extended to the holiday village. The extension was successful and West Coast Motors advised that they would operate half of the service commercially.

4.2.3 Without consultation, West Coast Motors registered cancellation of their commercial service with effect from 17th November 2014. Regrettably, the Council had no influence over this withdrawal of service, as it was operated commercially.

4.2.4 In order to establish the cost of replacement subsidised service the Council went through a tendering exercise. The cost of replacing this service was established as £34,334 per annum, for which there is currently no budgetary provision.

4.2.5 As the cost of replacing service 80 is prohibitive the council has undertaken work with the local operator to consider rescheduling options for service 480 including the following:

- Rescheduling service 480 to its original timetable to provide two journeys an hour between Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal and once an hour round Milton. This would mean no service from Hunters Quay Holiday Village or on Alexandra Parade.
- Maintaining the 480 as an hourly service between Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal, merging Milton and the Ardenslate loop. This means retaining the current reduction from a half hourly service to an hourly service between Upper Kirn and Dunoon ferry terminal.
- Provide a half hourly service 480 between Hunters Quay Holiday Village, Upper Kirn and Dunoon Ferry Terminal, dropping Milton, and reducing Ardenslate Road to an hourly service provided by service 489.
- Diverting all Portavadie, Rothesay, Inveraray and Carrick Castle journeys via Ardenslate Road and Alexandra Parade. (Services 478, 479, 484 and 486). This would provide a reasonable level of service on Alexandra Parade in place of service 480.

- Replacing Service 80 with a supported bus service at a cost of £34,334 per annum
- 4.2.6 Discussion with the operator, which includes analysis of passenger numbers and journey patterns is ongoing, and draft timetables will be prepared for approval, as necessary.
- 4.2.7 The initial analysis of the figures for service 80 and 480 from 1st April 2014 until 29th November 2014 shows that on average the service is being used by similar numbers at each point on the route and this limits the opportunity to remove any portion of the route being covered by the remaining hourly service being provided by service 480. Furthermore, very few complaints have been received concerning the reduction in frequency on the route from half hourly to hourly

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Service 489 is also now established, and complaints to both the council and the operator are now infrequent. Return to the previous timetable would risk losing patronage and could cause complaints from users who have found the changes beneficial. It is, therefore, recommended that service 489 loops round Argyll Street in both directions and this will resolve the complaints from Toward and Innellan users. There will be a minimal increase in costs for the additional mileage.
- 5.3 The current operator registered the withdrawal of service 80 which is run commercially. No advance notice was provided of this change, and the cost of replacing this service with a council supported service has been established at £34,334 per annum. As no budget is currently available for a replacement service, the recommendation is that the service 480 should remain operating on its hourly frequency so that it can continue to serve all parts of the route. This has the effect of:-
- Maintaining an hourly frequency in the Milton area of the town which was the level of service in place prior to the 80/480 enhancement.
 - Maintaining the traditional level of service on Ardenslate Road where the Ardentinny service was always supplemented by one bus an hour from the Toward service.
 - Retaining a service to Hunters Quay Holiday Village which had not been served prior to the introduction of the enhanced service. Around 10% of all passengers on the route are to or from the holiday village.
 - Reducing the traditional level of service between Upper Kirn and Dunoon from half hourly to hourly. Although this attracted a small number of complaints at the time of withdrawal of the service 80 there have been no ongoing complaints.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy - None
- 6.2 Financial – Replacement Service 80 - £34,334 per annum, for which there is no current budget. Costs for reverting to the original timetable are estimated to be £60,000 per annum. Cost for diverting service 489 along Argyll Street, southbound are minimal.
- 6.3 Legal – None
- 6.4 HR - None
- 6.5 Equalities - None
- 6.6 Risk - None
- 6.7 Customer Service – Potential for complaints through further changes to or withdrawal of services.

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