

5. McGills Bus Services:

Before CN (McGills Head of Operations) addressed meeting, MD summarised main complaints registered in letter of complaint to McGills:

Long waiting times for buses not running to timetable with two buses often running back to back at the same time – 40 minutes plus Monday to Saturday. Buses not turning up on the once per hour Sunday service Timetable.

Ongoing declining absence of inspectors on buses.

Sharp rise in fares over a few months. Particularly affects young people in low paid employment.

Rudeness and unhelpfulness of some drivers. No explanation offered for lateness of buses.

Cut in service from buses every 15 minutes to every 20 minutes per hour. Bus route of some buses diverted to a return route between Airdrie and Coatbridge where passenger demand for service was greatest.

Buses running by passengers at stops where another bus/buses servicing at a stop, most particularly at congested Airdrie Cross, but also occasionally at Monklands Hospital stop.

Buses noted sitting at terminal at Caldercruix while other route buses running late

Above problems particularly causing problems for bus users who depend on the service to get them to work or school/college on time, especially very early morning service for people trying to get to work

CN then made the following statements to meeting:

McGills was a major/ the major bus passenger service in the West of Scotland area with 5 depots, 110 services and 500 drivers. Their Blantyre facilities had recently been relocated at a new facility in Coatbridge where 150 people are employed.

The company has made considerable effort to provide the best 212 service possible for the residents of Plains and Caldercruix, including a stop at Monklands Hospital which had been a long term priority for residents. McGills is a commercial/profit making company and to make profit demand must justify supply. The demand/custom for a 15 minute service in the villages did not exist and this was the reason for the withdrawal of some 212 buses to serve the return route between Airdrie and Coatbridge where demand was greater.

He regards fares as very competitive, especially the monthly offers which had not been offered by previous bus companies serving the village.

Staff are all trained/re-trained, and buses are all equipped with CCTV cameras.

He admitted there was room for improvement in buses running to timetable, but highlighted that the IT tracking system used by the company to compare where and when a bus is in accordance with timetable has an 86% success rate.

Initial response from CC chair MD, and MSP AN,

MD asked if the 14% failure rate could be largely a reflection on the ineffectiveness of the 212 service to villages and CN responded that this was not the case – it referred to outcomes of their services collectively over the West of Scotland

MSP, AN said it was abundantly clear from the vast number of complaints CC and local councillors had received over the last several months regarding the 212 service that the tracking system used by McGills was not working. He added that a 14% failure rate was substantial and had to be addressed. He had dealt with the same scenario regarding McGills bus services in Salsburgh and to which McGills had responded by providing an additional hourly bus service. AN suggested that a similar response might be a solution to the problem in Plains and that only an increase in residents' belief in the reliability of service would result in an increase in bus user customers. All present agreed with this. One resident suggested that even an additional early morning bus to get people to work/college would help.

This was followed by a volley of individual complaints from others present at the meeting refuting the above statements made by CN:

One parent had monitored bus arrival times every morning for a week since his daughter uses the service to access school Monday to Friday. She was at the bus stop every morning, along with other pupils to catch the timetabled bus, but had to wait an additional 20 minutes for the next timetabled bus. This did not at all reflect CN's claims of an 86% success tracking rate.

Two other attending residents made complaints respectively of waiting over 40 minutes for a bus, and noting on several occasions buses running back to back. Another complained about the frequency of buses breaking down.

Several challenges were made re the effectiveness of the CCTV facility on board buses. One person recounted being verbally abused on a bus by a drunk. The driver ignored this excusing the man's behaviour because he was drunk. Another parent complained of fraud by a driver who did not hand over a weekly ticket to her daughter after she had paid for it. She could not stand her ground or wait an indefinite length of time for the arrival of her mother, who had no private transport, because she would have been very late for work. The driver said it would be his word against the passenger's if she took the matter further.

BM(Chair of Caldercruix CC) said on one occasion he picked up several passengers on a journey to Airdrie. On his return journey shortly after he counted 23 passengers still waiting at stops on the 212 route.

Another resident confirmed that 212 buses are moving to the outside lane at the congested Airdrie Cross stop and turning down into Broomknoll St without picking up passengers at Airdrie Cross.

All of the above residents had complained to McGills with little confidence that their complaints were being acted on. BM felt they were being 'fobbed off' by the Complaints Dept.

CN made the following responses to complaints expressed:

CCTV on board buses may miss incidents depending on the way it was angled – tendency was to have it angled towards front of bus, at door and stopping area. This was rejected as a poor explanation by all present. BM added if this was the case why did it not pick up on buses running by stops where bus users were waiting.

McGills had an efficient Customer Service complaints' procedure policy: complaint calls were recorded and callers were given a reference number to quote should they wish/need to call back. No resident at the meeting, most of whom had called with a complaint, had received a reference number. CC member JS had complained several times on behalf of her son who has travelled all week on the buses for some time for return trips to and from his place of work. He has often been late getting to work and returning home. On one occasion it was patronisingly suggested to his mother that **he must have been standing at the wrong bus stop.**

CN further informed the meeting that the company had a Fast Response Transport Vehicle service to cover breakdowns. Customers waiting on buses could also access, via an IT App on their mobiles, details of where their expected bus at a particular time and its expected time of arrival at any stop. Cllr Morgan insisted that while this was fine for younger people and any others proficient in using apps, but not for many others, especially elderly people who simply wanted to get on a bus which arrived in time according to timetable.

It was then again made clear to CN by MSP AN, that something needed to be done to improve their IT tracking facility in order to improve services, since it had been made very clear to him that it was not working for the residents of Plains and Caldercruix. This was endorsed by Councillors, residents and CC members present at the meeting. CN said the company were making constant efforts to address problems.

CM, Deputy Director at Bus Users West of Scotland Area, then addressed meeting. He reinforced the importance of dissatisfied passengers/bus users keeping ticket details, or at least noting bus number to strengthen complaints. He also stressed that the first point of complaint should be to the bus company, and then to Bus Users if unsatisfied with the response received.

Bus Users Scotland area groups monitor bus users' complaints and send a report on their findings to the Traffic Commissioner in Edinburgh who can impose fines if companies are assessed as not fulfilling contractual conditions. In response to Cllr Morgan's question the Traffic Commissioner, and their watchdogs, the regional Bus Users departments are Scottish Govt. controlled and funded

CN was aware that the company was being monitored, particularly with regard to the 212 service, but not for the numerous complaints put forward by residents at this meeting. CM reported that the report was almost complete and would be sent to CN in the next week or two. The report would also go to the Traffic Commissioner who had the power to decide whether action/fines against the company were justified or not. Residents were extremely dissatisfied when informed by CM that any such report was not available to the public. However, CN stated he was willing to share the contents of the report with the community council

CN also stated that the company was willing to address any shortcomings highlighted in the report and address all possibilities for improvement of the 212 service. He cited congestion points along the route as the source of ongoing problems. It was pointed out to him that this problem existed when, and long before, McGills took over the route. He stated he was aware of the problem before taking over the route, but not the extent of the problem. And that existing congestion was adversely affecting the frequency and reliability of services.

Cllr Beveridge stated that NLC was aware of this growing problem and a meeting had been arranged to discuss the problem and the possible solution of re-routing traffic to alleviate congestion points. Cllr Morgan strongly emphasised this was not solely the problem of NLC, that SPT and Transport Scotland also had a responsibility to address the problem. All present agreed with this. CN expressed his willingness to participate in any such discussions

CN also agreed to consider points/complaints/suggestions made to him at meeting with a view to improving the 212 service. ND gave his email address for the assistance of anyone not satisfied with the way his/her complaint had been handled.

MD thanked CN, ND, CM, MSP AN, local councillors and the many residents for their attendance at the meeting at the particularly busy festive time of year

Station:

AN was challenged by several residents about not keeping his promise to provide a station for Plains. His response was that a station fund still existed for the provision of new stations, and that the STAG Report funded by NLC, was being considered by Scottish Transport. MD suggested that Scottish Transport were dragging their heels in responding to NLC, and he agreed with this.

6. NLC Report: Councillors present, who were aware, prior to the meeting, of the time constraints to allow full discussion on the main agenda item, stated there were no pressing issues/items for discussion that could not be held over until the next community council meeting in February.

7. Treasurers Report: Balance £3354.05. Third signatory still required for the signing of cheques.

8. Correspondence: Mainly email correspondence issued regarding McGills Bus Services dealt with above. Other items to be dealt with at next meeting due to time constraints

9. A.O.C.B: Irene Reid was unanimously welcomed as a co-opted full member of Plains Community Council

10. D.O.N.M. 14th February 2017

MD closed meeting by wishing all a happy festive period.