

The Highland Council

**City of Inverness Area Committee
28 January 2016**

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CIA/3/16

Developing Inverness as a 'Coach Friendly' City

Joint Report by the Director of Community Services and the Inverness City Area Manager

Summary

This report invites Members to consider the Evaluation on the Operation of Ardross Street as a pick-up/drop-off point for coaches for 2015 Tourist Season and to consider recommendations to improve operations for the 2016 season.

Members are recommended to

- i. Note the evaluation of the operation of Ardross Street as a Coach Drop-off/Pick-up point and the adjustments proposed for 2016 onwards
- ii. Note that publicity will be produced promoting the use of Ardross Street as the Inverness City coach drop-off / pick-up location; and
- iii. Note that an application will be made to the Common Good Fund Grant Sub-committee to fund the recruitment of a Coach Ambassador

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the City of Inverness Area Committee on 2 December 2014 Members agreed to create a long-term coach drop-off / pick-up point at Ardross Street. This was established through a Temporary Road Traffic Regulation Order. As agreed at Committee, this Order is in the process of being advertised as a permanent Order.
- 1.2 The role of Coach Ambassador was established in 2015 on a trial basis, funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund and delivered through Inverness Business Improvement District.

2. Review of Operation for 2015

- 2.1 In March 2013 Ardross Street was designated as the official coach drop-off / pick up point for Inverness. This designation was temporary until March 2015 when it was made permanent.
- 2.2 To facilitate this arrangement a Temporary Traffic Order (TTO) was introduced for the Northern Meeting Park side of Ardross Street which restricted its use to only Coaches between the hours of 1000 and 1700.

- 2.3 On-street signage was erected to reflect the restrictions imposed by the TTO and the car park ticket machines were covered during the entirety of this period.
- 2.4 During 2014/15 regular meetings were held with residents and businesses of Ardross Street to discuss their concerns resulting from the implementation of the TTO. Action points taken from these meetings resulted in a revision of the TTO in April 2014 to stipulate that coaches were strictly prohibited overnight on Ardross Street between the hours of 1700 and 1000. This change to the TTO was reflected in updated on-street signage.
- 2.5 Original concerns raised by the Stakeholders during the period of the TTO were:
- Lack of enforcement of Traffic Order by Council and Police with coaches regularly parking overnight with no punitive action being taken. Cars were also noted to be parking during coach only periods with no penalty imposed.
 - Some coaches waiting for periods with engines running causing a disturbance for the neighbouring businesses and causing pollution.
 - Ardross Street was too long a walk to and from the City Centre for some older or infirm passengers.
- 2.6 These were taken into account when setting the duties of the Coach Ambassadors who operated successfully in 2015 to address the above issues. Additional feedback on their role is contained in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.7 A Working Group, including Officers from The Highland Council and representatives from the Confederation of Passenger Transport and Local Coach Operators was formed to identify locations for a coach drop-off / pick-up area as near as possible to Inverness City Centre and recommended Ardross Street. Parameters that were considered to be critical and therefore influenced the discussions included:
- Distance from Coach drop-off / pick-up to the City Centre (Victorian Market)
 - Number of Coach bays available. On cruise liner days, when there are more tours than normal visiting Inverness, more than 10 coach bays must be available.
 - Car parking that would be displaced by Coaches if solution was adopted.
- 2.8 The baseline that the group worked from was Ardross Street which is 568 metres from the City Centre and has space for 11 coaches whilst displacing 35 car park spaces.

- 2.9 The decision taken to locate a Drop-off facility at Ardross Street has been widely accepted as being a success with the businesses in the Tourist Sector being particularly supportive.
- 2.10 The Coach Ambassadors have been essential to the smooth operation of the pickup / drop off arrangements.
- 2.11 Coaches have been directed to park at Bught Park and this has helped reduce the number of coaches parking up in unsuitable locations in the City centre. The operation of the overnight/long term daytime facility operated by D+E Coaches is under review. Officers are most appreciative of the co-operation received for D+E Coaches during the operation of the Longman Parking Facility to date.

3. Proposal changes for the 2016 Tourist Season

- 3.1 A number of people and organisations have expressed a supportive view of the operation of the arrangements at Ardross Street and these are summarised as follows.

- 3.2 *“On behalf of European Cruise Service I would like to express our thanks to the way that the coach parking in Inverness was handled in 2015. Having Ambassadors in Ardross Street has worked well and our guides and drivers have spoken of the success that this has brought to the flow of traffic and parking arrangements and passenger experience. These arrangements seemed to work well for the numerous coaches that visit Inverness during the cruise season and we look forward to this continued service.”* – **Claire Risk, Operations Manager, European Cruise Service**

“My drivers including myself have used the coach drop off/pick up area in Ardross Street and it has been very useful for all coaches. On cruise days it is a lifeline to ensure coaches can unload and reload at a central point. The Coach Ambassadors that welcomed us were always happy and welcomed the visitors to the city centre very well bringing a smile even on damp days.” – **Kevin Mayne, Owner of Mayne’s Coaches of Buckie**

“The introduction of the Coach Ambassadors on Ardross Street in the Summer of 2015 greatly improved the experience of visitors to Inverness – having someone to greet and help solve queries clearly made our Highland Welcome very real. The Cathedral engaged with the BID Ambassadors in a very positive way and that partnership helped overcome the previous sense of frustration felt by the Cathedral welcomers and volunteers. The Cathedral has begun to train its own guides as we can now see the benefit of working alongside the Council on this and many other issues.” – **Bishop Mark Strange, Inverness Cathedral**

- 3.3 The above comments are evidence of the support from a wide range of people to the decision creating a long term solution at Ardross Street. A review of the operation has suggested that coach waiting times should be reduced to 30 minutes with return prohibited within 30 minutes.

4. Enforcement

- 4.1 We retain a limited traffic enforcement resource through the Traffic Warden service and within 2016 the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Project will deliver full time Council Parking Enforcement Officers. This will enable ambassadors to call on enforcement when required to maintain the availability of the Bus Bays. However to ensure effective smooth day to day running of the coach drop off/pick up facility it is proposed that a Coach Ambassador be employed between April and October 2016 to act primarily as a liaison between the residents / businesses on Ardross Street and the Coach Operators ensuring that any concerns are addressed timeously and effectively.
- 4.2 Whilst ensuring the smooth operation of the coach facility will continue to be the Ambassador's primary concern, they will also be expected to offer a welcome tourists to the City, provide directions to amenities, answer questions the visitor's may have and encourage our guests to visit the many points of interest in the City Centre.
- 4.3 It is proposed that the Coach Ambassador role be jointly funded by the Inverness Common Good Fund and Inverness Bid and a fully costed application will be put forward to the Inverness Common Good Fund Grants Sub-committee in due course.
- 4.4 Consultation will continue to be undertaken and it is proposed that a programme of regular meetings be established bringing all stakeholders together to discuss and resolve issues. Lack of enforcement of Traffic Order by Council and Police with coaches regularly parking overnight with no punitive action being taken has been an issue in the past however the work of the Coach Ambassadors in 2015 helped significantly. The number of Cars noted to be parking during coach only periods with no penalty imposed has significantly reduced.
- 4.5 The issue of Coaches waiting for long periods with engines running causing a disturbance for the neighbouring businesses and causing pollution has almost been eliminated.

5. Signage and Publicity

- 5.1 New signage will be required on all main trunk routes in to Inverness and within the City indicating the way to the drop-off / pick-up area. These would be priced and ordered once the location has been approved.
- 5.2 The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) will arrange for the approved location to be advertised in their industry recognised publications and will work with us towards our goal of Inverness becoming a "Coach Friendly" City.
- 5.3 The Highland Council, BID and the transport industry websites will publicise details of the arrangements.

6. Implications

6.1 Resource implications

The cost of implementing the proposal will be signage costs which will be met from current budgets.

Staff Costs relating to the Coach Ambassador role will be detailed to the Common Good Fund Sub-committee.

6.2 There are no legal or equality implications

6.3 Any provision sanctioned by the Council will meet with the terms of the Councils Equalities Policy.

6.4 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

6.5 There are no risk implications arising from this report.

6.6 There are no rural implications arising from this report.

7. Risks

7.1 The work undertaken in 2015 has given the City a strong reputation within the Coach market as a place that welcomes Coach travel. The use of Coach Ambassadors significantly contributed to the success along with the co-operation of Ardross Street Residents. The recommendation to support the continued use of Coach Ambassadors who will work well with the new Parking Enforcement Team will act to project and indeed develop this important sector for our tourist based economy.

8. City/Highland Context

8.1 Inverness is seen as a hub for tourists. By improving the City's status as a place to visit, we will attract more coach operators to the Highland Capital and so also bring significant benefit to adjacent attractions such as Loch Ness and Culloden. The publicity of the City achieving 'Coach Friendly' status will also help the wider Highland economy.

8.2 The coach operators travelling to Inverness will have no other choice but to use loading bays and in some cases bus stops thereby causing major disruption to City Centre traffic flows.

8.3 No signage or information will be available to direct coach operators to use the designated area within the City Centre as a pick-up and drop-off point because there won't be one.

8.4 There is a real danger that without a suitable facility coach operators will be forced to bypass Inverness as a tourist destination and take their business elsewhere.

9 Next Steps

9.1 In order to prepare in time for the 2016 summer tourist season the following will need to be achieved.

- A permanent Traffic Order created for Ardross Street for change of use from pay and display parking to coach drop-off / pick-up;
- Signage to be installed across the road network adjacent to the City at suitable and strategic locations;
- Publicity to be produced both electronically and on paper and widely distributed to promote the use of Ardross Street as the Inverness City coach drop-off / pick-up location; and
- Coach Ambassadors to be recruited to cover seven days a week subject to the approval of an application for funding to the Common Good Fund Grant Sub-committee.

9.2 Throughout the whole process the Central Ward Members will be kept appraised.

9.3 This will ensure that the City of Inverness will have a sustainable facility which will be a benefit to tourists, coach operators and the businesses in the centre of Inverness.

Recommendation

The Committee is invited to:-

- i. Note the evaluation of the operation of Ardross Street as a Coach Drop-off/Pick-up point and the adjustments proposed for 2016 onwards
- ii. Note that publicity will be produced promoting the use of Ardross Street as the Inverness City coach drop-off / pick-up location; and
- iii. Note that an application will be made to the Common Good Fund Grant Sub-committee to fund the recruitment of a Coach Ambassador

Designation: Director Community Services

Designation: Inverness City Area Manager

Author: David Haas, Inverness City Area Manager

Shane Manning, Traffic Support Officer

Date: 30 December 2015

Background papers: None

Review of Coach Ambassador Role 2015

Background

City of Inverness Area Committee Members approved the recommendations of the report of 2nd December to develop “Inverness as a Coach Friendly City” including approving Ardross Street as the long term location for coach drop offs/pick-ups in the City of Inverness.

Highland Council asked BID to take on the role of Coach Ambassador for the period April to October 2015 as in the previous year there had been;

- Complaints from the local businesses regarding the lack of organisation of the arrangements
- Issues from the coach company’s prospective
- No real welcome offered to the coach visitors

It is worth remembering that the number of cruise liners visiting in 2015 increased from 40 in 2014 to 55 (+38%) and the number of passengers from 56,509 to 88,790 (+57%)

The brief given to BID for the Coach Ambassador role was to:

- Act as a liaison between residents and businesses on Ardross Street with the coach operators to ensure that any concerns are addressed timeously and effectively.
- Extend a Welcome to visitors to the city, provide directions to amenities, answer questions and encourage our visitors as many points of interest in the city centre.
- Monitor usage of the coach parking area in Ardross Street and keep records as far as practical of all coach users of the Ardross Street parking area.
- Liaise with coaches dropping off in Ardross Street and direct them to park up at Bught Road for the interim period before returning for collection of their passengers.

The traffic order specified that the 11 coach parking bays in Ardross Street adjacent Northern Meeting Park were to be used for coaches only from 10am to 5pm Monday to Sunday. It limited coaches to a maximum 1 hour stay during these times. The order specified that coach parking was prohibited at all other times.

Operational Phases:

Effectively there were 3 operational phases to the Coach Ambassador project:

- Phase 1 – Circulate information to the businesses, residents, coach companies regarding the arrangements which were going to operate until 31st October and introduce the Coach Ambassadors and their contact number
- Phase 2 – Politely but effectively recover the coach parking bays from private cars which had been using the area - this required the invaluable support from the Police via the Beat Officers and Traffic Wardens
- Phase 3 – To optimise the Coach drop off/pick up arrangements and welcome visitors.

Coach Ambassadors:

Because of the nature of the coach visits BID developed a small pool of temporary staff to undertake the Coach Ambassador role who were supplemented as necessary by the BID permanent staff.

All the Ambassadors were trained to greet and offer a welcome to the visitors and inform them about what the City Centre had to offer.

It was decided to offer the attached map of the City Centre rather than one with specific businesses as the latter would be just a collection of over 500 names and addresses. Our map was well received by the coach visitors, tour guides and the coach drivers with the coach ambassadors available to deal with brief to address individual requests e.g. the best shop for sewing materials.

Normally there was one coach ambassador on duty at any one time but this was increased to 2 when a large cruise liner was due in.

The Coach Users:

The Coach users of the drop off/pick up facility fell into 3 categories:

- Cruise Liner coaches – the majority of these were local companies being contracted to transport passengers from Invergordon to Inverness and normally other venues in the same day. For information the largest visiting cruise liner was the MSC Splendida which carried 3,600 European passengers
- Regular Tour Coaches – these coach companies came to Inverness on a frequent basis and normally arrived on the same day of the week.
- British & European Once Off Tours to Inverness/Highlands

Even within these categories there would be variations as to the coach's patterns of time stayed etc

Over the 173 days in the Summer 2015 we recorded 1583 coaches drop off/pick up in Ardross Street. it should be noted that where a coach dropped off, went away to park up then to return to pick up, this was treated as 1 coach visit.

These visits came from more than 260 different coach companies.

Circa 20% (317) of the coaches using the drop off/pick up came from the Cruise liners.

A total of 443 coaches were from abroad.

The busiest single day of coach use was Friday 21st August when the Royal Princess docked at Invergordon with 3,400 passengers. This liner generated 22 coaches which together with the 16 tour UK/Foreign Tour coaches that day meant that 38 coaches used dropped off/picked up area. Although the area was busy there were no particular problems due to the numbers.

Response to Coach Ambassador Role

As well as having ongoing dialogue and feedback from the local residents, businesses, the coach companies and the police, BID undertook a number of surveys towards the end of the project.

a) Coach Driver's Survey

A total of 66 coach drivers completed the questionnaire over 2 weeks in late August & early September- the salient points from the survey was;

- Their visits ranged from 45 minutes to 5 hours with the average length of visit being 2.5 hours
- All welcomed a dedicated drop off & pick up site for coaches
- All welcomed the appointment of the Coach Ambassadors and 90% of drivers described them as being "very helpful" with the remaining 10% saying they were "helpful"
- All thought the City Centre map that BID issued was good for their passengers.

b) Coach Visitors Survey

Visitors were surveyed on 25th August, 2nd, 14th September which were days when a cruise liner was in.

The salient points from the survey was;

- 66% of the visitors said their experience of Inverness was "very good"
- 29% of the visitors said their experience of Inverness was "good"
- 99% of the visitors found the Ambassadors to be welcoming
- 70% of visitors surveyed on these days came from the Cruise Ships
- 72% found the map issued useful with the remainder saying they didn't need to use it – some of these would be visitors in groups with a tour guide.

- Over 50% of visitors stayed in Inverness for 2-4 hours
- The top 3 places visited by those surveyed were the Cathedral (75%), the High Street (75%), the Victorian Market (66%)
- 40% of visitors spent between £20-£50 in the City Centre
- Their comments were very positive describing a “nice, welcoming, clean and friendly City

c) Coach Tour Guide Survey

The majority of coaches don't have tour guides and so only 19 completed the survey in late August – these ranged from local guides with the cruise liner coaches and guides travelling with the UK /Foreign Tours. Thus it was difficult to establish any pattern from their responses other than they all said the Coach Ambassadors were “very helpful”

d) Businesses/Residents in Ardross Street

All businesses in Ardross Street/Terrace were invited by the BID coach Ambassadors to complete a questionnaire relating to the period that the Coach Ambassador had responsibility for i.e. 10am to 5pm Monday to Sunday.

The questionnaires were hand delivered by the Coach Ambassador who returned to all the business seeking to collect the completed survey on at least 3 occasions.

A total of 19 businesses out of 31 in Ardross Street/Terrace returned the survey – the salient points were:

- 43% thought the arrangements had “improved a lot” over the previous year
- 57% thought the arrangement had “improved” - included in this group were some who commented adversely on the parking of coaches in Ardross Street after 5pm - obviously this wasn't the responsibility of the Coach Ambassador but of Police Scotland

Given the concerns previously expressed by the 4 Bed & Breakfast businesses we take this opportunity of quoting from their response to the questionnaire “In your opinion what do you think has worked better this year?” The following comments were received from Guest House owners in Ardross Street/Terrace

“There never was a problem for us”

“On cruise liner days the Ambassadors made a big difference and the drop off, move off, return to pick up appeared to work well”

“The coaches have been moved on with no real time delay but some coaches are arriving well before time (8.30am-9am) when they are not supposed to”

“Coach Ambassadors have been a great asset, they are helpful and it is a lovely gesture to have the coaches welcomed by such persons”.

Looking to 2016

The provisional cruise liner list for 2016 issued by the Port of Invergordon shows a further increase in both liners at 62 (+ 7 on 2015) and passengers at 94,850 (up 6% from 88,790 in 2015). Included is the first ever visit of a Disney cruise (Disney Magic) which will take its 2,600 passengers into Invergordon in both June and July.

The 2015 Coach Ambassador project demonstrated the need for such a service and the benefit to all the stakeholders. BID would therefore recommend the scheme be continued and would suggest the following improvements be considered:

- Reduction from 1 hour to 30 minutes for time a coach is allowed to stay in the drop off/pick up area and no returning within 30 minutes – this would reduce the number of coaches at any one time in Ardross Street without in our view being detrimental to the coach visitors or drivers. The park up facility in Bught Road was never anywhere near full and could easily accommodate more coaches. Also

many of the cruise ship coaches are able to return to their Inverness depots after dropping off and before returning to pick up.

- Clear markings on Bught Road showing where coaches can park – this links in with the Glen Mhor Brewery planning approval.
- Better signage in Ardross Street (large enough to be visible to car drivers) making clearer the times coaches can park and that other vehicles cannot. Also including what vehicles can park between 5pm & 10am
- Provide litter bins in Ardross Street for the public
- Install a bus shelter with seating benches – there are many coach elderly passengers and a shelter would protect visitors and the coach ambassador from the inclement weather
- Prune overhanging branches from trees in Northern Meeting Park that are catching and damaging the top of coaches

Mike Smith

Inverness BID Manager

3rd January 2016