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New flexible community bus service introduced on Black Isle

A new flexible bus service in the Ferintosh Community Council area of the Black Isle is being introduced from Monday 28 June, making it easier for local residents to use public transport. The demand responsive service will operate between 9.30 am – 4.15 pm, Monday to Friday, and complement the scheduled peak services on Service 22 to Inverness that will continue to be operated by Stagecoach.

It will take residents to and from Tore Service Station where passengers can join any of Stagecoach's mainline A9 buses. Passengers can also book journeys between any two points within the Ferintosh Community Council area. Just like an ordinary bus, it is available to all residents in (and visitors to) the Ferintosh Community Council area, which includes Culbokie in the east to Mulbuie in the west, Mulbuie Ridge in the south down to the Cromarty Firth in the north)

All journeys, including concessionary travel, will be no more costly than current fixed route journeys, even although the journey to /from Inverness is a two bus journey. The National Entitlement Card can be used with this service. The cost of a bus journey is very much lower than the fuel and parking costs of a private vehicle or a taxi fare.

A bonus is that during the pilot, estimated to run until March 2022 a 5-seater (plus wheelchair place) an electric vehicle will replace the diesel Sprinter (16-seater). By the time it is introduced it is hoped to have volunteer drivers trained, registered, PVG checked and insured to enable the community service to be available through late afternoon into night time and also on Saturdays / Sundays thus providing essentially a 24/7 service. The modest fares for these volunteer services have not yet been decided.

The aim is for Ferintosh Community Council area residents to have 7 day access to all Stagecoach's A9 services at Tore Service Station. For example, for the first time, residents will be able to access evening events and activities in Inverness.

The pilot scheme is a partnership of HITRANS, the regional transport partnership, Stagecoach, The Highland Council, CSI Ross-shire and Ferintosh Community Council (supported by Culbokie Community Trust). It is supported through an EU InterReg project called MOVE which seeks to improve public transport provision through collaborative solutions.

-more to follow-

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Bruce Morrison, who is leading the project on behalf of Ferintosh Community Council, said: "The current fixed route bus service is used by a very small number of residents. Demand responsive bus services are proving more useful for residents in rural areas and this pilot we hope will prove to be more valuable to more of our

residents. The more useful we can make this service, the easier it will be to sustain valuable public transport for years to come.”

Neil MacRae, Partnership Manager at HITRANS, said: “The Ferintosh Community Bus is an example of a demand responsive form of public bus transport that is proving increasingly popular in rural communities across the country because it provides a more accessible, more frequent and more sustainable service for local residents. It is of particular assistance to residents who live remote from regular fixed route bus services. The frequency of bus journeys can therefore now be increased since the community bus will only be travelling within a small constrained area and will link with the more frequent A9 bus services operated by Stagecoach.”

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For more information please contact Bruce Morrison on 01349 877 127 or at ferintoshcc30@gmail.com

A leaflet promoting the new service is available by clicking on this link <https://hitrans.org.uk/userfiles/file/Ferintosh%20Lft%20PR2.pdf>