

Home linking plan will help residents to get on the buses

Rural pick-up project set to hit the road

BY JACKIE MACKENZIE

A TRAILBLAZING project is to get under way on the Black Isle aimed at linking rural communities with public transport.

The scheme, to be piloted in the Ferintosh area, will provide a direct link from people's homes to a bus stop on the A9 or A835.

The partnership between Stagecoach North Scotland, Black Isle Community Car Scheme and Ferintosh Community Council has been set up in a bid to make public transport more accessible for all.

The trial, subsidised by Stagecoach and the Black Isle Community Car Scheme, will offer the home-to-bus stop connections for just £1 one-way or £2 return.

The Black Isle has a frequent bus service on the A9 and A835. However, the introduction of this scheme will provide an affordable link for folk to get from their homes to a bus stop.

It will start on Monday, June 6 and be available to the area's 2000 residents.

Bruce Morrison, chairman of Ferintosh Community Council, said: "How do those of our residents who are unable to drive, manage to visit friends and family, make medical appointments, shop and generally lead a full independent life?"



Steve Walker hopes the scheme will help people link in to their buses.

Picture: Callum Mackay

"In rural communities people can live some distance away from a bus stop. They may be elderly, disabled or have come out of hospital recently, or not want to walk to a bus stop in dark evenings. There is no age limit on the scheme, but it's the isolated and more vulnerable people in our community we want to reach.

"Stagecoach runs a brilliant service on the A9 and A835 with frequent buses - it's just that some folk can't get to them.

"We think this is a first. We don't think there's anything like it linking with public bus services.

"Over the next three months the demand for this new service will let us know if this form of community transport is part of the answer."

Steve Walker, managing director of Stagecoach North Scotland, said: "We are always exploring new ways to make bus travel more accessible to members of rural communities in the Highlands.

"We are delighted to be part of the Ferintosh Community Bus Link project and hope it will provide a convenient connection to onward travel by bus."

Jamie McJimpsey, community project development officer with the Black Isle Community Car Scheme, said: "This is a simple but good example of a cross-sector partnership working approach which is directly seeking to address an identified community need in the Ferintosh area."

The trial will be reviewed by all stakeholders at the end of August where a decision will be made if the scheme should become permanent. ■ If you live in the Ferintosh area and are interested in joining the scheme call 01349 862431 to register.