



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Katy Clark MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland Region

9th June 2022

Rt. Hon. Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG

Our reference: XSCM-JR

Cut to X34 and X36 Routes in Ayrshire

Dear First Minister,

I am writing following Stagecoach's announcement that it intends to cut the X34 and X36 bus services from 17th July. Several constituents have written to me expressing alarm at this and I have written to Sam Greer, Stagecoach's Regional Director, to demand clarity about what consultation it carried out prior to these cuts, what assessment it has made of the impact on residents and what correspondence it has had with residents, workers and key stakeholders. The operator has thus far cited costs as a factor in its decision, describing the service as "unsustainable", but there appears to have been no attempt to engage with the local community on this issue or explore alternatives such as modifying timetables or cutting specific quieter journeys rather than the entire service.

Just to provide context, the X34 and X36 are currently the only bus services that connect Garnock Valley, an area holding a population of around 20,000 people, and Glasgow, which is just over 20 miles away. By scrapping these services, residents wishing to travel to Glasgow will be left with two public transport options: travel south to Kilmarnock, adding expense and at least an hour to their journey time, or opting for more expensive rail services. In the case of the town of Beith, the nearest rail station is also several miles away in Glengarnock and holds extremely limited car park space. The cuts will also affect residents of Irvine and the Three Towns, and they come off the back of a wave of cancellations by Stagecoach in recent weeks across Ayrshire due to "staff shortages".

The effects of these shameful cuts are obvious: residents who rely on these services for work, education, family visits and health appointments, or who need to access amenities only available in the city, will be forced to either fork out more money to travel during a cost of living crisis or opt for car journeys at a time when the Government's stated aim is to increase public transport usage. It will also leave elderly and vulnerable residents who wish to travel across Ayrshire more isolated.

I would urge the Scottish Government not to simply wash its hands of this issue by



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reasoning that Stagecoach is a private operator and that this is merely a commercial decision. The Scottish Government subsidised Stagecoach to the tune of £88.2 million last year, entrusting the operator to run lifeline public services across parts of our country. I believe ministers have a responsibility to engage with the operator directly on this matter, as well as the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. I would urge you to convey these points clearly to Stagecoach, particularly given the operator's apparent lack of consultation with local passengers, workers and councillors prior to this decision, with a view to reversing this decision.

I believe the actions of Stagecoach are illustrative of all that is wrong with how our bus services are organised, how decisions are taken and who operators are accountable to. It is a clear example of why the Scottish Government must do all it can to resource local authorities in the months and years to come to set up their own municipal bus networks so we finally have services based not on profit but the needs of residents.

I would be grateful if you would personally intervene and use your influence with Stagecoach to ensure they reverse this decision.

I look forward to reading your response.

Yours sincerely,

Katy Clark MSP
West Scotland Region