

Nightrider tickets get Fife night-owls home



Summary

Local authority:
Fife Council



MOFFAT & WILLIAMSON
BUS AND COACH HIRE



In 2017/18, Fife Council received a grant from the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (SCSP) programme to support the promotion of a new, cost-effective ticket offer that encouraged ‘the Christmas night out crowd’ to use the bus more often in the evenings.

The “Nightrider” ticket offer was introduced into Fife by Stagecoach in October 2017. A month later, two other Fife-based bus companies launched their own Nightrider tickets. The initiative set out to tackle declining bus patronage on evening and night services. Nightrider offered passengers unlimited bus travel for just £2, with tickets valid from 7pm until the last journey of the evening or through until 4am the following morning, whichever was the latest.

The multimedia campaign that was used to promote Nightrider tickets, with social media, radio and newspaper advertising featuring strongly in the mix. This generated a measurable increase in evening bus patronage and a willingness by the bus operators to continue the scheme without SCSP support.

During 2018/19, the operators all varied their original ticketing offer. For instance, Stagecoach increased the cost of its Nightrider tickets from £2 to £3, while both Bay Travel and Moffat & Williamson introduced earlier start-times. The continuation of the Nightrider initiative is testimony to its success and a demonstration of how SCSP funding can leave a positive and lasting legacy.

This project received funding through the *Smarter Choices, Smarter Places* programme, which is administered by Paths for All and funded by Transport Scotland.



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In November 2017, a new campaign and ticketing initiative launched in Fife, to encourage 'the Christmas night out crowd' to use the bus more often in the evenings and into the night.

Branded "Nightrider", the initiative was first introduced in Fife in October 2017 by Stagecoach. Two other Fife-based bus companies - Bay Travel and Moffat & Williamson - followed suit and launched their own Nightrider tickets in November 2017.

The initiative was designed to tackle a down-turn in patronage on evening bus services by offering passengers discounted tickets. It was hoped that - in the run up to the festive period - the new ticket offer would encourage people to ditch their cars and use the bus.

Through this initiative, passengers were offered a Nightrider ticket for just £2, which provided them with unlimited bus travel after 7pm. Tickets could be purchased from the driver and were valid until the last journey of the evening or through until 4am the following morning, whichever was the latest. However, tickets were not transferrable between services offered by different bus operators.

Alongside its offer in Fife, the Stagecoach Nightrider ticket was also valid throughout Perth and Kinross, Dundee and Angus. However, the tickets were not valid on Stagecoach services to Edinburgh, Cumbernauld/Glasgow, Falkirk/Forth Valley, Stirling, or north of Montrose to Aberdeen.

At the time of its launch, local businesses expressed enthusiasm for the Nightrider initiative, noting its potential to increase footfall for evening and night-time traders, such as restaurants, bars, theatres and cinemas. Associated promotional work by Stagecoach supports this goal by pointing out that:

"How you're going to get home is always a thought when you're out for a night out, enjoying a few drinks or some good food. You then start to factor in the cost of taxis, or even trains to get yourself back to the house, usually adding a considerable amount to your evening."

The Nightrider offer was heavily promoted from the outset, using a variety of media. Key messages focussed on a number of benefits, such as convenience, value-for-money and access to a great night out.

Although social media proved to be highly effective, other campaign media also played an important role, including leaflets, beer-mats, radio and newspaper ads. For instance, a targeted social media campaign that promoted Nightrider bus tickets for the "Christmas night out crowd" was delivered between November 2017 and January 2018. Over this time, the Nightrider campaign becoming the top performing post for the TravelFife site and reached a significant social media audience via both promoted ads and un-promoted posts.

Alongside this, on-bus livery designed for both Bay Travel and Moffat & Williamson a set of sharp, eye catching posters were designed and distributed around local destinations, such as

workplaces. These were subsequently refreshed, to give the posters more of a spring feel.

During 2017/18, Fife Council had regular contact with the participating bus operators, to review passenger numbers and fine-tune the delivery of the Nightrider campaign. Over time, it became clear the initiative was successfully attracting more passengers on evening and late-night services. Whilst month-by-month patronage wasn't always as high as the previous year, periodic drops in passenger numbers could generally be explained by other factors, such as bad weather.

During 2018/19, the Stagecoach offer evolved, with the cost of its Nightrider tickets increasing to £3 (although they were still available for purchase from 7pm). Over the same period, Moffat & Williamson started offering Nightrider tickets from 6pm, with tickets costing £2.00 for an adult and £1.50 for under 19's. Alongside this, Bay Travel tickets became available from 6.30pm.

The success of the initiative is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that all three bus companies chose to continue offering Nightrider tickets into 2018/19 without support from SCSP funding. This suggests that it has been successful in attracting a wider range of bus users than 'the Christmas night out crowd', which was the initial target audience for the Nightrider campaign.

Fife's Nightrider campaign and ticketing initiative shows how Smarter Choices, Smarter Places funding supported an increase in patronage on local bus services. The continuation of the initiative beyond the initial SCSP funding period leaves a longer-term legacy for the Fife community, which now has access to more cost-effective public transport services.

"The nightrider project was a brand new initiative for us and we're really excited to be helping our customers enjoy a great night out for less. The nightrider ticket is designed to be a great value travel option if you're venturing for a night out, taking advantage of all the great night spots we have here in Fife. From the many restaurants and bars available across the Kingdom, to diverse theatre shows and family activities available, we want to encourage people to make use of the local facilities across the region."

Douglas Robertson,
Commercial Director,
Stagecoach East Scotland

In numbers



Nightrider tickets **cost £2 or £3** depending on the operator



For one bus company, **passenger numbers increased by an average of over 10%** during the 8 months after the Initiative's launch

7,192

was the **average audience of un-promoted Facebook and Instagram** posts in December 2017, and the top performing post reached 15,112

107,323

was the **audience of promoted Facebook and Instagram** ads reached in the 5 months following the launch of the Nightrider campaign



The project received **£24,927 of SCSP funding in 2017/18**, but continuing funding was not required



Stagecoach provided **significant financial support** for promoting the Nightrider initiative

A photograph of three young women with long hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. They are positioned in the upper half of the page. The woman on the left is partially cut off. The woman in the middle is smiling broadly, and the woman on the right is looking slightly to the side with a gentle smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

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“ The council . . . wants to encourage people to enjoy cheaper evening bus travel with the new Nightrider ticket. As well as giving people the chance to take advantage of the wealth of places to visit and activities to enjoy in the Kingdom, we hope it will also give an additional travel option for people working later this winter. ”

Councillor Altany Craik, Convener of the Economy, Tourism, Strategic Planning & Transportation Committee

“ Moffat & Williamson Ltd are delighted to be part of the Nightrider scheme. Since the introduction we have seen an increase in the usage at night time, especially in younger passengers. ”

George Devine, Managing Director, Moffat & Williamson Ltd