

RELBUS Minutes of meeting held on 18th April 2018 in Meikle room, Haddington Town House.

Present: Harry Barker (Chair); Morag Haddow (Secretary); A. Beck (for Shena Jamieson); Jacqui Bell; Jenny Cormack; Mervyn Dickson; Ross McPhail; Barry Turner.

Apologies: Iain Gray, Shena Jamieson, Allison Cosgrove, Philip Immirzi, Andrew Tweedy, Ralph Averbach

Comments on existing services:

East Coast Buses: There is general satisfaction with the level and quality of service being provided, and their App was specially mentioned as being useful for both information and ticket purchasing

Borders Buses: Fares between Dunbar and Edinburgh are higher than ECB. Their App, whilst useful, does not cover real time late running and approaches to the company regarding this can take several days to answer. It is not possible to buy local tickets via the App.

Eve, Dunbar: The return fare between Dunbar and North Berwick is considered too high at £8.

Prentice, Haddington: No specific comments were made other than the size of the buses used on lightly loaded journeys seemed excessive. It was pointed out that it was more economical for the company to use one larger vehicle to cover all journeys rather than have two using the smaller one on lightly loaded journeys.

Haddington – Humbie 109

Harry Barker, who has observed this service on a number of occasions recently, advised it was not conforming to the bus charter standards. Being operated by an anonymous white 'van' type of vehicle, the only indication it is a bus is the large '109' sticker in the windscreen. There is no destination board at all. There is no timetable information in Market Street, Haddington at the bus stop, and the service number is not quoted on the stop flag pole. It was also observed standing on the main road in Haddington about to depart for Humbie rather than the terminus of Roodlands Hospital, although work there may be the reason for this, but there is no publicity regarding this. At Humbie the leaving times of the bus are quoted on the village notice board, but there are no intermediate timings. The service however does readily come up if typed into Google and is shown on Google maps journey planning. It was agreed that Harry Barker would write to Andrew McLellan at ELC to draw his attention to these matters. Usage of the route is extremely low = only one passenger in each direction during January and February 2018. Funding for another year of operation has been granted.

New Humbie to Tranent service

Following a meeting between Andrew McLellan of ELC and Harry Barker, it is proposed to make better use of the vehicle used on the 109 (above) by introducing a new service from Humbie to Tranent. RELBUS has requested that it travel via Glenkinchie, West Saltoun, East Saltoun, Pencaitland Park (for connections with ECB 113), New Winton and terminating in Tranent. This would provide a service between the Saltouns and New Winton directly to Tranent which was withdrawn some years ago and follows attendance by RELBUS at an East Saltoun Community Council public meeting in June 2017. The precise timetable has not been agreed yet, but it will operate on one or two days per week on an initially limited basis. In view of the lack of use on the existing 109, there is the possibility for the new service – which has much more potential than the 109 – to expand in frequency, but the 'lose it or use it' philosophy will no doubt be evident. It is considered this is a major success for RELBUS to achieve a new rural bus service at the current time.

Roadworks and congestion

At the recent Bus Forum, the positioning and timing of roadworks and their formal approval was raised and it transpired that, for example, on ECB's 124 there were at one time five temporary restrictions each creating around three minutes delay, which collectively meant that their buses were running 15/20 minutes late by the time they reached their terminus. Prentice also made strong representations regarding its 111 service. The authorities apparently only require to avoid (other than emergencies) roadworks within 500 yards of each other and no cognisance is taken of any bus route or its effect on timetables. Also, once notification is posted of a traffic restriction, there is little that can be done to mitigate it and in many cases no specific intimation to the bus company is made. The bus companies made the point that they simply are unable to continually monitor the website to ascertain new roadworks. It was agreed a meeting be held between the respective parties.

Bus stop information

Jacqui Bell has long raised the issue of unsatisfactory bus stop information in Belhaven and West Barns. Indeed this is becoming more of an issue as time passes throughout the County. Morag Haddow in her new role with ELC has taken on this issue and will undertake initial surveys. Two principal issues remain – the first is that unlike the majority of Councils, who take responsibility for bus stops and their information, ELC do not and assume it is the responsibility of operators to put up timetables at bus stops. This clearly is not working in some cases, and in others some operators' timetables are so large that they occupy a large proportion of available space to the detriment of other operators. Morag advised that double boards will be fitted to many more stops, but emphasized that ELC have no budget for bus stop improvements. An attempt to get Area Partnerships to become involved in this issue will be made. Jacqui Bell and Morag Haddow agreed to meet in Belhaven and West Barns to specifically look at local bus stop issues.

There is a possibility that SESTRAN may be able to advise or indeed help with improving bus shelters in the County. The point was made that whilst East Lothian had, arguably, one of the best if not the highest quality bus services in the UK, the shelters were relatively poor and deteriorating providing an unkempt appearance to intending passengers contrasting with the bus service provided.

Ross McPhail raised the issue of real time information at all (principal) bus stops similar to that provided with Edinburgh. It was agreed this was probably even more essential on less frequent services, but the cost involved was undoubtedly a factor.

Bus – rail connectivity and Equality Act (2010) issues

For this to be introduced at North Berwick, and to satisfy the Equality Act legislation it would require the 120/121 bus to terminate at North Berwick station to ensure an 8 minute period to allow disabled passengers to make a connection there. Because new bus termini have to be approved, for safety reasons, by the Police, this location has been declined by the Police as being unsuitable as it may result in two service buses being at the stop at one time which could prove dangerous due to visibility issues. It would be possible for these services to be slightly re-timed to pass the station allowing 5 minutes either side of the 10 minutes that trains generally stand at North Berwick station, and whilst this would not be compliant with the Equality Act, if it is not advertised as a connection it would not be in breach. Recent survey work at the station has revealed that with minor adjustments two buses could be accommodated at the station. ELC has meantime extended the current service contracts to run the supported services for another year pending radical ScotRail timetable changes due in December 2018 and this matter will be re-visited then.

SESTRAN have in partnership with ScotRail and others, recently installed a 'real' time bus departure screen at North Berwick station. Complaints have been received that this is not compliant under the Equality Act as the screen is 12 feet high and the writing on it is tiny – perhaps half an inch high if that. The luminosity of it is poor, especially in sunshine, another non-compliant issue for those with poor vision. Harry Barker questioned whether it was 'real time' or scheduled time' as he has observed that when a bus is due the screen changes to yellow writing and 'DUE' appears for one minute, and then disappears despite the bus not having arrived. Also times are not shown in time order, but are organised in service order and Eve's supported buses are not shown at all. Barry Turner agreed to look into these issues at SESTRAN.

New East Lothian bus map

ELC are in the course of producing a new East Lothian bus map and are using a professional map firm to ensure that it is as clear, and as accurate as possible. Hopefully a proof copy will be made available for comment and inspection before going to print.

East Lothian Bus Charter

Minor revisions to the excellent charter are proposed, principally concerning how intending passengers should flag down a bus. At present bus drivers have real difficulty is ascertaining if a passenger really does want their bus, many being so pre-occupied with their mobile phone that they either do not notice the bus approaching or simply assume it will stop in any case. This is causing late running as buses often stop at stops but nobody boards. Harry Barker has indicated that it is up to the bus companies to come to an agreed position on how to flag down a bus and include it in the Charter. It was felt that some useful publicity can be achieved when the new Charter is issued and that an agreed timescale should be produced for its implementation.

Other matters

ELC are currently inviting comments on their Transport Strategy which at first glance appears to be car orientated. It was agreed that RELBUS should make a contribution to this, and Harry Barker will do so, but inviting comments to be received by him on harrylbarker@gmail.com **BY END APRIL** concerning any issues members may wish to raise in order that comments can be made by 10th May deadline.