

EBUG Annual General Meeting June 2021

The Committee's report

EBUG's inaugural AGM was held on 2 May 2019. At that meeting we had presentations and a Q and A session with Lesley Macinnes, Transport Convener at the City of Edinburgh Council, and Nigel Serafini of Lothian Buses. The meeting formally set up EBUG, and elected a Committee to carry out the Group's work over the next year.

Over the two years since, it's surprising what a range of activities EBUG has engaged in. There was the 'internal business' of setting up the Group. We set up a bank account with a grant of £2000 from the Foundation for Integrated Transport. We have a Twitter account with a modest following, but more importantly a website.

The Committee started with a full complement of members, but has dwindled over the past two years by about half. So, we need new Committee members. If you're interested, please think about it! You don't have to be an expert in transport or running groups. The key thing is that you care about bus services in and around Edinburgh.

Early on, we established a principle of members of the Committee meeting Lothian Buses' management to discuss subjects of mutual interest, on a regular basis. Then COVID intervened, and these rather fell by the wayside.

An early issue was the Edinburgh City Centre Transformation project. The final report moved some way towards EBUG's comments during consultation. Transformation is likely to be implemented through a series of sub-projects. We continue to be critical of one core theme, applying the 'to not through' concept to buses. We consider it to be poorly thought through in principle and probably undeliverable in practice. A long-term battle ahead.

At the last AGM, there was much discussion of Lothian's new 'Superbus' design and access issues. It appears that the layout adopted on the first batch was amended; since then we've had little feedback, which suggests it was improvement. Tell us if you think otherwise!

Another early issue was a proposal to 'rationalise' (i.e. reduce) the number of bus stops. Along with other organisations, we argued against a blanket approach. The idea seems to have been put on hold, but we'll be keeping an eye open for any future developments.

The City Mobility Plan was finally approved in February 2021. This is the Council's Transport Strategy for the next decade. It provides a key reference point and background for everything the Council does, transport-wise, until the 2030s. Like the Transformation project, we were quite closely involved, and believe we saw some movement towards a more 'bus-friendly' Plan.

We responded to a Scottish Government consultation on extending concessionary bus travel to people aged under 19. We broadly supported it but noted that it doesn't help those in areas where there are no buses!

In 2021 we started a programme of 'bus stop audits'. These involve a small groups of volunteers walking a section of a bus route, and assessing whether the bus stops and any bus lanes are up to scratch. The programme is still in its early stages, but the aim is to build

up a library of bus infrastructure in the city to press for maintenance and upgrades as appropriate.

Turning to the Council's various Spaces for People schemes, which have generated enormous media coverage (and documentation). EBUG did not comment on every scheme. While we were broadly supportive in principle, we have some substantial reservations about some of the specifics and the processes. In June, the Council will decide which, if any, schemes to continue long-term. There'll be a lot of interest in that meeting!

Turning to the future, we're very concerned about the impact of the pandemic on bus services. A significant drop in patronage threatens the viability of at least some bus routes. In the short term, Government financial support continues to give bus operators a level of protection (as for some other businesses).

Even before the COVID crisis, EBUG warned of the dangers of taking Edinburgh's bus network for granted; in particular, the financial and service risks of reorganising the network on the basis of ideas that, we believe, were badly thought out.

In May 2020 the Council agreed a report on 'Creating Safe Spaces for Walking and Cycling'. Notwithstanding the title, its proposals for buses included: 'protecting and prioritising the city's bus and tram service...Strengthening bus lanes to provide all day bus priority, and relatively protected space for cycling, by strengthening some parking and loading restrictions, extending selected bus lanes through to traffic lights and extending the operating hours of most bus lanes'. There would be some new bus lanes, such as on Queensferry Road and the A90, and bus gates.

Particularly important are the criteria that 'Proposals should not undermine the long term viability of the public transport network'.

We expect a lot of work in the next year or two on the review of the bus network, which the Council plans to lead.

You may have seen media coverage of plans to reorganise the relationship between the Council and Lothian Buses. This is progressing slowly, and at the time of writing we have no details.