

Edinburgh Bus Users' Group

Inaugural meeting, 2 May 2019

Friends Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh

Attendance: 52 persons

1. Welcome by the chairperson; background to EBUG

The chairperson, David Hunter, welcomed all present. After setting out some housekeeping notes, he announced that Richard Hall, MD of Lothian Buses, was unable to attend. Lothian Buses would, however, be represented by Nigel Serafini and Ian Bieniowski.

He noted that copies of the agenda and a draft constitution for the Group were on the seats. He outlined briefly how the Group had formed in summer 2018 with the aim of providing a voice for bus users and of protecting and improving Edinburgh's bus network for the benefit of all, and introduced those who had been involved to date. The purpose of today's meeting was to formalise EBUG as a public group, and to hear from, and provide an opportunity to question, invited speakers from the City of Edinburgh Council and from Lothian Buses.

2. Draft constitution

The draft constitution was outlined. Two amendments were proposed from the floor: to include a provision for independent audit of the accounts, and to limit office-bearers' terms of office. With these, approval was moved by Michael Traill, seconded by Coree Brown Swan. Amendments to be progressed by the Committee.

Noted that the purpose is not to replace existing groups which focus on transport, but to be a voice specifically for bus users.

3. Guest speakers

The Chair introduced the guest speakers: Nigel Serafini, Commercial Director and Ian Bieniowski, Network Performance Manager, Lothian Buses, and Cllr Lesley Macinnes, Convenor of Transport and Environment, City of Edinburgh Council.

Nigel Serafini noted that LB is the only municipally-owned bus operator in Scotland. It is an arms-length company owned by the City of Edinburgh Council, with three other Lothian councils having a minor share. With 2,600 staff, it is a major local employer. It has a fleet of over 800 vehicles, one of the newest fleets in Scotland. Income is from fares, operations and contracts; there is no public subsidy. From this it has returned a dividend to its owners of £46 million over the past ten years.

While bus patronage has declined across Scotland, LB's had held steady, although there was a slight decline last year. It is a key part of active travel in the city, and works in partnership with the Council, although it is important to remember it is an arms-length company. LB hopes that groups like EBUG will help to press the case for the bus sector in future; it faces a number of important challenges, notably the need for better bus priority measures and their enforcement. Other challenges include a strategy for (visiting) coaches and for park and ride.

Cllr Macinnes noted she would reflect much of what Nigel had said. LB is almost iconic in Edinburgh. A critical issue for Edinburgh is the expected population growth of 20% over the next ten years. For Edinburgh to survive and thrive, its people need to travel sustainably. Sustainable development planning is essential.

Cllr Macinnes advised that a lot will happen over the next year; highlighting the proposed Low Emission Zone and the City Centre Transformation project, which is subject to a major report at the next Transport and Environment Committee. The City Mobility Plan will progress, including a major shift to use of sustainable transport.

How will this be achieved? It is important to improve bus journey times, notably with bus priorities at bus lanes and junctions. The Council will look towards bus stop rationalisation, noting how close some stops are to each other. A saving of 20 seconds at each stop provides a total saving of 5 minutes on a route; benefitting passengers and producing substantial operational savings. Bus lane operating hours would be extended, ideally from 7am to 7pm. However, these measures need extensive consultation, so will not happen overnight.

4. Questions

- 4.1 How can twin baby buggies be accommodated, particularly on routes 11 and 16 served by the new big buses? For those with a disability, is it possible to exit via the front rather than the middle door, which can be difficult for a number of reasons?
- 4.2 Drivers often find it difficult to align the middle door with the kerb, particularly if it is obstructed. The step is generally higher, and the middle door feels less secure, lacking a useful handrail.
- 4.3 What consultation had taken place with users? Had there been a risk assessment? There are a variety of ramps which creates uncertainty. The wheelchair space on the 11 and 16 is difficult to get into.
- 4.4 How is LB responding to the Change.org petition on these issues?
- 4.5 Only the buses on the 11 and 16 routes lack a dedicated buggy space, although the areas served have a high proportion of young families. Had this been considered?
- 4.6 It was noted that the big buses have also been used on route 7.

REPLY: LB can provide evidence that the designated spaces meet the required standards. Nevertheless, at some locations street clutter and parking creates an additional obstacle. The new buses are capable of doing a 'full squat' so that the middle door step is the same as at the front door. A Risk Manager is employed by LB to check all new vehicles. The double doors have reduced journey times. High-capacity vehicles are needed on the 11 and 16, and they need a lot of lower-deck seating for the many elderly passengers.

- 4.7 It was noted that some passengers board with very large prams, and there is a limit at some point.
- 4.8 A questioner asked why he had received an inadequate reply to his FOI request about consultation re the introduction of big buses.
- 4.9 It is embarrassing and difficult for a wheelchair user at a bus stop when a parent with a buggy is also waiting, because one or the other will be unable to use the designated space. It is difficult to manoeuvre a wheelchair through the throat at the front of the bus.
- 4.10 There was concern over reports of poor industrial relations within LB. What is the likelihood of industrial action? What is the Council's role in this?
- 4.11 The ex-London buses are difficult to board. What are the plans for them?

4.12 Does LB have a manager with specific responsibility for accessibility and equalities?

REPLY: Cllr Macinnes replied that LB is an arm's length company; the Council cannot intervene in operational matters. She is distressed to hear the problems being aired tonight, which reflect much correspondence she has already received. There were two issues: how to deal with these problems, and they affect the perception of care. She will continue to discuss them with the Chair of LB's Board. The Council could not rebuild every bus stop in the city, but a number of improvements can be made.

LB does not have a manager specifically responsible for access and equalities; responsibility rests across all managers to address these issues. Regarding industrial action, not all reports are accurate. Discussions are continuing.

4.13 Route 30 is often overcrowded and subject to delay, with buses often bunching. What are the prospects for some rerouting and deploying buses with more capacity?

4.14 A representative of Unite the Union challenged LB's response re industrial action, noting that the Managing Director of LB had not met with union since December.

4.15 What can be done to improve journey times in central Edinburgh, and specifically about congestion on Princes St.?

REPLY: Demand is different on different routes. The 30 runs through two congested points at Craigmillar and Fort Kinnaird. Musselburgh High St is also congested at weekends. It also runs under a low bridge, preventing use of double-deckers. David Hunter asked if LB could particularly consult EBUG on issues such as this. Ian Bieniowski said that LB is currently reviewing routes, and that it constantly consults community groups on services.

Stopping patterns had been rationalised on Princes St, but there is more to be done. LB had sought to increase frequencies on services which do not use Princes St. Nevertheless, demand is particularly strong there and on George St.

Cllr Macinnes noted that the Council is considering what could help thin out buses, but recognised that these are very popular destinations. This will take some time to work through. She would like to come back to EBUG on this and other matters in future.

4.16 We need to be constructive and positive, as a group.

David Hunter closed this part of the meeting by thanking the speakers and stressing that EBUG would definitely be keen to welcome them back, and to continue to engage with them. Any questions which were not raised tonight could be entered on cards at the door, to be dealt with by the Committee.

5. Election of a committee

The constitution requires the election of a Committee. Seven members of the initial Steering Group were willing to stand, and nominations were requested from the floor. With regard to what is involved, David Hunter noted that the Steering Group had had four meetings since last summer, with much other business done via email discussion. He suggested that, whilst it was up to the new Committee, it could work quite informally, with its meetings being open within reason.

The following nominations were received and elected:

Maggie Killin

Jennifer Marlborough

Sally Millar
Harald Tobermann
Chris Day
David Spaven
Bob Moseley
James McLennan
Coree Brown Swan
Danielle Rose
Kristine Robinson
Tim Parker

Thanks were expressed to the Chair.

6. End of meeting 19:45

Outline statement

Edinburgh Bus Users Group

Edinburgh Bus Users Group (EBUG) is a new campaign which aims to provide a voice for bus users and is committed to protecting and improving Edinburgh's bus network for the benefit of bus users and potential users. EBUG is concerned with bus services operating within the City of Edinburgh Council area and those which cross its boundary, and with city-wide rather than local issues.

Edinburgh's bus network is popular and is widely considered a model service by people within and outside Edinburgh. However it faces a number of issues, changes and challenges, including for example:

- the City Centre Transformation project.
- lack of investment and development of bus priorities.
- underlying issues such as: congestion and journey times, bus lane enforcement, parking (including in bus lanes and bus stops), roadworks/events, bus stops and shelters, accessibility, service standards, fares and smart ticketing, routes, and services to outlying areas
- integration with the tram system.
- the review of the Council's Local Transport Strategy.

EBUG is committed to sustainable transport. It is user/supporter led, independent of any operator, local or national authority, political party or trade union. Participation in EBUG is open to anyone with an interest on that basis.

EBUG co-operates with other user-focused groups, such as Bus Users Scotland at a national level, and more local groups, as appropriate.

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