

EBUG Annual General Meeting June 2022

The Committee's report

Our last AGM was in June 2021. Whilst COVID continues to affect everyone's lives, the past year has seen some degree of return to normality in EBUG's activities.

We're still on the lookout for new Committee members, or even just people who can 'muck in' occasionally. We particularly note the contribution of David Spaven, who's been a Committee member from the outset. David's moved on to pastures new, after a stalwart contribution from the start. Happy 'retirement' David (if that's the right word!).

Our website <https://edinburghbususers.group> is now well established. It shows some of our activities, which are also set out in members' bulletins, sent online to every member when they're published (numbers 6, 7, and 8 in the past year, all on the website). So this annual report concentrates on themes and issues, rather than listing everything in detail.

We resumed meetings with Lothian Buses' management, and continue to attend a variety of other meetings where the bus user voice needs to be heard. We had to engage quite forcefully with the Council behind the scenes to mitigate some bus-unfriendly proposals under its 'Meadows-George St' scheme. Some wins were achieved.

The Council election in May was perhaps the most important local event during the year, as it determined the direction of transport policy and practice for the next five years. EBUG, like many other groups, published a 'manifesto' of key points that any party should pursue in the new Council <https://edinburghbususers.group/category/ebug-policy/ebug-manifesto-2022>

We also invited the 5 main parties on the Council to respond to questions posed by our members (to which, disappointingly, the SNP and Conservatives failed to reply) and published an analysis of the parties' own manifestos. A side benefit of publishing our own manifesto was that it helped develop our position on a number of issues.

You'll know the result; 4 of the 5 main parties are pleased with it, to varying degrees. We make no assumptions about the extent to which transport affected the result. Nevertheless, it can reasonably be said that the electorate endorsed the general direction of transport policy in Edinburgh. That doesn't mean that every single action that has been, or will be, taken by the Council meets widespread approval.

We can reasonably expect that from 2022-2027 the Council will roll out implementation of the City Mobility Plan. Beyond that, we just say 'look at the manifestos of the parties that control the Council'. As regards buses, perhaps the main point of interest is that we can expect a major review of bus routes, and not just when 'Trams to Newhaven' start running. EBUG members will be well aware that operators, not the Council, determine routes and timetables.

However, the Council can use a variety of 'soft measures' to influence them. The Council is fully aware of our broad positions on the key issues (if it isn't, it hasn't been listening!). But we expect some battles ahead. See the notes below* for some useful points to file away.

We launched our Bus Stop Audit toolkit, with pilot audits on the Mound-Lauriston Place and Haymarket-Ardmillan Terrace corridors. The Audits involve small groups of volunteers

walking a section of a bus route, and assessing whether bus stops and any bus lanes are up to scratch. It could build up a library of bus infrastructure in the city to press for improvements as appropriate. The toolkit is now available for any group to use, though obviously we're keen to get copies of any that are completed.

Using Freedom of Information legislation, we found that the Council, notwithstanding its financial constraints, is failing to use the 'Section 75' mechanism to finance bus improvements. Section 75 payments are funds secured from developers to pay for facilities needed because of the development. When a development is built, the Council can secure payments to cover the cost of public transport improvements needed to serve it.

We found that, between 2015 and 2022, CEC secured a total of £84,230,232 in Section 75 payments. Of this, £670,306 was allocated to improving bus services; less than 0.8% of the total. We encourage members to send us examples of minimal or no investment in buses at new developments in/around Edinburgh (or even the opposite!).

Last year we were very concerned about the impact of the pandemic on bus services. Any significant drop in patronage threatens the viability of at least some bus routes. Government financial support provided bus operators a level of protection during the height of the pandemic. Our impression is that passenger numbers, while still far from their previous peak, are recovering.

Nevertheless, the quality and sheer passenger numbers that Edinburgh's buses provide cannot be taken for granted. Neither can the dividend Lothian Buses sends to the Council due to its long-standing commercial success.

From May 23-29, the first Scottish Bus Week took place. Our main contributions were:

- Emailing all Councillors and Community Councils to encourage take-up of the under-22s free bus travel scheme
- Launching our second Bus Stop Audit

'Notes below'

* 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 and bus gates.

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