**EBUG**

**Fifth Annual General Meeting**

**Augustine United Church, Edinburgh, 18:00 6 June 2024**

1. Attendance: Approximately 20 EBUG members, plus others. In the interests of personal security, names of attendees and those who submitted apologies are anonymised, except Committee members.
2. Apologies: 3
3. Harald Tobermann took the chair.
4. Introduction

Harald Tobermann welcomed members and non-members present, noting that this was an auspicious day for a number of reasons.

1. Minutes of fourth AGM (21 June 2023): moved Mike Birch, seconded Fiona McLean. Approved.
2. Committee’s report

Harald Tobermann introduced the Committee’s report on the previous year’s activities (previously circulated). No matters arising.

1. Accounts

Noted that transactions followed previous yearly patterns, and continue to maintain an adequate surplus. Adoption of annual accounts approved by acclamation.

1. Elections to Committee

The Chair reported that members of the existing Committee present at the AGM were standing for re-election. No other nominations had been received, and he therefore invited nominations from the floor. There being none, the Committee was elected: Harald Tobermann, Chris Day, Fiona McLean, Gail Clapton, Mike Birch, Jennifer Marlborough, Sally Millar, Bob Moseley, leaving 3 Committee places vacant.

1. There being no other business, the formal part of the meeting closed. Harald Tobermann introduced David Begg, former Transport Convener in Edinburgh, who has held a number of significant transport posts since then.

David observed that, whilst Edinburgh's transport is one of the UK's best, the city's bus network needs to be futureproofed. In particular, bus journey times had increased by 20% in the last 10 years. This was the key issue.

Covid and the introduction of contactless ticketing should have improved journey times, but this has not happened. With the reappearance of traffic congestion post-Covid, it is difficult to see a way forward while the Scottish Government withholds money from the Bus Partnership Fund. A 10% decrease in speeds reduces patronage by at least 10%. In 1997, with the introduction of Greenways in Edinburgh, vehicles infringing bus lanes were 15 times more likely to be prosecuted. Nowhere in the UK achieved the same level of modal shift to buses that Edinburgh did.

What has happened since then to reverse this progress? This legacy had dissipated through weaker enforcement and cutting operating hours in off-peak periods in 2015.

How can it return? David mentioned the concept of the Overton Window. The window frames the range of policies that can be promoted without appearing too extreme to gain or keep public office, given public opinion at the time.

The current 24 hour news cycle, and the advent of social media, makes the task more difficult. Nevertheless, the cost-benefit return of bus lanes significantly outweighs that of many other interventions; as much as 13 to 1.

Why were all-day bus lanes right in 1997, but abandoned in 2015? David recommended that groups like EBUG need to keep plugging away at the Bus Partnership Fund. Bus operators also need to be more vocal.

David has been struck by how far the UK has regressed. The Fuel Duty escalator has been abandoned. Sustainable transport is almost demonised. Municipal bus companies need to challenge their shareholders. Bus users need to press their elected representatives on bus journey times.

**Questions and audience discussion**

*What could EBUG learn from larger groups like Spokes?*

Bus use tends to attract fewer activists than cycling. Partly because safety motivates cyclists, partly reflecting a different demographic.

*Issues re bus data?*

There is a case for pressing for real bus journey-time statistics. This is easily available for rail users, and focuses campaigns for improvements.

Noted that many politicians don't use buses, or make a point of doing so.

Impact of tourism on buses in Edinburgh; and visitors using drivers for information.

*Roadworks. Why are bus routes diverted to suit construction of developments e.g. Leith St?*

Perhaps fines should be issued for lost passenger hours. It's strange that transport isn't regarded as a utility, like water, electricity etc.

The importance of the Lothian Buses dividend to its owner Councils; could be worth £20m/yr if patronage grows.

*Targets?*

Scottish Government's is to reduce car/km by 20% by 2030; but it is not clear how it plans to achieve it.

Noted some bizarre suggestions by active travel consultants, such as terminating through routes in the city centre.

Bus stop closures; sub-optimal road layouts for bus operations.

The time having reached 19:30, Harald Tobermann closed the meeting with thanks to David Begg.