

NOTES FROM MEETING WITH FIRST BUS ON 6th SEPTEMBER 2011 AT JOHN MUIR HOUSE, HADDINGTON

Present

Cllr Jacquie Bell
Paul Thomas – First Bus
Cheryl Fleming – First Bus
John Gorman – First Bus
Ros Lowrie – Parent from East Linton
Cllr Barry Turner – Transport Spokesperson ELC

Apology

Cllr Paul McLennan – Council Leader

Issues

1) East Linton School Service to/from Dunbar Grammar School

Major issues had arisen at the start of term with children being left behind both in East Linton and at the school on a number of occasions. Initial problem had been capacity on the coach style buses but there had also been breakdowns.

Paul Thomas apologised for what had happened.

Duplicate buses now run on the peak school journey times.

A bus inspector is now on the route to ensure children get on the buses. In case of breakdown a spare bus is parked within East Lothian – nearer than the Dalkeith Depot.

In future years First will work with ELC staff to separate the passes needed from East Linton to Dunbar. This will allow preparation for the number of pupils needing to travel. This will increase again in 2012. Once the number of pupils is identified First will have a meeting with the school and Andrew McLellan from ELC. A parent would be welcome to attend. The earlier plans are made the better.

Duplicate buses will continue to run at the main times. Also a Bendibus is to be trialled. This allows up to 120 passengers with 72 seats. First are planning to buy them from an Irish airport. It is expected that 3 of them will be used on the X45.

Paul Thomas will also discuss with the school and Andrew McLellan about extending the timing of the passes until 5.30 pm so that children can attend after school activities. At present the passes run until 5 but the hourly bus runs after that.

It was mentioned that people can register for updates on travel timings e.g. late running buses via the First Bus website. First are also to launch on Twitter. It was

suggested that if there are problems on the school run First could contact the school so that texts could be sent to parents.

2) Breakdowns

There have been frequent breakdowns on the X45 including 4 between 15th and 18th August. On 18th August the bus had broken down on the dual carriageway just outside Haddington. The radio was broken and the driver had had to use a passenger's mobile phone to summon help. Luckily the next bus that came had been a low loader as if it had been coach style about 15 people would have been left waiting for over an hour.

Paul Thomas apologised for the breakdowns. He spoke of sensor issues on some of the Scanias. If these indicate a fault e.g. overheating the driver has to stop.

In case of breakdowns a bus is now kept within East Lothian.

There have also been problems with malfunctioning of Almex ticket machines. This is being taken up with the manufacturer. They are to be upgraded. If the driver cannot use his machine he can give hand written tickets until the supply of these runs out. After that passengers can travel free.

3) Accessibility and Safety on Coaches

The steep steps are a difficulty for older people, people with disabilities and mums with buggies. A number of people are unable to use the bus because they cannot get on.

Paul Thomas said that a different design of coach is being introduced (bought from London) which is slightly easier to get on.

It is also intended to alternate coach and low access buses. New timetables will indicate the times when accessible low level buses are intended to run.

Also issue that the stop buzzers are high up. Thus need to stand up whilst the coach is moving to indicate wanting to get off. An issue for shorter people/children in particular little to hang on to when doing this. Handrail for the lift is very wobbly on some of the coaches e.g. CV55 AGZ. Also at points where passengers have to stand to get off e.g. Leith Street, Waverly Station limited places to hang on whilst the bus is in motion as seat backs are soft and no rail at luggage rack height. Engineers will be spoken to to see if anything can be done.

4) 253

Concerns had been raised by Innerwick residents and at East Lammermuir Community Council about the reliability of this service although it was welcomed as an addition to the 2 hourly Perryman.

Cheryl Fleming advised that only 1 bus had not gone through Innerwick – that was due to a breakdown.

There was an issue in the early days of the route when a driver forgot to turn up to Innerwick. When passengers alerted him he had braked and been hit by a lorry. Paul Thomas had advised that the driver of this vehicle had been dealt with.

It was noted that change IS GIVEN on the 253 route only.

The 253 will cease on 30th September. It is hoped to run it again for summer 2012.

5) Cross East Lothian Connections

The X45 is timetabled to arrive in Haddington before the routes that go to Tranent and Musselburgh. However, the X45 often arrives in Haddington after the connection has left. This is an issue for people going to work, QMU and the Job Centre in Musselburgh. This timekeeping will be looked at.

There are also issues of connectivity with trains at Dunbar

6) Orchardfield East Linton

Some buses are having difficulty getting along this road due to parked vehicles. Paul Thomas advised that the matter has been passed to the police. Vehicles are blocking a registered bus route.

7) Customer Service

Concerns have been raised about contacting First Bus e.g. letters not being responded to, vague information when calling about issues.

Cheryl Fleming advised that the Customer Services section has been revamped. Real people are available to speak to 24 hours a day.

8) Future Meeting

First Staff are to meet with Paul McLennan and Barry Turner.

Jacquie Bell

12/9/11