

transportation@eastlothian.gov.uk

Following your invitation to comment on bus services in East Lothian as part of your consultation exercise pending a review of next year's subsidy negotiations, RELBUS is pleased to do so.

RELBUS readily appreciates that budgetary constraints will be a primary consideration in shaping the forthcoming contracts for supported bus services, but notwithstanding this feels that several improvements can be made without incurring major additional costs simply by maximising what already exists and ensuring that co-ordination of bus/rail facilities are exploited wherever possible. In addition the newly formed East Lothian Community Rail Partnership, which has a mandate along with the new Scotrail franchisee (to be announced in October this year) to focus, amongst other things, on bus/rail co-ordination has made a submission to you. RELBUS is fully supportive of that which only covers those services that pass or stop close to a railway station in East Lothian. In this paper we also make comments on bus services that do not pass or stop close to railway stations.

We understand that the East Lothian Community Rail Partnership propose to support the introduction of an East Lothian tourist joint bus/rail ticket that will offer travel from all stations in Central Scotland to North Berwick and Dunbar which will incorporate an all-day bus ticket for use on buses in East Lothian. This of course has still to be negotiated and all stakeholders will be approached in due course, and we know that revenue sharing agreement and other items will have to be dealt with – so it may some time before this comes to fruition. **However, it is important that the shape of East Lothian's supported bus services are designed now to accommodate this possibility and also bus/rail co-ordination which will be the easier and quicker objective to meet.**

It should for example be possible to advertise an East Lothian tourist ticket from say Ayr, Balloch, Glasgow etc. to North Berwick connecting with buses on services 120 (North Berwick – Dunbar), 121 (North Berwick – Haddington) and X24 (North Berwick – Edinburgh). If advertised properly, such a facility would increase tourist numbers substantially to both North Berwick and Dunbar allowing travel without a car in view of increasing parking difficulties in these towns.

Issues on current services which, if adopted, will result in improved connections or timetables for little or no additional cost, the concept being to make greater use and awareness of what already exists, and detailed below under the specific route.

120 Dunbar – North Berwick (Eve Coaches, Dunbar)

This service could be radically improved along the following lines:

In North Berwick the terminus in Quality Street is not convenient for the majority of potential passengers and cannot be reached by any other bus service. Its current terminus there harks back to the original licence holder Stark's of Dunbar who were taken over by Scottish Omnibuses (Eastern Scottish) in 1964. Things have moved on since then but the bus service has not. If the bus is extended to the Seabird Centre along Victoria Road (which it does anyway for layover but not on service), then along the Quadrant and into St. Baldred's Road to the Railway Station, it could terminate there, and return via Station Hill, Forth Street and Victoria Road to the Seabird Centre, then back via Quality Street to take up the existing route. This will not only give a service between the Seabird Centre and the Railway Station both ways, but also, if re-timed to meet trains every two hours, would provide an advertised connecting service to the various villages into/from Edinburgh which does not presently exist. It also means that the West End of North Berwick will have a bus service to Dunbar which it currently does not, and further that passengers from the trains to say Lochbridge Road in North Berwick will also have a direct bus service from the Railway Station. At

present First Group buses that serve the station stop only go into Edinburgh because of the one way system.

The additional running time would be 5 minutes from Dunbar and a similar amount from North Berwick, well within the current layover period and that would allow approximately 10 minutes at the Railway Station to connect with trains. In other words, no additional buses or driver hours required. The existing driver layover break is taken at the Dunbar end, therefore any additional costs would be incremental and could well pay for themselves with increased usage.

Potentially this is the most tourist orientated route in the County. It serves Tantallon Caravan Park (where timetable leaflets should be made available), Tantallon Castle (likewise), Preston Mill (likewise), Foxlake and East Links Park. None of these attractions are specifically detailed as timing points in the timetable and with the Seabird Centre in addition, it should be promoted as such at every opportunity. The proposed possible East Lothian Tourist Ticket mentioned above would maximise use, increase revenue and potentially cut subsidy once established.

If you are serious about tourism, a Sunday bus service would have to be re-introduced in the summer.

121 Haddington – North Berwick (Prentice of Haddington)

A very minor timetable alteration would result in this service connecting with trains at North Berwick station. At present they miss each other by about a minute. No additional costs required. Therefore the potential additional journey opportunities would create additional demand again providing advertised connections for the villages en route with the train service to Edinburgh from North Berwick.

Tourist opportunities are Fenton Barns Retail Village (incidentally some shops there make no mention of the 121 service suggesting passengers travel to Gullane on First X24 and walk for 20 minutes when a bus passes their door), Merryhatton Garden Centre, East Fortune Caravan Park (5 minute walk), Museum of Flight and National Flag Centre. Prentice recognises some of these in the timetable, but if the East Lothian tourist ticket is introduced, and the buses connect with train at North Berwick, substantial additional passenger traffic could be generated.

Again if you are serious about tourism, a Sunday bus service in the summer should be introduced.

Suggested timetables for both the 120 and 121 showing connections at North Berwick have been produced (by RELBUS committee member Harry Barker) for the East Lothian Community Rail Partnership submission.

123 Gifford Circle and 110 New Winton / Elphinston / Prestonpans (Prentice of Haddington).

To get the most out of these services, which require two small buses, the concept of having one centred on Haddington only and the other Tranent only requires to be understood. At present the 123 tries, unsuccessfully, to connect both Haddington and Tranent with villages and as such results in a very awkward timetable.

In considering the 110 first, south of Tranent what is required is an infrequent service working Tranent – New Winton – Easter Pencaitland (113 terminus) – East Saltoun – West Saltoun – Glenkinchie – Wester Pencaitland – Easter Pencaitland – New Winton – Tranent. Journey time would be around 35 minutes and perhaps four or five well spread journeys will be all that is necessary. This therefore connects all these smaller villages with Tranent (connections to Edinburgh) and would mean that the 123 Gifford Circle would no longer need to consider Tranent as a destination but

rather concentrate on connecting to/from Haddington only. With only just over 2 hours daily taken up with this service, the bus could then be used on connecting Elphinston and Prestonpans with Tranent.

The present 110 frequency is too high and unbalanced. The 110A could be interworked as part of the 123 Gifford Circle – see below.

Glenkinchie Distillery is on the proposed route, and advertised connections to/from Edinburgh at Tranent would take advantage of this tourist attraction which, by definition, should be visited by public transport due to drink/driving considerations. Another use of a tourist attraction to boost passenger numbers and keep subsidies down. I am sure the Distillery could be persuaded to chip into some of the tourist literature costs. Just imagine a tourist leaflet in Edinburgh promoting public transport to the Distillery – it could really take off. At present at RELBUS it has been noted that regularly passengers travel to Pencaitland on the 113 and walk the 1.5 miles to Glenkinchie to undertake their tour of the Distillery. An additional possibility is a through ticket from Edinburgh – Glenkinchie albeit that different operators would be involved. (It is understood that the distillery can cater for private parties and will run a minibus to/from Edinburgh which merely emphasises that there is a real demand.)

Moving onto the 123 Gifford Circle: If this bus is concentrated only on connecting Haddington with the various villages, avoiding Tranent altogether (that being covered by the proposed 110 above), a more even interval service could be provided. In addition, the 110A (if still required) could be built into this service as a journey from Haddington to Ormiston via Pencaitland thereby providing a direct service from Ormiston to Haddington which does not currently exist. A return journey should also prove possible. I would envisage three basic routes – Haddington – Gifford via Bolton; Haddington – Gifford – East Saltoun – West Saltoun – Glenkinchie – Pencaitland – Haddington and Haddington – Ormiston via Pencaitland as mentioned above.

Timetabling could result in some journeys offering cross county connections with 121 North Berwick to Haddington both ways, and other principal routes at Haddington including Perryman's 253 to Berwick and Dunbar. Obviously these should be advertised.

128/129 Haddington – New Royal Infirmary and Ocean Terminal (Eve of Dunbar)

Our only criticism of these routes is that last year the timetables were reduced and as such do not follow a clock-face pattern making potential passengers less likely to use them as they will not be able to remember when they run. In appreciating that economics undoubtedly played a part re the subsidisation budget, it would be useful if some sort of more regular frequency could be introduced, possibly on a two hourly headway.

Conclusion

Without using any additional resources, and thereby keeping costs down, it is possible to hugely improve local bus services in East Lothian by simply exploiting what is already there, increasing travel opportunities, improving publicity (including your website which is poor) and co-ordinating services and using the tourist trade to increase patronage to keep rural buses running.