

# RELBUS ANNUAL REPORT

## Highlights of 2013-2014

### Statement from the chair

*It has been another busy year for RELBUS featuring not only our quarterly participatory meetings but the now established mix of initiatives, responses and direct involvement with other organisations which are dealt with below. It has been a year when RELBUS has been reaching out and having more and more influence on what is happening to bus service provision in East Lothian.*

*The highpoint of last year's AGM was a thoughtful and entertaining talk by local public transport expert Barry Hutton, Chartered Town and Transport Planner, whose book 'Planning Sustainable Transport' was published in 2013. He proposed that public transport must have a defined explicit purpose to overcome its inherent unattractiveness (e.g. it is less convenient and less comfortable than the alternatives; it can only be delivered at times and places which are not exactly as you wish; AND you can never choose your travelling companions!). And so he highlighted and dwelt upon the power of public transport to deliver substantial economic benefits while meeting social and environmental goals. The 'benefits' of public transport should not to be measured by ticket revenue but by their effect upon land values, council tax yields, gross value added etc.*

*The big success story of the year has been the launch of the Passenger Charter, a RELBUS idea taken up by the East Lothian Bus Forum. It represents a new deal for bus passengers and shows what can be achieved when different organisations working in the same field come together to find common ground and a common cause. RELBUS is very pleased with the outcome and looks forward to close cooperation between the parties to deliver on the deal. More below.*

*You can see that we're doing a lot. If you are interested in what we do then get in touch and get involved.*

*BARRY TURNER, Chair of RELBUS  
info@relbus.org.uk*

### Membership and Communications

RELBUS has 84 members around the county and membership remains free. We use Facebook to keep members up-to-date and have 153 followers on our page. Our regular press releases keep local people up-to-date with our initiatives, and our website ([www.relbus.org.uk](http://www.relbus.org.uk)) has recently been refreshed, thanks to support from Sustaining Dunbar. Our mobile version of the website promotes the different ways that information about buses can be accessed on the move see [mobile.RELBUS.org.uk](http://mobile.RELBUS.org.uk). Our four evening meetings in the last year were attended by a range of stakeholders including community councillors.

## Financial report

RELBUS currently operates without financial resources, relying on support from Sustaining Dunbar for occasional printing and postage, and East Lothian Council for the use of meeting rooms. Thank you to both.

## Current bus issues

RELBUS continues to channel bus users' concerns to East Lothian Council and local operators. It is important that the operators hear of users' experiences so please continue to report issues direct to operators, to RELBUS, or via your community councillors. Some matters raised in the last year have been delays and the need for express buses on service 113, the ongoing regularity problems on First's services and poor quality of the buses, and bus stop issues in Dunbar.

## Bus stop infrastructure

We've long highlighted the poor state of the bus stops in East Lothian, and get frequent comments about timetables posted in bus stops being out of date. We are pleased to hear that East Lothian Council is conducting a review of current bus stop infrastructure and look forward to seeing at least the main 'hub' bus stops in each town being upgraded in due course. We understand that the bus stop flags will also be standardised to match those in Edinburgh where the services that stop there are listed on the flag.

## Passenger Charter

Over the course of 2013, RELBUS pulled together representatives from the 5 local bus operators to agree a charter which will see them working towards certain standards of service. A copy of the charter is available at [www.relbus.org.uk](http://www.relbus.org.uk) and from East Lothian Council through its offices and libraries. It will also be displayed on bus shelters. The aim is to improve co-operation and dialogue between bus companies, the council and passenger groups. The charter sets out responsibilities of the bus operators, actions that the council will take to support bus operations, how the council, operators and passenger groups will work together to deliver improvements and what is expected of passengers as part of the deal.

## East Lothian Bus Forum

The East Lothian Bus Forum chaired by Councillor Michael Veitch has met twice in the last year, bringing bus operators together with bus users and community groups to create a network that works for everyone. RELBUS always attends this forum, suggests agenda items and continues to make the case for better infrastructure, better information and better integration. Operators and the Council are seeing the benefits of informed consultation, and we appreciate the resultant movements on policies and services which reflect RELBUS priorities.

## More buses meeting trains

Better bus/rail integration is a RELBUS priority. Following a review of the local buses, East Lothian Council requested changes to a number of the services that it pays for to improve the connections with trains at Dunbar and Prestonpans. The Council is also looking at the siting of bus stops near train stations to ensure that these are easily accessible and visible.

## Combined timetables

Better information is another RELBUS priority. East Lothian Council is to produce combined operator timetables for the major bus stop 'hubs' in East Lothian, including Dunbar and Haddington, where the presence of multiple operators makes finding the right bus a confusing process. We look forward to seeing these in place in the near future.

## X1 Haddington to Wallyford

RELBUS was delighted when Prentice Coaches started the new X1 bus link from Haddington to meet the trains in Wallyford earlier in the year as we feel that bus integration with rail is crucial for a viable rural sustainable transport network. We are disappointed to hear that due to low passenger numbers the service has been withdrawn but we would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their innovative and community spirit in taking the Haddington Community Development Trust's idea on board. RELBUS will support any proposals to reintroduce this link given local house building proposals.

## Links with other organisations

Being affiliated with **Bus Users UK**, allows RELBUS to campaign effectively at a national as well as a local level. One of our committee members, Harry Barker, provides a vital link between Bus Users UK and RELBUS and has recently been appointed to the Bus Appeals Body Scotland team as passenger representative. The Bus Appeals Body Scotland is the final arbiter concerning passenger complaints that have not been fully resolved.

The brand new **East Lothian Community Rail Partnership** for the North Berwick/Dunbar lines was formally recognised by the Scottish Government in July as a way of drawing all parties together to improve the passenger experience, and particularly links with local train stations. A key aim will be improving bus/rail integration and RELBUS is pleased to be supporting the Partnership with this. See [www.acorp.uk.com](http://www.acorp.uk.com) for more information.

RELBUS is represented on **SEStran, the South East Scotland Transport Partnership**, by virtue of our Chairman, Barry Turner, being a non-council member. He has been a voice on rural transport issues and innovation in bus service provision across the region.

## **Bus services tendering**

With the current East Lothian supported services contracts due to expire next summer, we are pleased that for the first time the council will be consulting local people about what their requirements are before working out how best to meet them. RELBUS has been asked to submit a paper for inclusion in the consultation, drawing on our experiences over the last few years.

New national guidance promotes the tendering of bus services based upon intelligence, i.e. information about local needs and about the available supply across all sectors to meet those needs. It is an alternative approach to relying to a great extent on conventional buses by fully involving all potential players with their various capabilities, and achieving better value for money. RELBUS saw the potential of this approach in East Lothian and the chairman produced a paper entitled 'Intelligent Tendering' setting out how it might be taken forward locally. This has gone to SEStran and to the council. We are particularly pleased that the council is currently considering how taxis and other services could fill some of the needs, where a full-sized bus is unnecessary.

## **RELBUS Responding**

During the year RELBUS made a submission supporting in principle the provisions of MSP Iain Gray's proposed parliamentary Bill on bus regulation having assessed its proposals against our own priorities for improving bus services. The Bill proposes to provide local authorities with greater powers to set service levels for local bus services, including a power to group profitable routes with non-profitable ones before they are put out to tender with operators. The premise of Iain Gray's proposal is that current arrangements for the provision of bus services are letting down some communities and that the unregulated market has failed to protect those who depend on local services. The RELBUS response to the consultation on the Bill can be seen on our website. Also during the year RELBUS was invited by Bus Users UK to consider becoming an official Bus Users group. We decided to remain an independent affiliate. We were concerned about loss of identity and autonomy and about a lessened ability to be political or controversial and adversarial when we wished.

## **Buses and Tourism**

RELBUS, in its latest initiative, is pressing for bus services to be adapted so that they are more attractive to tourists. East Lothian has a fantastic tourist offering but getting to and between our tourist attractions other than by car is not easy. RELBUS believes that there is much scope for making it more easy and convenient for visitors to use public transport to reach what is on offer and wants to work with the council and bus operators to see what can be done. It has drawn up and sent to the council a list of possible initiatives and improvements for consideration as part of the forthcoming tendering process. Better connections for tourists also means better connections for local people.