

Focus on Bus Passengers

A RELBUS DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

Introduction

RELBUS campaigns for better rural bus services. RELBUS' main aim is to represent the passenger's voice. RELBUS, although a relatively young body, is well positioned to seek the views of East Lothian bus passengers through its network of members, local representatives and Community Councils, a web presence, and through local meetings. RELBUS aims to represent the passenger perspective at all opportunities to politicians, to government and to local government officials and to bus operators.

Bus operators, including those supported and run by East Lothian Council face many challenges. Public policies and strategies at Central, Scottish and local Government levels are increasingly directed at stimulating patronage of public transport. East Lothian Council's Draft Local Transport Strategy echoes these policy directions, and the recent ELC mini conference on supported and community transport recognised the need for a more cohesive and directed approach.

Despite the significant subsidy that exists to support operators and passengers, bus users frequently feel their voice is not heard and that making public transport choices is neither easy nor any longer an affordable option. RELBUS therefore wants to see a new focus on passengers. RELBUS believes that to construct public transport services that are not only well used but also well regarded requires adequate investment in wide passenger consultation.

The following is an assimilation of best practices and the types of measures that would help passengers use public transport out of choice rather than just necessity. We set out what RELBUS thinks companies and public authorities should be doing now and in the future.

We are now seeking wider views on the issues raised and our campaign priorities. Please mail responses by 20th Oct 2012 to info@relbus.org.uk or send them to Philip Immirzi, RELBUS c/o BeGreen, 16 Westport, Dunbar, EH42 1BU. If you want your response to remain confidential, mark it clearly so.

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Bus Service Information

Our research suggests that lack of good information about bus transport choices is an important barrier to people using bus services as a travel option, rather than out of necessity. The problems are compounded on certain routes where multiple operators to run services in competition. There is no ELC policy on the provision of harmonised information and therefore there is a glut of information, which users find on the one hand confusing and on the other inadequate.

The future holds considerable promise of improvement, as electronic forms of information take hold. However the diffusion of information via the internet and mobile applications is not as wide as it could be and the quality of the services does not compare with those available for rail users.

Now

RELBUS believes that all bus operators should provide up to date and accurate information about their services as a minimum:-

- Clear and easy to read timetables
- Maps showing routes
- Schematic maps showing connections
- Fare information
- Information about special fare deals
- Accessibility of services to passengers with mobility requirements
- Information about changes to services, permanent or temporary

All timetables and timetable leaflets for all local services should be easily accessible through a range of outlets, situated close to where people are travelling from (e.g. a local shop in a small community that has reasonable opening hours). These outlets should display recognisable advertisements and be listed on the ELC website. Timetables should be clear and easy to

understand and should also take into account the needs of partially sighted users.

Printed information should also carry an *Effective From* date, and all information about changes to services should be distributed to outlets well before the start date.

Important information such as the 'No Change' policies should also be displayed on relevant timetables, together with useful or indicative information about fares to major destinations.

It is not reasonable to expect passengers to have the correct fare if that information is not displayed prominently.

The above should be available from:-

- Bus stops
- Leaflet dispensers on buses
- Local outlets such as tourist information offices, council offices, libraries and High Street shops located near major bus stops or community based organisations
- Bus Operator's websites
- Telephone enquiry services provided by the Bus Operators, which should be open during bus operating hours (??)
- Independent travel advice websites such as Traveline Scotland
- Secondary schools and further information establishments
- Mobile phone TXT services and Apps

In future

- Major and certain minor bus stops should have combined standardised timetables in the East Lothian Council area livery
- In the absence of local bus stations Transport Information Hubs should be developed for all the major settlements in East Lothian

- Combined timetables, which list all services serving particular destinations should be easily available.
- Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) plans for East Lothian should be advanced and adequately funded with trials for screen displays in shop windows and coffee shops and investment in enabling mobile telephone enabled services.
- Public Transport Travel Guides to serve both the regular travelling public as well as tourism markets and a travel map that is updated and republished at least yearly.
- Marked bus stops should display QR coded information

Bus stops

Major stops display QR coded information. It would be useful to explore best practices in this area.

Major and certain minor bus stops (e.g. in East Linton) should have combined standardised timetables in the East Lothian Council area livery.

Information Hubs

There are no bus stations in East Lothian. Bus stations offer a variety of benefits: protection from the elements; a safe and unthreatening shelter for passengers; visible staff on duty to deal with enquiries and problems. Clear and up-to-date information on bus services can be provided. Bus station facilities can include an enquiry/ticket office, open at sensible times and facilities such as toilets.

However, it is unlikely that bus stations will be introduced in East Lothian, but as an alternative RELBUS believes that the idea of *Transport Information Hubs* should be developed for the major settlements in East Lothian. Hubs could display the up to date information covering all the principal public transport routes bring together public transport options, bus and train, and could include connections for those whose journey begins or ends on foot or by cycle. Hubs could provide shelter, extra security and illumination, cycle parking and potentially satisfy other functions too.

Maps showing bus routes and estimates of travel time and bus frequency would also be required. These hubs should also provide useful information

about connecting services to major destinations in adjoining areas, including information about walking and cycling.

This assumes some co-ordination with bus and train operators, and walking and cycling groups, but which could be overseen by ELC or a partnership project board.

Combined Timetable Information

RELBUS would like to see greater emphasis on producing combined timetables, which list all services serving particular destinations. There is considerable demand by passengers to see all available options and collaboration and co-operation between Bus Operators could encourage greater bus use.

We understand operators' reluctance to promote competing services, but we are aware that in other areas some operators already include competing services in their timetable books, (and according to Bus Users UK have done so for many years.) By showing the full range of travel opportunities available bus users are less likely to be dissuaded from using the bus if the return journey is available at a time that suits them.

Real Time Passenger Information

Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) plans for East Lothian remain at an early stage. RELBUS understands that the costs of RTPI fixed infrastructure are considerable and supports efforts to site (less expensive) display screens in shop windows and coffee shops, e.g. near or at a major terminus or principal High Street bus stop; and efforts to provide information by mobile telephony.

Real Time Information must be just that, rather than simply detailing scheduled departure times (though in the absence of other information this would be a good place to start.)

Displays are often provided in urban situations, where frequencies are high, but this information would be considerably more valuable on rural or interurban routes, where frequencies can be low and where passengers need reassurance a bus is actually coming.

Public Transport Travel Guides

RELBUS would like to encourage Bus and Train Operators, and ELC to fund the production of a 'Getting around East Lothian' public transport guide with

detailed insets for all major settlements. This could serve regular travelling public as well as tourism markets. Travel information from major settlements in East Lothian to specific destinations such as *hospitals, further education establishments* and *tourist destinations* would be held in one place. The information guide could be paid for through advertising.

This should include a full service list with frequencies, an index to places served, including major visitor attractions and places of interest, operator details and a list of major timetable outlets.

Park and Ride and modal interchange points should also be highlighted. It is anticipated that this map would be updated and republished at least yearly.

Bus Stops

The passengers journey starts at a bus stop and all too often the infrastructure is to be found wanting. If the timetables are present and up-to-date and also clearly displayed then the condition of the shelter isn't. Sometimes the infrastructure itself may be older, but some newer infrastructure has not withstood the vagaries of time so well. Poor hygiene is a problem for certain stops, with both the building, and pavements inside and out unappealing of foul smelling.

RELBUS supports Sustaining Dunbar's project to carry out a wider survey of the condition of bus stops around East Lothian.

Now

The minimum standard should be:-

- A clean bus stop where passengers can wait without fear for personal safety
- Up to date bus timetables which can be easily read during operating hours
- Bus stop location plates and SMS identification number
- that ELC monitor operators' timetables and related information at bus stops is clear and up to date.

ELC should police and enforce the obligation that operators' timetables and related information at bus stops is clear and up to date.

In future

RELBUS supports the work of Sustaining Dunbar on the 'adopt a bus stop' project, which has seen the ELC open up displays to additional useful travel information alongside community information.

Opening up community bus stops to displaying wider information about what is going on or is available in the community could encourage people to take greater pride in the infrastructure and help to police issues such as cleanliness and timetable quality.

- Combined timetables, with a uniform East Lothian livery.
- Displays are opened up to display other useful travel information alongside community information
- Communities are actively encouraged to take greater pride in the infrastructure and help to police issues such as cleanliness and timetable quality
- Combined timetables are available in a uniform East Lothian livery.
- More stops are built out and accessible to all
- Bus stops have clearer naming conventions and include an indication of the direction of travel
- Restrictions on unnecessary idling
- Resident consultation & approval of new and modified stop locations are put in place

Fares and Tickets

Now

Bus operators should provide summary fare information on their own timetables, all major stops, and on all their websites.

Bus operators should also provide information about their special fare deals.

This information should be available on the bus operator's websites and provided in the form of printed material to all main timetable outlets and displayed at bus stops where practical.

RELBUS believes:

- that fare information should be available from Bus operators, who should as far as practical provide summary fare information on their own timetables
- that fare information should be available from main timetable outlets and major marked bus stops and on all their websites
- that exact fare and no change policies should be properly advertised and accompanied

In future

RELBUS believes there a number of ingredients to Fair Fares:

- Fare levels should be affordable fares to ensure that bus travel remains accessible to all sections of the community
- Exact fares will only apply where there is a flat fare in place
- All operators have promotional multiple ticket purchasing of season ticketing
- Smart payments using contactless payment and mobile telephony, perhaps before boarding could make life much easier for passengers and encourage patronage
- Through ticketing or joint ticketing whereby a ticket bought from one operator, is valid on any other serving the same route.

Fair fares

RELBUS believes there a number of ingredients to Fair Fares. Fair Fares need to be competitive as well as affordable. Innovative fare payment methods and ticketing approaches are required. 'Rewards' for regular passengers are also desirable. There is potential to link with other bodies to offer discounts and

encourage sustainable travel e.g. a percentage off the fair price for members of a car club, or holders of a rail season ticket.

Fare levels will always be a source of controversy among passengers, and while BUS USERS UK recognises the importance of viable bus services, it continues to campaign for Affordable fares to ensure that bus travel remains accessible to all sections of the community. This is particularly important for those to whom the bus is the only alternative to not travelling at all.

Exact fares and no change

Easier fare payment can speed up passenger flow. While exact fare and no change policies can make sense to many regular travellers and can have distinct operational and security benefits, they are perceived as unfair by infrequent travellers and more likely to discourage than encourage regular bus use.

RELBUS believes that exact fare schemes are acceptable when there is a flat fare or the value can be made up from a minimum number of coins, and the information is clearly displayed at all stops.

Multiple ticket purchases

RELBUS would like to see more operators promote multiple ticket purchases such as '10 tickets for the price of 8' where the tickets can be used over a period of time. This not only encourages bus use but removes the barrier of needing to look out cash before boarding the bus (especially in cases where the fare is a matter of mystery).

Payment by debit card/mobile phone

Why not? It would make life easier for passengers.

Smart ticketing

The development of smartcard ticketing is simplifying payment and developments in various parts of the country are being closely watched, but the ability to purchase tickets at outlets before boarding – commonplace in Europe - is also highly desirable.

Day and season tickets

RELBUS would like to see the greater use of Day Tickets and Season Tickets, sold by the driver or at selected outlets, which allow unlimited travel. Books of

prepaid tickets should be available for journeys to major destinations from local outlets such as those outlined in Section 2. Bus Service Information.

Joint ticketing

Passengers don't always distinguish between operators and cannot always understand why a ticket bought from one operator, should not be accepted by another if it is serving the same route.

Operators are often reluctant to provide opportunities for joint ticketing with other bus operators or rail services.

Operators may cite uncertainty about the response of the competition authorities as the reason, but particularly where service frequencies are poor, in the evenings and on Sundays, such availability would be invaluable for passengers.

Timetabling

Now

RELBUS recognises that punctuality and reliability are sometimes out of the control of the bus operator. Companies should aim to provide

- a punctual and reliable service
- as far as practical information on known delays
- compensation for passengers who inconvenienced by lengthy delays

Punctuality is important on all bus routes, whether frequent urban services or occasional rural services. Bus companies can do little when buses are caught up in situations beyond their control, but can do more to keep passengers informed of the reasons for delays. For example Prentice Buses are to be commended for making use of Twitter to keep passengers informed of the progress of their buses during the severe weather last winter.

Reliability can be affected by external factors, but chronic, predictable and regular unreliability should lead to speedy service improvements.

Compensation should be offered to passengers in the form of bus ticket vouchers or refunds in the event of delays caused by events within the bus

company's control - vehicle breakdown or non-availability, staff absences or shortages.

In future

In the future RELBUS would like to see:

- integrated timetabling, between bus services and between buses and trains
- on the spot compensation for delays or when other things go wrong
- communication using an appropriate alert systems of delays (e.g. Twitter)

One award winning company provides a free journey if passengers reach their stop destination more than 20 minutes late.

RELBUS would like to see wider empowerment of drivers to administer refunds on the spot when things go wrong.

Buses and Accessibility

Bus services should be easily identifiable and their destinations and direction of travel obvious. We find that in East Lothian there are many different liveries and certain operators have multiple liveries. This is confusing.

Buses are not always clean nor comfortable and easy to board, though the practice of using coach style buses is hopefully a thing of the past.

However, accessibility will continue to be an issue, for even when a low floor bus is made available drivers who do not or cannot drive close enough to the kerb make it difficult for the less abled. We do not know whether there are many instances of built up / built out pavements to ease alighting for those with buggies, elderly or disabled.

RELBUS finds that general information about the accessibility of bus services to passengers with additional mobility requirements is wanting.

RELBUS has received complaints from members about the attitude of drivers, the public face of the bus operator. Customer care standards need to be maintained and seem to be a more pronounced issue with national operators.

Now

RELBUS believes that:

- Bus services should be easy to identify and destinations and direction of travel obvious.
- Companies should use standard liveries
- Buses are easy to board and that coach style buses only used in emergencies
- Low floor bus should be used
- That kerbside improvements are made where practical to make boarding easier for the less abled
- Instructions and training are routinely administered to drivers to assist the less abled
- General information about the “accessibility” of bus services to passengers with additional mobility requirements is wanting.
- Buses are clean and fresh, easy to move about in; provide adequate storage and properly heated and ventilated; driven thoughtfully and basically comfortable
- That drivers are friendly and welcoming; assist those with mobility problems; provide useful and helpful information and
- That driver service is monitored, perhaps using Mystery Shopping

Ease of identification is often a problem for users especially where there are a range of liveries.

Ease of boarding has improved greatly with the spread of low-floor buses, but the advantages are sometimes lost because illegally parked vehicles restrict access to bus stops, or where drivers make little or no effort to pull up.

Where it proves impossible to provide a service with the same type of bus throughout, journeys operated by low-floor buses should be clearly identified in the timetable and that type of bus should always be available for those journeys.

RELBUS welcomes the provision of proper luggage and buggy space, together with obvious and adequate handholds. Where wheelchair/ buggy space is provided, it should not make it difficult for other passengers to find their seat, especially those who are older or less mobile.

RELBUS would like to see operators making a serious commitment to providing space to carry bikes on their buses in the near future (either inside or outside); making it easier for people to complete their journey by bike is an important element of joining-up our public transport system.

Proper heating and ventilation would appear to be an automatic requirement, yet many complain about inadequately heated buses in the winter months, or excessively hot and inadequately ventilated buses in the summer. Older buses mostly fall short of reasonable expectations. Operators should ensure that existing heating and ventilation systems are in full working order and well-maintained.

Personal safety is a matter of increasing concern for many passengers, and there is often a reluctance to travel later in the evening, or at the end of the school day, or on the upper decks of double-deck buses because of rowdy, anti-social and sometimes violent behaviour.

In future

In the future RELBUS supports:

- a commitment to providing some space on vehicles to carry bikes on their buses too
- smaller and quieter buses that are accessible to all

Promotion

RELBUS believes that:

- Buses and bus services should be properly promoted as a socially acceptable form of transport
- Local businesses should be encouraged to include public transport information on their websites especially, but not limited to, their 'How to get here' page.

- Liveries and branding, including sponsorship of buses by local destinations will play a part in this

Complaints Procedures

Now

RELBUS believes that complaints procedures should be allied to improvements or suggestions scheme and should be

- properly advertised
- and complaints handled promptly and efficiently
- suggestions for service improvements and changes should be acknowledged
- a transparent complaints appeals procedures in place
- complaints statistics published annually and suitably classified (for example - drivers' behaviour, reliability, information provision).

After a bus journey, bus users with complaints or suggestions should feel confident that

- complaints will be dealt with promptly and efficiently
- suggestions for service improvements and changes will be considered and acknowledged
- there is an appeal procedure to which they can turn if they feel that their complaint has been handled inadequately by operators

Complaints procedures vary widely between bus companies, and many bus users are cynical about the value of complaints processes.

RELBUS believes that representations from passengers can be a valuable source of customer feedback and, if handled in a positive way can help to ensure that problems are investigated properly and addressed.

Trends in complaints should be studied, to alert operators of problems and published regularly.

Companies should publicise Passenger View Scotland, which is set up to deal with appeals from passengers who are dissatisfied with the bus operators' responses to their complaints about operational matters (for example - drivers' behaviour, reliability, information provision).

In future

In the future RELBUS would like to see:

- a non-statutory appeals or consultation mechanism to deal complaints about service patterns, frequencies and fares to cover commercial and supported services

While there is no appeals machinery for commercial issues such as service patterns, frequencies and fares, RELBUS regards the formation of the Local Bus Forum as an important mechanism for registering these sorts of complaints.

Consultation

RELBUS would like to see:

- regular consultation (at least every few years)
- additional surveys when major changes are planned or ELC is preparing to tender supported services.
- mechanisms for channelling suggestions from bus users
- mechanisms for raising suggestions for new services, re-timing and re-routing of existing services,
- suggestions for improvements to vehicles.
- more opportunities for passengers to discuss their concerns face-to-face with both bus company managers and local authority officers e.g. at Bus Users' Surgeries.

It is therefore vital that we have a better process for consulting bus users. If the costs of consulting users are shared, there would be benefits to all the operators and to the Local Authority and fewer appeals to Passenger View Scotland.

There should be an additional non-statutory consultation at least every few years, with additional surveys when major changes are planned or ELC is preparing to tender supported services.

Suggestions from bus users should be encouraged. Better mechanisms for coordinating bus user feedback need to be put in place, using online surveys and feedback forms for complaints and compliments.

Suggestions for new services, re-timing and re-routing existing services, improvements to vehicles and the like should be both encouraged — perhaps by notices in buses — and discussed.

RELBUS has found that passengers get very upset about changes to services and the uncertainty that ensues. Lack of consultation with users seems to be the common factor.

There should also be more opportunities for passengers to discuss their concerns face-to-face with both bus company managers and local authority officers at Bus Users' Surgeries. Relbus supports the work of BUS USERS UK, which has pioneered work on bus surgeries and follow-up meetings.

RELBUS regards constructive dialogue between riders and providers as the way forward.

Bus Futures

So what would a quality public transport network look like? In the future there will be:

- A network of frequent local services with stops connected to the local cycle path network, which feed into rail and bus express networks joining major towns.
- Prepaid and through ticketing available in local outlets / shops
- East Lothian Councils own buses become 'Community Owned', helping also to connect remote rural communities and joining up the many minibus services used by local groups
- Buses connect directly to rail services and vice versa

- People consider bus travel as an option not as a last resort
- Residents and visitors alike can get around affordably
- Buses are quieter, run on renewable energy