

RELBUS ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

2017 has been a year of a vastly improved bus service for East Lothian passengers particularly following the withdrawal of First Scotland (East) from the County and the assumption of their services by East Coast Buses (ECB), a subsidiary of Lothian Buses. That development was referred to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). RELBUS, along with some private submissions, responded to the CMA's invitation to comment and the final decision to allow the transfer of services was upheld. This enabled ECB to invest in 15 new single deck buses, with high quality interiors and next stop information and Wi-Fi significantly improving the quality of vehicle previously used by First Group. Most importantly the reliability of the service is now very good, and passengers appreciate these improvements. ECB themselves reported an overall increase in passengers of 31% during the year, well ahead of any other bus operation in the UK.

A new express service – X5 – was introduced between Edinburgh and North Berwick, and the success of this resulted in the frequency being increased to hourly, Monday to Saturday during the day. This means that North Berwick has three buses per hour to Edinburgh – during First's tenure, it was only one per hour through to the City.

The gap in service between Haddington and Musselburgh was plugged the previous year by Prentice of Haddington with its 108 to Kinnaird Park/The Fort and its success prompted ECB also to introduce a 106 service which largely competes with the Prentice route. ECB also assumed responsibility for the 139/140 routes from Musselburgh to Penicuik and local around Dalkeith, from Lothian Buses.

Prentice's 111 service from Haddington to the Royal Infirmary continues to be well used and tweaking of the timetable occurs from time to time.

Harry Barker, Chair, attended a meeting of East Saltoun Community Council on 23rd June 2017 where an impassioned plea was made for a service from East Saltoun to Pencaitland and Tranent. Historically this was provided by Eastern Scottish on a two hourly basis (service 112) until the Scotmap exercise in 1980 when a revision meant that new services were introduced also providing a two hourly frequency and better journeys to Haddington via Bolton, not previously served. This was subsequently taken over by Edinburgh Transport in a tendering exercise and further cut backs resulted in the current 123 service coming to fruition. At the time this was worked by Prentice and is now operated by Eve. With only one bus being used at any one time, and the principal destination being Haddington, the Tranent section became poorly used and badly timed (some journeys only allowed three minutes shopping time in Tranent with many hours of a gap for return journeys) and latterly these were withdrawn altogether. Harry Barker indicated he would take the matter to the Bus Forum established by East Lothian Council.

Following local elections in May 2017, and the departure of the previous ELC Chair of the Bus Forum, it became unclear if the Forum would still be held. After several months one was held in November 2017 and the issue of East Saltoun was raised.

At this point, the introduction of the 109 from Haddington to Humbie following lobbying, was discussed and it transpired that initially it did not conform to the ELC/RELBUS Bus Charter on a number of points, including destination information and timetable information. It is not being well used and ELC sought views on how to utilise the vehicle on Tuesdays and Thursdays. RELBUS suggested that it be used on a Humbie – Glenkinchie – West Saltoun – East Saltoun – New Winton – Tranent service on these days, making the point also that if the existing service to Haddington was also routed by these villages, more use would be made of that service, rather than travelling direct by the main road where there is minimal population. In principle, this was agreed.

Meantime Perryman's of Berwick had been taken over by West Coast Motors and were in the process of re-branding to Borders Buses with a fresh new red, blue and cream livery.

Other matters raised during the year is the continuing lack of information at bus stops in Belhaven, and the provision of services to Innerwick by Borders Buses.

Harry Barker has indicated that East Lothian now has one of the best and highest quality bus services in the whole of the UK, and certainly for a generally rural operation. East Lothian Council continues to subsidise services which is greatly appreciated by all concerned. Harry Barker also said that although he expected the work of RELBUS to reduce following the withdrawal of First Group from the County, it would continue to watch the overall bus scene carefully and in detail as would raise matters as appropriate.

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