

RELBUS CHAIR REPORT 2018

2018 has been a quieter year than previously, but it is very pleasing to report that East Lothian bus passengers have enjoyed another year of exceptionally good service from all the operators in the County. It is clear that East Lothian not only has one of the highest quality bus services in both Scotland and the UK, but also one of good coverage largely due to East Lothian Council continuing to subsidise non remunerative rural services.

East Coast Buses continued to expand its services with the X5 Edinburgh – North Berwick Express being increased in frequency to hourly during the day (NSu) whilst the X7 Edinburgh – Dunbar Express was increased to half hourly, which will result in specific competition with Borders Buses on their 253 on the Dunbar – Edinburgh section which will almost certainly have an effect on usage of the 253. Also, the 106 was extended to Kinnaird Park from Musselburgh by East Coast Buses which now competes directly with Prentice 108 to Kinnaird Park, albeit at complimentary timings. It will be recalled that Prentice introduced their service when First withdrew in 2016, and services from Haddington and Tranent to Kinnaird Park were not replaced by East Coast Buses.

East Coast Buses introduced eight new double deck Euro 6 vehicles in August and September 2018, these being almost exclusively used on the 124/X24 North Berwick corridor. With real time stop information with 'talking' information to assist blind passengers (necessary under Equality Act regulations), Wi-Fi and USB points this brings up to 23 the number of new vehicles used on the County's bus services and it has not been since 1978/79 that a similar number of new vehicles were used on the County's bus services.

The Scottish Open Golf Championship was held at Muirfield, and a train and ride service was operated from North Berwick to the golf course. This did not get off to a good start, as ScotRail terminated the very first, and well advertised and well loaded train at Drem resulting in the buses (hired in Lothian vehicles working on behalf of East Coast Buses) being in the wrong place and around 150 passengers stranded at Drem. The buses were dispatched to Drem, but it emphasises the pit falls of working with other forms of transport over which the bus operators have no control. East Coast Buses also ran duplicates to Gullane from Edinburgh and increased the frequency of the X5 to half hourly to cope with the additional business.

Lothian Buses relinquished two Musselburgh and Midlothian locals to East Coast Buses, one of which was fairly quickly re-contracted to Borders Buses (Service 139) with East Coast Buses continuing with a slightly revised 140 to Penicuik.

East Coast Buses introduced an open top tour of East Lothian operating hourly from Easter to September. This was not well advertised and patronage was extremely poor. To date, when this was written, it had not re-appeared in 2019.

Prentice continued to establish and improve their services both to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary introducing an XIII to accelerate peak journeys, with some tweaking of the 110 Elphinstone/Prestonpans and New Winton service.

Eve continued to provide its subsidised network, and with Council agreement altered the 130 Dunbar local services.

There was some adverse comment on the Haddington to Humbie service 109 in that it was not running in compliance with the Bus Charter, particularly regarding showing a destination on the bus – often only the number 109 – and not always running to route. Passenger usage is extremely low.

The trimming of Borders Buses 253 was criticised by local councillors and residents as affecting Innerwick with final journeys from Berwick upon Tweed leaving in mid-afternoon and a reduction in Sunday services. The operator indicated that demand was very low and that the service provided exceeded that in recent years.

Harry Barker, Chair.