

Transport for Edinburgh – moving along



When the council found itself owning the majority stakes in

two transport companies, and as part of the Edinburgh Trams management, it formed a new company called Transport for Edinburgh. You may not have noticed it much, except that it has a new logo and appears on the vans which take bus drivers to their buses when starting a shift.

Now it has been deemed time for the council to enter into the first Service Level Agreement with Transport for Edinburgh and this will be discussed at next week's Transport Committee meeting. The good news is that it may mean that we eventually get a public bike hire scheme in the capital.

Until now the company has worked under a Shareholder Agreement, but the council is being asked to approve the governance and working arrangements for the arms length body going forward. Audit Scotland guidance will lead the way when setting out these future working arrangements, but George Lowder TfE Chief Executive said it is now time for the city to define what it expects of TfE. He explained: "The city must clearly articulate its expectations. There is a lot written about what the aspirations are, but now it is time to capture all of that in a Service Level Agreement in one place. We need to be very clear about the relationship between the city and the arms length company. We have some happy situations here as the the city owns 91% of the bus company and 100% of the tram operating company and the vehicle through which it can deliver everything is TfE. We just need to empower the company to get on with it. It is the next step on the journey."

Transport Convener Councillor Lesley Hinds said: "Transport for Edinburgh has the potential, if properly empowered, to develop and deliver certain key functions on the Council's behalf at a reduced cost to the public purse and to further progress our vision of a truly integrated public transport system for the Capital. Robust governance and scrutiny provision will of course be embedded in the new arrangements to ensure democratic accountability."

Mr Lowder confirmed: "Transport for Edinburgh is ideally

placed to support the Council in delivering its transport goals for the Capital and we look forward to maintaining and enhancing our strong working relationship through a new Service Level Agreement.”

Financial arrangements for TfE operating costs are to be reported to a future meeting of the Finance & Resources Committee. The annual operating cost of TfE is £472,265 and in the future TfE will provide forecasting of the company's operating costs as part of the council's budget process.

The council is also being asked to approve commercial business plans for certain operations such as the Bus Station, Park & Ride sites, CCTV and travel information, integrated tickets, communications and marketing.

The CEO explained that TfE has an opportunity to take the lead on the bus station with all the bus operators who use it and to make it as commercial and low carbon as it can be. The council leases the bus station (it is currently fourteen years into a 25 year lease) but the feeling is that it needs to be integrated with the rest of the transport network.

There is a proposal for improving all of the CCTV so that it is both enhanced and used for a number of different functions such as anticipating where traffic jams might occur. Lowder continued: “We can use this to get to a place where we are more proactive rather than being reactive to a number of traffic situations. We have a lot of people who really understand all this, whether it is traffic signalling or travel demand management. Now what we need is a more integrated system to keep the city moving more freely. The business cases need to stack up, but this move would give us the authority to do that work.” The hope is that certain services could become commercial in their own right and thus remove the need for council funding in certain areas.

The much anticipated bike hire scheme will also become part of

the remit of TfE who must find a low cost solution for the council. They might also work with the Bike n Go scheme at Haymarket to expand it if they can, and they will look at a scheme for visitors too.

When the bike hire scheme was introduced in Dublin in 2009 it was underwritten by JCDecaux (heard of them?) who had an advertising contract with the council. In five years the scheme was used for 8 million journeys and a major expansion means that it now has 1500 bikes and 100 stations on the capital streets. It has been an amazing success, with Coca Cola now involved in the sponsorship deal.

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary in September 2014 Jon Woods, General Manager, Coca Cola Great Britain & Ireland said: "We were delighted to be able to unveil the new Coca-Cola Zero dublinbikes in June this year. At Coca-Cola we are passionate about encouraging and enabling active lifestyles. Our commitment to Coca-Cola Zero dublinbikes builds on other measures we are taking to encourage active lifestyles across the country through our support of the regional bike schemes in Cork, Galway and Limerick and through the Coca-Cola Thank You Fund which has granted €375K to non-profit groups taking an innovative approach to help get more people active. The 5th birthday of Coca-Cola Zero dublinbikes is a milestone we didn't want to go unmarked. We hope everyone enjoys their saddle cover and reflector belt that we're giving away today with each bike to mark the celebration." So clearly the sponsors love it.

We asked the Transport Convener why it would necessarily involve any council spending in a public hire scheme. Councillor Hinds explained that she has been to Dublin to see the scheme in action for herself, but she was also aware of other schemes across the UK which cost the local councils a lot of money. She said: "Dublin was different because they entered into the scheme initially with JCDecaux before the recession. They got the most fantastic deal. What you are

looking at is essentially an advertising deal, but what we want is a scheme which does not cost the council anything at all."