

# **Just Eat Bikes – contract to end in September**

**Edinburgh's bike hire scheme which has been deteriorating over the last year, despite any attempts by operators Serco to keep it on track, will end in September.**

Stolen bikes have become the norm, there is barely one stand which is left intact in the city, and fewer bikes can be observed on the streets.

It has been reported elsewhere that the operator walked away from the contract and the council leaders say they are "dismayed" that the arrangement will come to an end, but this is disputed by Serco.

Council Leader Adam McVey said the council is actively investigating alternative ways of replacing the scheme. He said: "We are very disappointed that Serco have opted to walk away from the popular shared bike hire scheme in Edinburgh. When the bike hire scheme was first introduced the commitment was to operate it with no public funding and it is highly regrettable that Serco will not continue the scheme on that basis.

"We recognise that the bike hire scheme has helped more people get access to bikes, enjoying the benefits of fast, reliable, healthier journeys around town. The withdrawal of Serco will come as a frustrating shock to many regular users of the bike hire scheme.

“It sends absolutely the wrong message at a time when so many of us are deeply concerned about the climate emergency and what we can each do to combat the effects of human activity. Choosing to travel by bike is one of the easiest changes many of us can make.

“We’re now working on a replacement bike hire scheme for the Capital. We are actively pursuing options to ensure that a replacement scheme is in place as quickly as possible.”

Depute Council Leader Cammy Day said: “Over the past few years it’s been a welcome sight to see residents, students and visitors making journeys from A to B across Edinburgh by hire bike and they’ve become a key part of our sustainable transport infrastructure in the city.

“The city will share our huge disappointment that the scheme is coming to an end and that Serco have walked away from a key part of the city’s active travel plans. We will now engage with the cycling community to look at alternative innovative scheme to get people back on the bikes.”



Just Eat Cycles Photo Martin P McAdam

## The numbers

In the year to October 2020 more than 221,000 trips were made, breaking all the records set in the previous year by other UK cycle schemes and the company’s own statistics. There were 57,000 customers at that point who all appeared keen to use the bikes. Since then it seems that vandals have trashed the stands and the bikes themselves at an alarming rate. Serco also run the cycle hire scheme in London which is very successful with 12,300 bikes from 800 stations and 21,000 docking points.

# Serco dispute the ending of the contract

But the way the contract is being brought to an end is in dispute. Serco say that they have not walked away from the scheme, having done everything in their power to extend the arrangement.

Serco provided the bikes, but funding was also provided by SP Energy Networks Green Economy Fund which is a programme designed to increase active and sustainable travel in Scotland, with funds provided by Transport Scotland.

It was only in March 2020 that 68 e-bikes were funded by a grant provided by Energy Saving Trust and Transport Scotland. By October 2020 more than 21,000 trips had been made on them. The scheme also provided free passes to NHS staff to support them getting to work safely.

But earlier this year the council was told by Serco that there was considerable financial risk in continuing the contract. However the company dispute that they simply turned their back on the arrangement.

Sam Jones, Micromobility Director, Serco, said: "We're disappointed that we have been unable to find a way to continue the Edinburgh bike scheme. We have explored every route possible to find extension options beyond our original three-year contract which expires on 17 September 2021. Those efforts continued through to last week when the Council advised us that they were not able to extend the current contract.

"Serco has been running the scheme since September 2018 under a three-year concession. Despite the scheme making a loss over that time we have not walked away and we have stood by our commitments and continued to make a success of the scheme for the city's people and visitors.

“As was reported in May 2021, funding options were being explored which would have enabled the scheme to carry on, however we were informed two weeks ago that City of Edinburgh Council has been unable to confirm those plans.

“We will continue to operate the service until midnight on 17 September 2021, at which point the service will stop. We will ensure that our customers are offered full refunds for existing tickets and passes and that there is a smooth demobilisation of the service.

“We know how disappointing this announcement must be for the many regular users of the scheme in the City, but unfortunately due to factors outside of our control, we are not in a position to continue the scheme.

“Serco operates successful bike schemes on behalf of authorities in several other localities and values their importance in providing citizens with environmentally responsible travel options. We hope the Council will return such an offering to Edinburgh and we will review the Council’s requirements in any future procurement exercise.”

In September 2018 it was a different story when the sponsor Just Eat was unveiled along with the new purpose built blue bikes. Then Jason Holtom, Serco’s director of leisure services, said: “We’re really pleased to have such a well-known household brand like Just Eat wanting to support our cycle scheme, which shows the impact the service will bring to the city.

“We will be working closely with Just Eat on this exciting project which will actively promote cycling as a fun, healthy and efficient transport alternative for getting around Edinburgh.”

In June two teenage boys [were charged](#) over the theft of a cycle hire bike in the London Road area.



Just Eat e-bikes. Photo: Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)