

Hopper fares may be introduced in Edinburgh

A 'hopper fare' could be introduced on Edinburgh's bus services to encourage more people to use public transport – as the council was warned operators face their "biggest challenge for decades".

Under the ticketing scheme, which is already in place in cities including London, passengers can board multiple services within one hour for the price of a single fare.

Scott Arthur, the council's Transport Convener, agreed to meet with bus chiefs to discuss rolling out the scheme in the capital but warned timed ticketing would "mean a loss of revenue for bus operators".

He added this would "result in overall ticket prices going up".

Bus passenger numbers in Edinburgh have still not fully recovered since the pandemic and council bosses said recently the yearly £6m dividend that used to come from Lothian Buses is unlikely to return in the next five years due to financial pressures.

In addition, a number of services have been reduced or cut altogether as operators struggle to recruit and retain bus drivers, whilst several city centre routes have been severely impacted by the Trams to Newhaven project and repairs to the North Bridge.

This month the 20 and 63 – council-subsidised services run by First Bus in west Edinburgh – began running on significantly reduced timetables, with residents in Ratho calling for a service that “at least get us into Edinburgh”.

The proposal to initiate talks on bringing in a hopper fare was tabled at a full Edinburgh Council meeting on Thursday by Lib Dem Ed Thornley.

Cllr Thornley said the scheme would “ensure that those now having to get two buses rather than one are not detrimentally affected by the ever-shifting nature of a bus service under strain”.

He added: “Passenger numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, Government support is gone that was there in the pandemic, driver recruitment is hard, retention is even harder. Lothian is not immune to these changes.

“My own ward, Drum Brae/Gyle, seems to be taking hit after hit when it comes to service changes of late; the withdrawal of the 300, moving of the 41, the reduction and now moving of the 12.”

The idea has been backed by the Edinburgh Bus Users Group (EBUG), which represents the views of bus users in the city and campaigns for improved services.

EBUG member Chris Day told councillors Lothian Buses, which the council is the majority shareholder of, has been “taken for granted for a number of years”.

He added: “We now have a situation where Edinburgh’s buses face their biggest challenge for decades.”

The main challenges, he said, are a shortage of drivers and mechanics, and withdrawal of financial support by the Government.

Mr Day added: “Passengers want direct services, they do not

want to have to change to another bus service, any new ticketing initiative should not be seen as an excuse to make them do so.”

“There is scope to considerably extend the reach of the network by allowing for interchange”.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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