Delays to new bus tracker system costs council over £1.5million

Delays to the roll-out of new on-street bus tracker screens in Edinburgh have cost the council more than £1.5 million – with the project now more than two years behind schedule.

Aimed at improving the reliability of live bus times displayed at the city's bus stops, the new £2.9m system has been under development since 2019 but has suffered a series of setbacks.

Initially planned to be up and running by early 2021, the council said the impact of the pandemic and Brexit has hindered progress and estimated it would now not be fully operational until the end of March 2024.

Councillors have agreed to continue the contract for the existing tracker system whilst work is ongoing on the new one, at a cost of £700k to the public purse. Previous contract extensions as a result of delays have resulted in the council paying out an additional £1.07m.

Digital bus shelter displays across the Capital are often criticised for displaying unreliable information or not working. Currently, they only provide updates for services run by Lothian Buses, however the new-and-improved travel tracker will deliver "multi operator Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) to bus users" as well as onward travel information for tram, train, air travel and taxi's "on modern full colour

displays," according to the council.

A report explained that more time was needed to complete the installation of new signs due to "missing data from bus operators", inability for the team overseeing the project to meet in person and increased costs of "critical components"

Speaking at the finance committee on Friday (March 10) as members were asked to approve the contract extension, SNP councillor Lesley Macinnes said she was "concerned about the link between the lack of information coming in from that group of operators and the fact that we're having to extend this contract".

She added: "It does seem as if public money is being used to extend this contract in a way that it might not have done before."

"I'm just conscious that that's quite a substantial hike in council funds going towards this particular project."

Transport officer Stuart Lowrie said: "It is a little bit disappointing we've got to this stage and we're having to continue with the existing system for a little bit longer, but in the last few weeks there has been really strong commitment from the operators.

"It's very complex, it's a new system, it's completely different from the old system as well so we're relying a lot more on data feeds from the operators.

"On the old system, a lot of the data was in our grasp and it was only working with Lothian Buses. This new system has real time from a number of different operators and they all have different protocols and data feeds."

Cllr Alys Mumford, Edinburgh Greens, said she had received "lots of emails about ghost buses and safety concerns that often come with buses not arriving".

She added the city's bus trackers sometimes show "wild routes that don't exist in Edinburgh".

Mr Lowrie said the new tracking technology being installed on bus fleets "should resolve a lot of this".

He added: "It is really really difficult out there at the moment, I don't know if there's any bus that isn't on a

diversion route as there's so many roadworks in the city.
"The actual algorithms that we use to predict the arrival time at each bus stop, they take many months if not years to tweak and amend to get the accuracy to where it needs to be."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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Bus	Destination	mins
34	Riccarton	♿ DUE
34	Riccarton	♿ 17
MA1	Majestic Tour	* DUE
*	Estimated time	