

# **Bus users up in arms at changes in their service**

**Bus users on the outskirts of Edinburgh are furious at a decision to axe the only direct service to the city centre and have accused operators of “riding roughshod over the travelling public” by not consulting or warning them.**

Lothian announced earlier this month that the 41, which has served areas such as Cramond and Barnton in the north-west for decades, would be withdrawn at the end of May as part of a major timetable shake-up.

A local councillor said the news sent shockwaves through the community and called for an end to the “culture of secrecy” around route changes, which he said elected members were not briefed about prior to the announcement.

The 41 will be replaced by two services, the new 9 and altered 47 – however these will not follow the same route, missing key city centre stops including Princes Street and George Street.

The issue was discussed at a meeting of the Transport and Environment Committee on Thursday when councillors were told that the impact on residents in Cammo, Cramond, Barnton and Davidson’s Mains would be devastating.

John Loudon, chairman of Cramond and Barnton Community Council, said: “I do not think that Transport for Edinburgh

nor Lothian Buses understand the implications of these changes on the travelling public.

“Lothian Buses say they have surveyed the public about going east at the West End but no one I have spoken to was involved.”

He said many locals found out through “rumours and speculation about the cancellation of their bus services”.

Mr Loudon said communications between the council and the bus company it owns were “patently lacking”.

He accused Lothian of “riding roughshod over the travelling public” by not consulting residents or councillors before the announcement was made.

He said: “They didn’t tell people what was going to happen and as a result somebody got a rumour and a whole lot of speculation took place which needn’t have happened if there had been communication.

“People wouldn’t have liked the changes but at least they’d have known accurately what would happen.”

Rod Alexander, from Davidson’s Mains and Silverknowes Association, said: “The current process as far as Joe Public is concerned is seen as secretive with Lothian Buses seen as judge and jury on service changes and completely oblivious and unconcerning about the concerns of local residents.

“We would suggest that local councillors, ward councillors, should be involved at an early stage on a strictly confidential basis.”

Mr Alexander said this was just the latest in a series of cuts to bus services in the area.

“In recent years the village has seen the withdrawal of the 32 to be replaced by a totally ineffective 200,” he said. “We’ve

seen the withdrawal of the 42 which used to give residents and direct service to Craighleith Retail Park and Stockbridge, we lost the 64, a peripheral route across to the Gyle.

“But this one is beyond the pale, this goes further than all the rest, and is deeply concerning.”



Cllr Kevin Lang Almond Ward

Cllr Kevin Lang, who represents the affected residents as one of the councillors for the Almond ward, said: “The reality is that so many of my constituents do not understand how a company that is owned by the council can get its communications so wrong.

“What we saw this month, I would understand it more if this had been a one off, but this has always been the way with Lothian Buses – that we find out about changes – and I’m not talking about minor timetable adjustments, I’m talking about very significant changes to routes – we find out when they’re announced in public.

“This is the only bus service in Cramond, the only one, so when you’ve got changes they can have a big impact. That was a long-established route. There had never been any suggestion at any point from Lothian that it was even thinking about making changes to that route.”

Cllr Lang said the uncertainty created by the situation showed a need to “end this culture of secrecy on route changes so the voice of communities can be heard when decisions are being taken”.

A motion he tabled calling for the council to write to Lothian Buses requesting a “mechanism by which two-way communication with local councillors can be improved when route changes are being considered” was unanimously passed by the committee.

Cllr Scott Arthur, Transport and Environment Convener, said Lothian is facing “huge challenges” with driver recruitment.

He said: “Lothian Buses know best how to define their network and they’re absolutely clear that they will do that based on public feedback 365 days of the year, not just at the time of publishing those changes.

“I get that there’s tensions, but I was reassured on Tuesday that Lothian Buses is responding to them and in the next iteration of timetable changes that there will be a difference in how things are communicated.”

*by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.*

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