

Lucky 13 – bus service saved for now

Council plans to axe the number 13 bus route have been shelved for now and the bus service retained.

One councillor said that the proposal to cut the bus route would be “detrimental” to locals who rely on public transport to get around.

It comes amid a review of the city’s subsidised services the council said would achieve best value for the £1.5million spent annually, and better connect communities underserved by bus services.

But proposed alterations to a route between the east and west of the capital were criticised as “deeply unfair” and it was claimed changes would impact some of the city’s most deprived areas.

Under the proposed change, included in a council report, the service 13, which runs between Craigleith and Lochend, would no longer serve Princes Street, the New Town, Broughton, Leith Walk and Lochend.

Instead it would have turned onto Lothian Road at the West End, before proceeding to Lauriston Place and then terminating at Dumbiedykes, an area which has faced repeated bus cuts and where no services currently pass through.

After the issue was debated at the Transport and Environment Committee councillors passed a Lib Dem motion which agreed the existing route should be retained when the contract is re-tendered next year.

Cllr Jack Caldwell who proposed the motion said the impact of the move to “cut the entire eastern leg” of the route would be “large and detrimental to our city’s mobility and our residents’ confidence in our public transport”.

He said: “Since the news broke, residents have come forward and told me about all the users that will be affected. From McDonald Road Library, to the Naval Club, to going into town, it’s deeply unfair to put communities in this position.

“We believe this is a social-justice issue as well as a transport issue. The current 13 route serves two SIMD areas which are in the top 10% most deprived in Scotland and has poor alternative public transport options.

“Our residents in areas that commercial bus services won’t serve must have the freedom to move from east to west and vice versa.

“While we are fully supportive of a supported bus service in Dumbiedykes, as demonstrated by our respective voting records on it, it is a fundamental truth that this proposal would actively remove provision from one community to serve another.”

After the meeting Cllr Caldwell said he felt “optimistic” the service had been saved but said “budget pressures” meant there was always a risk the plans could be back on the table further down the line.

Cllr Iain Whyte, who represents Craightinny/Duddingston said cutting the Lochend section to create a new transport link for Dumbiedykes “seems to give with one hand and take away with another”.

Council transport manager Stuart Lowrie said there were “other alternatives in that east half of the 13 route” even if “some of them may not be as accessible as the 13 will provide”.

He said: "We've always had pressure placed on us to try and create a connection to Dumbiedykes. We used to have a supported service there and that has fallen foul of previous budget constraints.

"I'm dealing with the same budget and I'm being asked to do more with it. So just doing the same isn't going to work."

Mr Lowrie stressed that as of yet "no decision has been made" about the future of the service.

He added: "We just thought we better have a look what maybe we can do playing with the same numbers as the budget. Maybe the presentation here hasn't been quite right."

Head of placemaking Daisy Narayanann said the council was going out to market to get costs from potential operators "to make further recommendations later".

Cllr Caldwell said: "I think we've bought a lot of time and that's the important thing."

Leith Walk councillor James Dalgleish said: "I think this potential decision that was on the table took us a little bit by surprise but I know Councillor Caldwell and I and other residents managed to get our voices heard.

"The 13 should remain in Lochend and go off to Craigleith on the route it is."

Cllr Susan Rae, councillor for Leith Walk, said: "I'm glad to hear the existing route 13 will be put out to tender, and won't be cut by stealth. The number 13 provides a vital service to many of my constituents in Broughton and Leith Walk, and the proposal to reroute it came as a complete surprise to most of them because there was woefully inadequate consultation."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

