

Ratho left in a 'bus wilderness' without a direct service to Edinburgh city centre

Residents living in one of Edinburgh's most isolated communities say their village will remain a "bus wilderness" despite new subsidised services being agreed by the council.

Lothian Buses has been awarded a contract for a route between The Gyle and Hermiston park and ride via Ratho – leaving long-standing pleas for a direct Ratho to city centre service unanswered.

It will replace the existing 20 which will be withdrawn by McGill's on July 14.

Stacey O'Flaherty from Ratho Community Council said the outcome of the council's tendering process "leaves Ratho in a bus wilderness, still without a direct bus service to Edinburgh city centre".

This is despite "unstinting efforts" of the community council's Bus Working Group over the last two years, which have included "identifying business stakeholders who are keen to see improved services, regular lobbying and the provision of possible timetables to include a current staff shuttle service".

She was addressing councillors at the transport committee where five new contracts for supported buses for west Edinburgh were awarded on Thursday, May 23. Alongside the new route serving Ratho, Lothian will run Queensferry to The Gyle, Cramond to Balerno and Wester Hailes to Chesser, while Handicabs Lothian will operate a service between The Gyle and Clermiston.

The council tendered for a direct city centre bus but said the cost was “beyond” the available £1.1m budget. The agreed route is intended to attract more passengers as it offers onward tram links at The Gyle and bus services at Hermiston.

However Ms O’Flaherty called it a “waste of public money” which would “permanently cut” the frequency of buses from half hourly to hourly.

She said the return journey in both directions would require up to a 60 minute wait. “Hermiston is seen as even less attractive place to wait at night than Edinburgh Park or Gyle to return to the village, and will not grow patronage,” she said.

“The route was proposed as a possible option early in the process by the council – we are unclear how it has been developed or by who – and was firmly rejected by the working group at that time, approximately eighteen months ago. The proposed route does not support social and economic inclusion, is not safe for young or vulnerable persons, and will not move the modal shift needle, except possibly in reverse as Ratho residents who can afford a car will almost certainly use it.”

She added: “Many councillors have given fulsome support to our campaign for a direct bus service over the last two years – to them go our grateful thanks.

“We and they need not have bothered, as the route changes appear to have been decided on behind closed doors before the process even started.”

Transport convener Scott Arthur said: “It’s worth remembering what people in Ratho have been through over the last couple of years, so their frustrations are understandable – they had threats of services being completely lost; at one point, buses were just not turning up.

“But now they’re being connected into the city by one of the UK’s best bus companies.”

By Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter