

Extended bus lane hours trial set to commence next year

Some Edinburgh bus lanes are set to be enforced 12 hours a day, seven days a week from early next year in a bid to make services faster and more reliable.

It comes as the council prepares to approve a trial of '7-7-7' bus lanes along a key bus route, potentially tripling the weekly hours of operation.

Most across the city currently allow all vehicles outwith peak times of 7.30am to 9.30am and 4pm to 6.30pm, and don't operate on weekends.

If the trial is given the go ahead by the authority's transport committee this week, bus lanes between the Gillespie Crossroads in Juniper Green and Musselburgh – a route which mirrors Lothian Buses' 44 service – will be active from 7am to 7pm, Monday to Sunday.

It's anticipated an 18-month pilot would commence in the first quarter of next year and cost the council £80,000 over the next two financial years.

A report to councillors said increasing bus priority measures on the roads would improve the reliability of public transport for the city's population, which is growing six times faster than the national average.

It is anticipated the changes would "result in a decrease in private car journeys," it added.

Once implemented the trial will be “extensively monitored,” and the start and end times of operation will be “examined to evaluate whether they remain optimal”.

While taxis, but not private hire cars (PHCs) such as Uber, are exempt from peak hour bus lane rules, PHCs will be allowed to use the 7-7-7 lanes during the experiment.

The move has angered the Edinburgh Bus Users Group (EBUG) which said the inclusion of PHCs represented a “worrying watering down” of the scheme.

A spokesperson said: “It’s exasperating when a step forward for bus users leads to two steps back.

“The whole point of bus lanes is to provide priority through congestion for the most efficient ways of moving people about. The more vehicles are allowed in bus lanes, the less they do that.

“Over two council terms, we’ve had the length and hours of bus lanes cut back. Motorcycles were allowed into bus lanes; we were told that was the end of it.

“Earlier this year the Scottish Government cut funding for bus priority schemes. Now, for the first time in years, Edinburgh had a plan to reinstate bus lane hours on one route (ONE ROUTE!) and it’s compromised by allowing PHCs into it.

“A host of transport sectors have sought to get into bus lanes. If the council concedes this now, after giving way on ‘red lines’, why would we believe it’s the end of it?”

The council report said dialogue with the private hire car trade during the development of the Meadows to George Street active travel project has “resulted in access being permitted to private hire cars through the bus gate being implemented on Market Street.

“Furthermore, the George Street and First New Town operational

plan also proposes the testing of access for private hire cars.”

If approved at the transport and environment committee on Thursday, August 15 work would commence to prepare the trial, launch an awareness campaign and change signs and road markings along the route.

The report said: “The majority of waiting and loading restrictions within bus lanes along the corridor will be harmonised with the new times of bus lane operation. This will ensure that buses are not impeded when the bus lanes are in effect.

“Loading surveys will be arranged to quantify loading requirements in locations where local exemptions for loading and parking may be permitted to support business (for example at Dalry, Abbeyhill and Jock’s Lodge).

“Where amendments to parking and loading are to be implemented, the configuration of potential alternative arrangements will be informed through engagement with locally affected stakeholders.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter