

Multi-million pound bus tracker system branded an “embarrassment” by councillors

The troubled roll-out of Edinburgh’s new multi-million pound bus tracker system has been branded an “embarrassment” by councillors.

Councillors say they have been bombarded with emails about unreliable departure times being shown at bus stops on 330 newly-installed screens.

Already over three years behind schedule, it was revealed last week the project had been hit with more delays as testing of the new system continues.

It was hoped real-time service updates would be shown in time for this summer’s festivals, however a new estimate of “early September” has been given by officials.

Conservative councillor Marie-Clair Munro said across the city “ghost buses” were being shown as on their way “despite being cancelled” as the issue was raised at the transport committee on Thursday, August 15.

“I am concerned that we’re going to reach September and residents across the city will still be looking at the tracker system and seeing it’s still not working,” she said.

Kevin Lang, Lib Dem group leader, added: “I’m pretty

embarrassed we're going to get through another Edinburgh Festival when visitors who are very reliant on this information, they don't have access to it. I think it's embarrassing."

The £2.9m system has replaced outdated screens which, while being more difficult to read, provided reliable live bus times.

While some local bus companies have been able to communicate live arrival and departure times, updates on services run by the council-owned Lothian Buses, have been absent for months.

An Edinburgh Council transport manager said the fiasco arose after Lothian Buses' timeline to upgrade GPS trackers on its fleet "parted ways" with the local authority's work securing new displays and upgrading software during the pandemic.

Stuart Lowrie said the council was then tied into a contract meaning if the project was not progressed it could have faced penalties.

"Sign installation was delayed and held back as much as it possibly could but it got to the point where old signs were not working, new signs had been procured and needed to be installed," he told councillors at the meeting.

Councillor Chas Booth, Greens, suggested referring the matter to the scrutiny committee to investigate "what's gone so badly wrong here".

"This is an embarrassment," he said, "a question my constituents ask me is why on earth did the council not ensure the system was working before they removed the old live bus tracker system?"

"We've gone from a system where we had live bus tracker information... and we've now gone to a system where actually we're increasing confusion for bus users. Because we're

putting information up there and it's only right at the bottom of the bus tracker that it says this information isn't live this is timetabled."

Cllr Munro added: "While we appreciate there's testing to do, a lot of money has been spent on this and it's still not working fully across the city."

Mr Lowrie said "significant progress" had been made in recent weeks.

"We did undertake a test in July which was very successful. I witnessed it with my own eyes; the actual real-time predictions on a sign on street were very, very accurate.

"I was thinking we're almost there and we could go live with this.

"Subsequent tests just uncovered some anomalies that we just need to work through. It's really frustrating, I absolutely appreciate that, and none more so for the team that's working so hard on it.

"We're nearly there, we just need a little bit more time just to reassure ourselves the tests are showing what we want."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter