

**DENNISTOUN COMMUNITY COUNCIL**  
**NOTES FROM PUBLIC MEETING ABOUT BUS SERVICES**  
**HELD AT WHITEHILL SCHOOL 23/11/11**

Meeting chaired by Stephen Birrell (Dennistoun Community Council chair)

Also Present: Paul Martin MSP, Councillor Jennifer Dunn, Councillor Elaine McDougall, Councillor Alison Thewliss, Kenny Hogg (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport), Alex Shearer (Commercial Director First Bus), Chris Carberry (First Bus), George Stewart (First Bus)

Notes provided by Frank Plowright - please note that in the interests of grouping topics not everything is noted in strict chronological order, and some repeated points have been omitted.

Frank Plowright introduced the meeting noting that it was a follow-up to a meeting held on October 11th regarding bus services in Dennistoun. First Bus had chosen not to attend that meeting, but had since provided a full response to all issues raised, which is posted on the Dennistoun Community Council website. Frank noted that as this was the case, some people might be directed there rather than re-hashing comments already covered and responded to. Stephen Birrell then introduced the transport representatives present and enquired how many members of the public attending had looked online at the issues previously covered. None had.

1. Alex Shearer apologised for First Bus not attending the October meeting and underestimating the public interest. He stressed that he regularly attends Community Council meetings, normally regarding a specific issue.
2. Bernard Elliott was particularly concerned at the bus shelters being inadequate for winter conditions as they're open to the elements at the road ensuring everyone within will become wet if it's raining, and the seats cannot be used as they're also wet. It was pointed out by Elizabeth Shearer that the older style bus shelters were better as they were placed on the kerb, thus minimising wind and rain. Mr Elliott later stated he felt the shelters were so inhospitable they discouraged people using the buses. He also asked if smoking was permitted in the shelters. Alex Shearer noted that bus companies aren't responsible for the bus shelters and other infrastructure, which fall under the remit of SPT. Kenny Hogg said the current shelters being open on the street side are of benefit to bus drivers who can see people at a distance. The old polyurethane shelters were very susceptible to graffiti and therefore deteriorated rapidly. He considered the current shelters had a more aesthetic design, and offered to solicit a more detailed explanation. There is a formula in the anti-smoking legislation defining what constitutes a closed area, and it was felt that bus shelters fell within that remit.
3. Bernard Elliott was also concerned about people smoking upstairs on buses, which is definitely not permitted. Alex Shearer responded that he shared this dismay, and that all drivers are instructed to tell passengers boarding with active cigarettes that this is not permitted on the bus. The notices are also there on every bus, but it's difficult for drivers to be aware of people smoking upstairs. It was acknowledged that this an ongoing problem, and that some people just don't care. Elizabeth Shearer raised a related point about people putting their feet up on facing seats, a problem that could be solved if buses were designed with seats all facing in one direction. She also despaired at people leaving their copies of the Metro lying about the seats and on the floor. Again, there are notices about this, but it's fundamentally down to people not caring about others.

4. In response to comments raised at the previous meeting regarding all new buses being allocated to routes other than the East End, First Bus have revisited their policy and it was announced that early in the new year routes 8, 64 and 89/90 will have newer low floor buses. Janette Cochrane asked why this couldn't be introduced on the 213, which is a hospital route, at peak times. Alex Shearer explained that at first new stock had been introduced to most routes simultaneously, but there was no understanding that not all buses could be low floor, and this led to raised expectations and subsequent complaints. The policy was therefore revised to replace all buses on a single route basis. Legally all buses are required to be low floor by 2017, and First Bus in Glasgow is already well ahead of schedule with 70% of their buses already having a low floor.
5. Councillor Elaine McDougall acknowledged that plenty of buses ran through Dennistoun along Alexandra Parade, but that beyond areas of her constituency were particularly poorly served, noting the lack of buses to Stobhill hospital, no buses after 6pm. She was consistently being told that the situation would be assessed, but that nothing ever changed, and also noted that a recent report cited the poor bus service to the area as a contributory factor in children under-performing at school. Was it also true that services were due to be cut further in January? Alex Shearer admitted there would be cuts to services from January, but these would not affect Dennistoun. The problem is that First Bus have to make money in Glasgow, yet it's currently struggling. It was later noted that there were thousands fewer passengers every day than there were in 2009, and it's believed that this is due to people not having the money to spend at their destinations. Some services are run at a loss, but the less money First Glasgow makes overall the less the company can afford to subsidise loss making services. The projected profit for the current year is likely to be a very small percentage indeed. Specifically regarding Stobhill, access is a problem. There are plans to redevelop the hospital access, but as things are currently two buses would be unable to pass on the road. This also stymied a later suggestion regarding re-introducing the 35 that ran to Stobhill via Duke Street at one stage. There is a direct route from the city centre, but this would mean passengers from Dennistoun making the journey into the centre and out again. Janette Cochrane considered this beyond many elderly and disabled. Alex Shearer noted that a direct route wouldn't cover the costs of the fuel and the driver, and that while First Group worldwide does make a decent profit, it's slim locally. Today's paper mentioned Glasgow shopping trade has been reduced by about 9% this year, and that's consistent with First Glasgow's drop in revenue.
6. MSP Paul Martin noted that Tesco and Asda now stay open 24 hours, providing a service for the few who want to shop at 3am. This is due to competition, and First Bus has no serious competition in Glasgow, so they are able to cherry pick routes. He didn't believe they weren't making money and considered they were unwilling to grow services and encourage people to use them. He was horrified at the news of further cuts in January, and felt First Bus needed to respond to communities with more information regarding routes. He'd had meetings regarding routes that weren't considered profitable, and when enquiring how many people used the service had been stonewalled by being told that was commercially sensitive information that couldn't be revealed. It was noted that when there has been competition in the past it's been First's policy to flood a particular route with buses, and while it can't be proved, it certainly seems to be the case that the larger bus companies carve up territories. Parliament has looked into this and Paul himself would favour legislation. He also noted that subsidies and tax concessions would equally apply to any community service buses set up. Alex Shearer responded that a route that due for cancellation, the 59 has incurred very heavy losses over the last six to seven years. He is now prepared to show Paul the figures regarding services that make a loss irrespective of commercial confidentiality. He pointed out that no other bus operator in Glasgow runs buses through the night, and no bus run in the small hours makes money. If all the loss-making services were stopped it would require SPT to step in, and they don't have the funds to cover the routes.

Chris Carberry answered the point about growing routes with reference to a

service mentioned at the previous meeting running half hourly from Ballieston to Glasgow Fort. This ran for a year, but not enough passengers were using the service.

Alex Shearer also noted that with regard to growing services the subsidies are being reduced. Fuel subsidy has been cut and First Bus used to be refunded 73% of the fare for passengers with concession cards, and this has recently been reduced to 67%. This alone has cost First Bus several million pounds annually. The primary users of the 59 bus were such passengers, and the service being withdrawn is a direct result of this reduction in subsidy. First Bus do cross-subsidise to provide a service on non-profitable routes via those that make money, but with smaller profits fewer routes can be subsidised. Routes noted as making money in the Dennistoun area were 40, 41 and 62, but even though these routes were profitable, they had also been losing passengers.

7. Councillor Jennifer Dunn made the point that sometimes buses from Carntyne and Riddrie to Dennistoun just don't turn up at night. She's often there as a councillor, and cited an incident of arriving 10 minutes before a bus was due and waiting for 30 minutes before having to take a cab. Were the buses more reliable people would use them more. Kenny Hogg replied that at night some buses are diverted via Cranhill, and this information is on the timetables at the bus stop, but SPT will investigate this incident if provided with specific details. Alex Shearer explained that First operate a GPS system called Start Time Adherence that regulates when buses leave and when they arrive. One minute early and five minutes late are the parameters defining whether a bus is on time.
8. Jennifer Dunn also noted that the information provided via electronic streaming is also frequently wrong. Chris Carberry explained that this information is sourced via two different systems. Some routes have buses fitted with antennae, and their location is fed via GPS to the streamers at stops along the route. Others, with the 8 and 46 routes mentioned, are only noted on the streaming via timetable information. There are also occasions with the GPS service isn't working properly due to satellite malfunction.
9. Elizabeth Shearer asked about the fare stages printed on the concession tickets she received on buses. She generally boarded at Bellgrove Street, but the tickets were equally likely to state Parkhead Cross. Chris Carberry explained that the ticketing system was connected to the GPS and automatically updated as it passed fare stages, many of which are grouped together now due to the £1.80 single fare covering such a large portion of the city. The reimbursement procedure is thoroughly audited to avoid mistakes. Regarding the fares, Elizabeth noted that a leap from 90p to double the price at £1.80 was enormous. Alex Shearer responded by noting the 90p fare had been reduced from £1.25 to generate more shorter hop passengers. It had resulted in a considerable increase in passengers paying 90p, but it is now suspected that many of the people paying 90p ought to be paying £1.80.
10. Margaret Donarsky commented that the 38 buses that Canavan used to run along the Parade were spotless and without litter, and this isn't the case for First Buses. Alex Shearer noted that all First Buses go through the bus wash every night, and First employ over 100 cleaners to ensure that buses are clean when they leave depots. There was some disagreement about the state of cleanliness.
11. Jim Sneddon was concerned about the frequency of the number 8 route to Haghill, Riddrie and Carntyne, saying that it ought to be half hourly, but some buses don't turn up at all, and the service ceases altogether at 6pm. Furthermore if the buses used on the routes were not good enough for people in Birmingham and Manchester, why are they fit for use in Glasgow? The service has deteriorated since it was deregulated. He also noted problems with buses being unable to service housing estates as they're unable to turn in the streets. Alex Shearer re-iterated his point about the gradual replacement of the fleet, noting 33 new hybrid buses will be introduced next year. The reason the number 8 stops at 6pm is that it's not commercially viable to run

the service beyond that time. If the buses were to be taken back under local authority control the same problems regarding a shortfall of finance would still persist as things are currently.

12. Lindsay Robertson asked about why a service can't be run connecting Alexandra Parade with the Forge. This is something that is currently being re-assessed with regard to the new Tesco store having opened. If it does come about, though, it will involve re-routing an existing service rather than instituting a new one. It seems to First that the most frequent users of any such service would be concession pass holders, and the recent reduction in reimbursement would again play a part in any decision.

Elizabeth Shearer later suggested re-routing the 8 might provide this service, but it was pointed out that re-routing some buses would mean delays in journeys for other passengers, and the 8 is viewed as a local route for areas with no other buses.

13. Bernard Elliott feels the bus shelters featuring rolling advertising are intrusive on the pavements, and he's contacted both health and safety and the police about this. He also wondered why there were so many CCTV cameras on some shelters.

Chris Carberry explained that the advertising programme was negotiated by Glasgow City Council and is part of a deal whereby the company that solicits the advertisements maintains these particular bus shelters. Complaints about these should be addressed to the relevant Council department. Mr Elliott felt First Bus adding their voice to such complaints would have a greater weight than just individuals complaining.

14. Stephen Birrell enquired how First Bus engages in general consultation with the public. Alex Shearer responded that it was via meetings like this, and the route development plan on the website has been a considerable success. Several changes to service are the result of suggestions received via the website, and all suggestions receive a response. He has also encouraged the formation of bus users forums, citing one set up in Cumbernauld with the help of local MSP Kathy Craigie

15. Elizabeth Shearer asked about plans for the Commonwealth Games. Alex Shearer noted the Games would only last for two weeks, so while extra buses would be provided for journeys to the venues for that period, they're not necessarily going to be long term services, and more likely than not these will be from the city centre. In co-ordination with legacy plans First will consider new services if these are deemed viable. 2014 has already been very useful in helping to replenish the fleet. Councillor Alison Thewliss pointed out that the venues will be use before and after the games, and people will need to reach these venues otherwise they'll become white elephants. Those moving into the new housing will also require services. Alex Shearer was unconvinced that the housing won't have two cars outside every home, but noted that services will be provided if viable. He also thought most would be driving to the venues, but it was pointed out that parking at them and in the surrounding area will be limited and it's planned that these venues will be in constant use.

16. Wesley Wright asked why First Bus continued to run loss-making routes as part of a profit-driven company. Alex Shearer responded that First Bus runs services on routes with lower demand, plus night and weekend services, due to a combination of social conscience and a commercial choice of being able to credibly present First Bus as providing an extensive network in the Greater Glasgow area. But this is becoming less and less possible due to falling revenue. It's now reached the point where if these services are to continue politicians and SPT will have to fund them after next year. Without this investment loss making services will go.

17. Frank Plowright asked if any of the First Bus representatives would be taking the bus home after the meeting. Chris Carberry would be, but this wasn't an option for George Stewart who started work at 5.30am, and while Alex Shearer had taken the bus to work for 30 years, early starts now prevented him doing so as well.

18. Alison Thewliss noted that while services running from East to West and vice versa were generally good, there seemed to be fewer services north of the river running from South to North and back.