



Cllr Andrew Burns
City of Edinburgh Council
City Chambers
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1 Greenfield Crescent
Balerno
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18 April 2016

Dear Councillor Burns,

Balerno Community Council - Subsidised bus services - routes 24 and 70

Balerno Community Council was taken aback by the decision of West Lothian Council on 2 February to withdraw its subsidy towards the 24 bus route which connects Balerno, Currie and Juniper Green with St Johns Hospital. The Community Council was not consulted, nor were we aware of any consultation. Nor so far as we are aware were Edinburgh Council aware of the proposal before the end of March 2016.

We gather that Edinburgh Council discussed subsidised bus services on 15 March and that service 24 was referred to as if it would continue.

Balerno Community Council also understand that Edinburgh Council agreed to withdraw funding from service 70 between Balerno and Gyle meaning that service will close with effect from from early June.

Withdrawal of service 24 - St John's Hospital is as far as we are aware the referral hospital for medical cases from the Balerno area. As such it is fair to assume that public transport provision should be designed to ensure that patients can access their hospital without undue difficulty. If that is a reasonable principle, and we think it is, then it has been ignored in this case.

Withdrawal of subsidy for service 24 by West Lothian Council led inevitably to withdrawal of the service on 10 April, and to the new reality for residents of Balerno of a four hour round trip to St John's, via Haymarket, as against 30 minutes each way on the direct 24 service.

Loss of the 24 service will impact disproportionately on the elderly who do not have ready access to alternative transport. In 2013 some 71% of the passengers on the 24 were entitled to concessionary fares, and the overall subsidy for each passenger was at the rate of only £0.81; average passenger numbers were 2400 per month although we do not know the numbers from the Edinburgh section of the route. £0.81 per fare does not seem an exorbitant amount.

The choice for those passengers now for the immediate future is between around four hours overall by bus or paying £35 for a taxi each way. That is a strange situation where the overall distance involved is of the order of only 10 miles. Going to hospital is a stressful thing at the best of times. I am sure you will agree that it is not helped by additional concerns about getting there in time or having to pay £70 for the privilege

Service 24 ran along Lanark Road West to Kirknewton before going onwards to Livingston. You will know that Balerno High School catchment area includes Kirknewton. Effectively the withdrawal of the 24 service prevents Kirknewton students from accessing any extracurricular activity at their secondary school.



In summary, therefore, the withdrawal of this service would appear to affect disproportionately the elderly, the sick, those on low incomes and secondary school pupils. This cannot be justifiable.

Withdrawal of service 70 - Separately the Balerno area is also losing the 70 service to the Gyle. Again, loss of this service hits hard on the elderly. As the paper before the Transport and Environment Committee noted the service provided shopping opportunities, mainly for elderly residents not on a bus route. Those elderly residents who came to our April Community Council meeting explained that the service meant significantly more than a shopping opportunity, but was a much anticipated social opportunity.

Alternative arrangements - We are aware of efforts being made to reroute the 40 and X40 services to provide some mitigation of the detrimental effect of withdrawal of the 24. However you will be aware that, to access the 40 service, passengers will have to travel to Currie and change buses at Riccarton Mains Road. The service will therefore be significantly less convenient than that provided by the 24 for those having to travel to St John's Hospital from Balerno. It may be that the rerouted 40 is the best that can be achieved in the short term but we would not consider it to be a long term solution. Taking into account also that the 40 does not serve Kirknewton, there is therefore no proposal of which we are aware which provides a bus service across the Balerno High School catchment area, and that on its own we would regard as unacceptable

We would be disappointed if West Lothian Council had taken their decision on the 24 service without considering the impact on neighbouring communities. Part of the problem so far as the decision on the 24 service is concerned is the cross boundary issue. Clearly if Councils are not required to consider the impact on and consult with neighbours before taking decisions which they must realise have an effect outside their areas then decisions like that in relation to the 24 service will arise, and that cannot be a desirable outcome.

We would welcome your comments on whether Edinburgh Council have expressed any concerns to West Lothian Council about their decision on the service 24, and on what steps Edinburgh Council may have taken to secure revision by West Lothian of their decision. We would also appreciate your comments in general on the issues raised in this letter and your proposals for reinstating the 24 bus service and cancelling the withdrawal of the 70 service.

Yours sincerely,

Richard M Henderson CB WS
Chair, Balerno Community Council

cc – Cllrs Bill Henderson, Ricky Henderson and Dominic Heslop; Chief Executive CEC;