

The Cockburn Association AGM 2014

Transport Committee Report

Lawrence Marshall

General Overview

Transport remains one of the most important issues facing the city and its ever expanding travel to work area. It is a crucial enabler of our continued economic, social and environmental prosperity. Edinburgh residents make 55% of their trips to work by public transport, on foot or by bike. This is commendably high - indeed, it is a higher proportion than anywhere else in Scotland. But it hides the fact that there remains a continued systemic inefficiency in that journey times throughout the city remain little better than in Victorian times - and in many cases worse. There is still much to do to make taking public transport, in particular, truly competitive with the convenience of the car. That it is far faster to journey into the city centre from Prestonpans than from Portobello or from Bathgate than from Barnton is indicative of an investment strategy which has, by and large, better served those choosing to live outwith the city than it has those who have chosen to live within it. There is no easy solution here - but it is an issue which needs urgently to be addressed.

Car

The number of Edinburgh households without a car is, uniquely in Scotland, rising and, at 89,000, is higher than at any time since the 1970s. Furthermore, Edinburgh is the only Scottish city where driving to work diminished as a proportion of all work journeys between 2001 and 2011. Nevertheless, the total number of cars owned by city residents has nearly doubled over the past 30 years (from 94,000 in 1981 to 181,000 in 2011) and journeys by car still account for some 42% of journeys to work and 43% of all journeys. It is reckoned that driving in Edinburgh takes 29% longer than it would were traffic free-flowing.

Walking

Some 19% of journeys to work and 35% of all journeys are made on foot in the city by Edinburgh residents (if tourists, who tend to walk much of the time they are here, are included, this latter figure would be even higher). Our streets are still dominated by motor traffic. Particularly in the city centre we must create more civilised, pedestrian- and cycle-friendly streets. Look at Perth, Dundee - dare I say it, even Glasgow. Only in a section of the Royal Mile can we even compare with the pedestrian-friendliness of some of the main streets of these other Scottish cities. And, of course, an attractive public realm attracts people - and people spend money when walking around. So, it's good for business.

Cycling

Cycling accounts for 7% of journeys to work and 2% of all journeys. We welcome the decision of the City of Edinburgh Council to increase from 5% to 7% the share of its transport budget allocated to cycling. The Scottish Government's target is to achieve a 10% share of all journeys across Scotland by 2020. Despite, therefore, a 16% increase in the number of people in Edinburgh travelling by bike or on foot since 2001, a huge amount remains to be done. We support much of the work undertaken by the Lothian Cycle Campaign group Spokes - but we share with the Edinburgh Living Streets Group a concern regarding the practicalities of "shared use" pavements contained within the Council's recently published draft Street Design Guidance. We welcome the intention of the City of Edinburgh Council to develop a "family network" on mostly quiet roads and off-street - aimed at ensuring that those less confident and family groups feel safe and secure when cycling.

Bus

29% of journeys to work by Edinburgh residents are made by bus. Lothian Buses continues to provide the vast majority of public transport trips in Edinburgh. Passenger numbers increased from 110.7m in 2012 to 115.4m in 2013, a 4.2% increase and a 25 year high.

A net profit of £8.2m was recorded in 2012 - representing a 31% increase in profits from operations and a near 5% increase in total revenues from the previous year. £5.5m was invested in the business - with the City of Edinburgh Council receiving an annual dividend payment of over £3m.

Lothian Buses has one of the youngest fleets of buses in the country – with an average bus age of 4.9 years. The fleet is completely low-floor and easy-access. We welcome the introduction of increasing numbers of hybrid buses to our streets - and indeed the trial of a fully electric bus last summer.

We also welcome the introduction last June of a Family DAYticket, allowing 2 adults and 3 children to travel on all daytime services for £7.50. This was extended in September from Sundays only to 7 days a week.

In November, m-ticketing was introduced allowing users of Apple and Android smartphones to pre-purchase day (and night) tickets straight onto their mobiles.

Lothian Buses is now a constituent part of the integrated Transport for Edinburgh - encompassing bus, tram and eventually “active” travel modes such as walking and cycling.

In preparation for the introduction of tram services, several bus routes were diverted away from Princes Street onto George Street in an effort to, in particular, avoid congestion around Marks & Spencer and the Scott Monument. This has resulted in a reduction in choice of buses from the city centre for some residents - and also a reduction in access to Waverley station. We will keep a watching eye on this in the coming year.

Tram

The trams are here! We are glad that the end of this particularly expensive and disruptive saga in the life of the city is coming to an end. If experience elsewhere is any guide, the trams will soon come to be seen as part of everyday life - and there will be calls for the half-line now built to be extended to better serve the city. Indeed, we believe that without such an extension Edinburgh Trams will be hard pushed to ever make an operating profit. As noted in last year’s AGM report, the Cockburn Association joined with Transform Scotland in December 2012 to urge that the Scottish Government extend the current terminus down Leith Walk to Newhaven - and then via the former railway line to join the tram line at Roseburn. All this has Parliamentary consent.

A tram line up the Bridges to Little France has also been proposed by the City of Edinburgh Council. This does not have Parliamentary consent - but does have the support of business groups and institutions such as the University of Edinburgh. Like the route down Leith Walk to Newhaven, it would serve a corridor where many folk live, work and play.

One other option which trams in Edinburgh opens up is an extension to run on under-utilised rail tracks in the city. Causing little disruption to implement, the south suburban railway would be an ideal candidate for such tram-train operation – especially as the line is to be electrified in the coming years. Such a scheme would open up new journey opportunities in the city, e.g. Princes Street and Haymarket via Murrayfield, Gorgie and Morningside to Cameron Toll, running then on-street to Little France. Trams would also be able to access the south suburban railway from the direction of the airport and Edinburgh Park. Tram-trains are increasingly common on the continent. We await the results of the forthcoming UK tram-train trial in Sheffield with interest.

Train

Work journeys by train in Edinburgh have grown by 36% over the past decade –but from a modest base. Thus only 2% of journeys in the city are made by rail. The increased use of rail – undoubtedly due to the opening of Edinburgh Park, Brunstane and Newcraighall stations (which together handled 1.168m passengers in 2012/13) – demonstrates the latent demand for rail in a city overshadowed in respect of rail service provision by its central belt near neighbour, Glasgow. It is a scandal that communities such as Portobello and Abbeyhill are still not connected back into the rail network and that the south suburban railway lies empty for most of the day - this in the UK’s fourth most congested city as measured by satnav data.

The completion of the refurbishment works at Waverley was a particularly welcome development in the past year. We continue to believe, however, that much could be done to improve the offering within the station itself. The east end of the station offers much potential –as does the main station building. We are encouraged that Network Rail is not unmindful of this.

The redevelopment of Haymarket station, Scotland's fourth busiest, has created ten times as much public space than before - and with a tram stop adjacent. Passenger numbers are projected to more than double to 10 million by 2028 - in line with a forecast 90%-115% growth in rail travel in the Edinburgh city region by 2014/25. We continue to regret the decision not to provide an entrance onto Dalry Road.

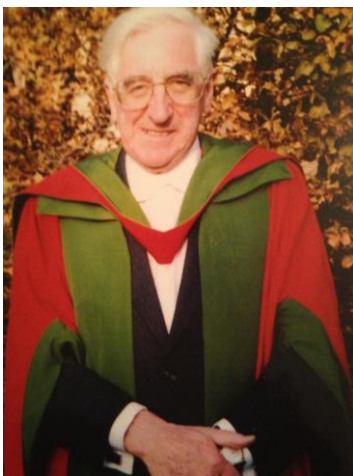
It is unfortunate that the proposed Edinburgh Gateway station at Gogar - providing access by tram to the airport from the Fife main rail line - will not now open until December 2016, some two and half years after the trams have started operation.

The Borders Railway is well on its way to completion. We look forward to Midlothian and the central Borders rejoining the rail network next year.

The Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP) will see the main line via Falkirk High electrified and an eventual best journey time of 42 minutes by the end of 2018. It is likely that a new depot to service the new electric trains required will be built at Millerhill.

Transform Scotland recently launched a campaign to improve inter-city rail journey times in Scotland - pointing out that it takes longer now to travel between Edinburgh and Perth than it did a century ago.

The Scottish Government continues to pursue a new high-speed rail line between Edinburgh and Glasgow - to be open by 2024. It is also studying options to bring high-speed rail over the border from England to both Edinburgh and Glasgow. Identifying a station to serve such trains is no easy task. The Cockburn Association believes that Waverley should be regarded as the location of first preference. A station outwith the city centre would be unacceptable - as would any station not also served by a full range of existing conventional Scottish domestic rail routes.



Professor Arnold Hendry - It was with great sadness that we learned of the death, on 14 December 2013, of Professor Arnold Hendry - at the age of 92. Arnold was a leading light in campaigning for improved public transport and a better public realm in Edinburgh over many years. His contribution to the work of the Cockburn Association was invaluable. He was a director of NETCo - the private company led by Professor Lewis Lesley which sought in the early years of this century to bring trams back to Edinburgh. Although the City of Edinburgh Council was not convinced by the technology on offer, I've no doubt that NETCo helped build the case for the return of trams to the capital. I hope that Arnold was able to learn of the first tram returning to Princes Street before his death. He also published a short history of transport proposals for Edinburgh - which made very interesting reading. Arnold was a longtime supporter of reviving the south suburban rail line as a transport facility in the capital. He was also for 26 years (1977-2003) the President of the Scottish Association for Public Transport.

Born in Buckie, Arnold was educated at Buckie High School and Aberdeen University. He had a varied career in civil engineering, starting off working for Sir William Arrol and Co. Ltd. in Glasgow and then starting an academic career as a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, moving on to posts in London, Khartoum, Liverpool and Edinburgh - where he was Professor of Civil Engineering from 1964 to 1988 and then Professor Emeritus.

He moved to Southport to be closer to his daughter in 2007. He didn't forget about Edinburgh, of course - and only last October donated a selection of his book collection to the Cockburn Association.

Above all, I'll remember Arnold for his polite yet dogged insistence that Edinburgh, great as it is, was not as good as it could be - especially as far as transport provision was concerned. I hope that we can, in the coming years, see even more of his visionary ideas come to fruition. That would be the most fitting tribute to Arnold's work and life.

A memorial service for Arnold will be held at Mayfield Salisbury Church on Friday 30th May at 2.30 p.m. - followed by refreshments at around 3.30 p.m. at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 22-26 George Street.

Bill Cantley - It would be remiss of me not to mention the presentation to Bill, my immediate predecessor as convener of transport in the Cockburn Association, of an Inspiring Volunteer Award (in the category of Arts, Culture and Heritage) on 5th June by the Lord Provost - recognising Bill's contribution to the work of the Cockburn Association over more than forty years.



As Marion Williams wrote in the Association's June 2013 Newsletter:

"Bill took on the convenership of the Cockburn Association's Transport and Planning Committee in the mid 1980s adding the Vice-Chairmanship of the Association's Council in 1994 ... He has been involved in many of the Cockburn Association's campaigns including the 'Save our Skyline' campaign challenging a 17 storey hotel development on the boundary of the World Heritage Site; the campaign in 1999 challenging the development of Princes Street Galleries, a proposal to build a one kilometre long shopping mall under Princes Street; campaigning against a motorway system through the city and promoting public transport; and continuing campaigns since the 1993 Structure Plan review put forward many potential areas for development in the Green Belt.

George Bruce wrote in his poem 'The Song of Henry Cockburn'

No longer here to mark out right from wrong,
The Cockburn bears the burden of his song.

Bill has undoubtedly carried on the Cockburn tradition for many, many years and Edinburgh is a better place for his, and his predecessors, travails. Thank you Bill."

Committee

I am grateful to the Association for entrusting me with the convenership of the Transport Committee. In some ways we are yet to find our feet - and we could usefully add to our membership.

I attended a meeting last June of the Edinburgh Transport Forum (set up by the City of Edinburgh Council to discuss issues with "stakeholder" groups) - Marion, our Director, has also represented the Association at these meetings.

I wish to record here my appreciation of the support offered to me by my fellow committee members: Bill Cantley, John Fleming, Mike Marwick and Julia Hill. And, of course, the support of Marion, our Director, in particular, enables our work to be seen within the wider context of the totality of issues addressed by the Association.

[Figures quoted in this report are largely taken from 2011 Census data as analysed by the City of Edinburgh Council and published by them in December 2013. Additional statistics are from the Council's 2014-2019 Local Transport Strategy. Supplementary bus information has been gleaned from the website of Lothian Buses. Rail usage statistics come from the Office of Rail Regulation (see <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/station-usage-estimates>). Other rail figures come from Transport Scotland's "Rail 2014" public consultation document and from Network Rail]