

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 August 2014

Bus Lane Network Review

Item number	7.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	Citywide

Executive summary

In its latest Local Transport Strategy, the Council states it will continue to maintain Edinburgh's bus lane network, review it regularly and extend it or enhance it, where opportunities arise.

The Council has carried out a review of a number of issues relating to the bus lane network. These comprise bus lane operational hours, permitted vehicle classes, ineffective bus lanes and new flashing or illuminated bus lane signs.

This report summarises the main issues and findings of the review and makes a number of recommendations, including undertaking trials changing all-day bus lanes, into peak periods bus lanes and allowing motorcycles to access with-flow bus lanes.

Links

Coalition pledges	P19
Council outcomes	CO22
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4

Bus Lane Network Review

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee:
 - 1.1.1 notes that a consultative review of bus lane network has been carried out and notes its findings;
 - 1.1.2 approves the promotion of an 18 month Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to trial peak periods bus lanes, in place of all-day bus lanes;
 - 1.1.3 approves the promotion of an 18 month Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to trial allowing motorcycles access to with-flow bus lanes during their operational hours;
 - 1.1.4 does not change Council Policy to allow Private Hire Cars or electric vehicles access to bus lanes during their operational hours;
 - 1.1.5 notes that the first tranche of amendments to ineffective bus lanes is due to be completed within the next few months;
 - 1.1.6 notes that the results of the above two trials, future bus lane expansion plans for the city and an update on bus lane camera enforcement will be reported to Committee in due course; and
 - 1.1.7 agrees that any decision to deploy flashing or illuminated bus lane signs, should be delayed until after the completion of the peak periods bus lane trial.

Background

- 2.1 The Council has invested heavily in a network of bus lanes. These now total around 65 kilometres, in length. They form an important element in delivering a high quality and reliable public transport system.
- 2.2 A report to Committee, on 4 June 2013, noted that a bus lane network review would be undertaken and the findings would be the subject of a future report.
- 2.3 In its latest Local Transport Strategy, the Council states it will continue to maintain Edinburgh's bus lane network, review it regularly and extend it or enhance it, where opportunities arise.

Main report

- 3.1 The review's scope included:
 - 3.1.1 reviewing the existing bus lane operational hours;
 - 3.1.2 reviewing the existing list of permitted vehicle classes that are allowed to use the bus lanes;
 - 3.1.3 identifying ineffective bus lanes for adjustment or removal; and
 - 3.1.4 investigating the feasibility of deploying a new flashing or illuminated bus lane sign based on existing blue statutory bus lane signs.

Bus lane operational hours

- 3.2 There are three bus lane operational times:
 - 3.2.1 all-day - 7:30am-6:30pm Mondays to Fridays and 8:30am-6:30pm Saturdays;
 - 3.2.2 peak periods – 7:30am-9:30am and 4:00pm-6:30pm Mondays to Fridays; and
 - 3.2.3 24 hours, seven days per week.
- 3.3 The review focused on the hours of operation of all-day bus lanes and considered, whether these should be maintained as they are at present, or amended to operate during peak periods only.
- 3.4 Approximately 90% of the city's bus lanes are peak periods or all-day bus lanes.
- 3.5 There are a limited number of 24 hour bus lanes that operate within the city. These will be retained, as they are usually deployed at discreet locations for specific reasons, for example bus gates, Park and Ride sites and contra-flow bus lanes.
- 3.6 Between February and April 2014, bus lane surveys were undertaken at a number of locations throughout the city, at various times of day.
- 3.7 The surveys showed that, at most of these locations, there was little or no delay to buses during off-peak periods; that is between 9:30am and 4:00pm, Monday to Friday. This appears to indicate that all-day bus lanes, offer little additional operational benefit to buses, compared to peak periods lanes, under normal traffic conditions.
- 3.8 There are approximately 22 kilometres of all-day bus lanes within the city. The surveys undertaken, represent only a snapshot of prevailing traffic conditions. It is therefore recommended that an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) is promoted to change all-day bus lanes into peak periods bus lanes.

- 3.9 There are number of reasons why an ETRO, rather than a TRO is proposed:
- 3.9.1 It allows the opportunity to trial peak periods bus lanes in place of all-day bus lanes.
 - 3.9.2 It allows for compilation of detailed bus journey time data, which would enable a more comprehensive and robust analysis of the impact of this change.
 - 3.9.3 The ETRO can be quickly revoked if, early in the trial, there is found to be significant justification for reinstating all-day bus lanes.
 - 3.9.4 If the trial is successful, it will allow time for a more extensive consultation with bus lane users prior to making any proposed permanent change.
 - 3.9.5 If a bus operator objects to the trial becoming permanent, a public hearing may be required. The supporting evidence from the above database, would provide robust objective evidence to support the Council's case.
- 3.10 Before and after bus journey times surveys would be undertaken, at the times of the year when traffic flows are typically at their maximum, for example, mid September to mid December and mid January to March.
- 3.11 It is proposed that the duration of the trial would be nine months, from June 2015 to March 2016. If the trial is successful, a TRO to make the change permanent could then be promoted within the 18 month life of the ETRO, which may avoid the need to temporarily revert back to all-day bus lanes.

Permitted vehicle classes

- 3.12 As part of the bus lane network review, the issue of extending access to bus lanes to other vehicle types has been reviewed. This has been the subject of several previous reports to the Committee. Consideration has been given to allowing Private Hire Cars, motorcycles and electric vehicles to use bus lanes.
- 3.13 There are potential issues associated with allowing additional vehicle classes access to bus lanes:
- 3.13.1 The more classes of vehicles that are allowed to use bus lanes, the less effective they are for buses, taxis and cyclists.
 - 3.13.2 Extending the number of classes permitted to use bus lanes, will reduce the attractiveness of cycling.

Private Hire Cars (PHCs)

- 3.14 The Council wrote to the main PHCs operators earlier this year, informing them that it was undertaking a bus lane network review, which included a review of the vehicle classes that are allowed to use the bus lanes.

- 3.15 The operators were asked to comment and submit reasons to support the case for allowing PHCs into bus lanes. Amongst the main reasons given were that PHCs are considered public transport and that they provide a very similar service to taxis (the main difference is that PHCs cannot pick up passengers on-street).
- 3.16 Edinburgh's bus lane network is the largest in Scotland and buses are easily its most important public transport mode (Lothian Buses carried 115.4 million passengers last year). Buses have a key role to play in the lives of a large proportion of the city's residents and workers. It is, therefore, essential that bus services are reliable. The bus lane network plays a key role in realising this objective.
- 3.17 Throughout the UK, the classes of vehicles that are permitted to use bus lanes vary from local authority to local authority. Some authorities only allow buses to use the lanes, some also allow taxis, while others allow both taxis and PHCs. It is a matter for each authority to decide what vehicles classes it allows into its bus lanes.
- 3.18 Police Scotland, SPOKES, bus and taxi operators were canvassed for their opinions regarding allowing PHCs into bus lanes. Police Scotland was supportive of allowing PHCs into bus lanes, as long as they were carrying passengers. Replies received from SPOKES, bus and taxi operators indicated that they were against allowing PHCs into bus lanes.
- 3.19 In addition to the issues stated in 3.13, there are two other potential issues with allowing PHCs access to bus lanes:
- 3.19.1 Enforcement of bus lanes could become problematic. Although PHCs have plates at the front and back, they mostly resemble general saloon cars and there are concerns that general traffic will follow them into bus lanes.
- 3.19.2 Unlike Edinburgh taxis, whose numbers are limited, there are no limits to the potential number of Private Hire Cars.
- 3.20 It is therefore recommended that PHCs should not be allowed access to bus lanes during their operational hours.
- Motorcycles**
- 3.21 As part of the review, motorcycle users' organisations were asked to comment and submit reasons to support the case for allowing motorcycles into bus lanes. Amongst the main reasons given were that they are considered vulnerable road users who would gain safety benefits from being able to use bus lanes and reduced journey times. Motorcyclists' organisations also consider motorcycles to be a greener form of transport.

- 3.22 Police Scotland, SPOKES, bus and taxi operators were canvassed for their opinions regarding allowing motorcycles into bus lanes. Police Scotland was supportive of allowing motorcycles into bus lanes. Replies received from SPOKES, some taxi and bus operators, including First, indicated that they were against allowing motorcycles into bus lanes. Lothian Buses do not have any opposition to motorcycles using bus lanes.
- 3.23 Transport for London (TfL) has undertaken two extensive trials of allowing motorcycles access to bus lanes; the first from January 2009 to July 2010 and the second from July 2010 to January 2012. Two monitoring reports were produced and are available as background papers to this report.
- 3.24 After the trials, TfL decided to give motorcycles permanent access to the majority of the Capital's red routes. TfL states on its website that 'the safety of motorcyclists and other vulnerable road users is unaffected' and 'benefits include reduced journey times for motorcyclists and less carbon dioxide emissions'.
- 3.25 In addition to London the following cities allow or partially allow motorcycles to use bus lanes: Bath, Bedford, Belfast, Birmingham, Colchester, Derby, Hull, Leicester, Newcastle, Plymouth, Reading, Sheffield, Sunderland and Swindon.
- 3.26 It is considered that allowing motorcycles access into Edinburgh's bus lanes will have marginal or no impact on bus lane efficiency
- 3.27 Given the above, it is recommended that an 18 month Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) be promoted to allow motorcycles access to bus lanes. However, it is recommended that access should only be permitted to with-flow bus lanes and not to contra-flow bus lanes or to bus gates, as these are primarily intended to prohibit intrusive through traffic, including motorcycles, from sensitive areas while maintaining access for public transport.
- 3.28 It is proposed that the duration of the trial would be nine months, from June 2015 to March 2016. If the trial is successful, a TRO to make the change permanent could then be promoted within the 18 month life of the ETRO, which may avoid the need to temporarily revert back to excluding motorcycles from bus lanes.
- 3.29 At present, special authorisation from the Scottish Government is required for bus lane signs that incorporate a motorcycle symbol. However, public consultation is currently underway on changes to the relevant regulations. One of the proposals being consulted on would remove the need for this authorisation. It is currently expected that the new regulations will be introduced in March 2015, prior to the start of the proposed trial. Nevertheless, the Council will seek prior approval, for these sign variations, from the Scottish Government at the earliest opportunity.

Trials

- 3.30 If the trials are successful, TROs will be promoted to make the proposals permanent. It is intended that discussions will take place with bus operators, with a view to identifying any issues arising from these proposals and seeking to resolve these.
- 3.31 The timescales involved in a public hearing process would mean that it would not be possible to have this completed within the 18 month life of the ETRO.

Electric vehicles

- 3.32 Consideration was given to allowing electric vehicles, which are zero emissions vehicles, access to bus lanes. In addition to the issues stated in 3.13, there are two further specific reasons for not allowing them into bus lanes:
 - 3.32.1 Enforcement would be very problematical, as there are no distinctive visual differences between electric and non-electric vehicles.
 - 3.32.2 Electric vehicle use in Edinburgh is currently very limited. In the short term, allowing electric vehicles into bus lanes would provide an incentive to encourage uptake. However, a 'tipping point' would eventually be reached, where the number of electric vehicles would significantly impact on bus lane efficiency.
- 3.33 It is therefore recommended that electric vehicles should not be allowed access to bus lanes, during their operational hours.

Ineffective bus lanes

- 3.34 The adjustment or removal of ineffective bus lanes will improve traffic flow by reducing congestion. Ineffective bus lanes in the context of this report, are bus lanes where one of the two following conditions exists:
 - 3.34.1 Locations where buses, taxis and cyclists receive marginal or no advantage and which also cause localised congestion (solution – remove bus lane); and
 - 3.34.2 Signalised junctions where there are heavy right turning traffic flows and which also suffer from regular congestion. In these instances a potential solution is to curtail bus lanes further back from the junctions, thus improving traffic flows while still maintaining an acceptable level of bus priority.

- 3.35 As part of the review process a first tranche of five locations were identified (refer to background paper 2 for further details) and TRO procedures were subsequently undertaken, to remove/amend the bus lanes at these locations. No objections were received to these proposals and these changes are in the process of being implemented.
- 3.36 There is an ongoing programme to identify further ineffective bus lanes and implement the appropriate changes. Consideration will be given to providing reasonable alternative cycling facilities in locations where a bus lane is being curtailed or removed.

Flashing or illuminated bus lane signs

- 3.37 One issue that was identified as part of a previous review of bus lane camera enforcement was that some members of the public were confused over when bus lanes were operating.
- 3.38 The Council investigated whether it could deploy flashing or illuminated bus lane signs, based on existing blue statutory bus lane signs. Initial contact was made with Transport Scotland and the Department for Transport, to seek the necessary approval for these signs.
- 3.39 Transport Scotland and the Department for Transport's initial indications were, that they would not give approval, for the use of a non-standard statutory bus lane sign. Some of the reasons for this decision are given below:
- 3.39.1 The current blue statutory signs are considered fit for purpose.
- 3.39.2 National consistency of the traffic signing system is of primary importance, so as to ensure driver understanding and to maintain road safety standards.
- 3.39.3 Concerns that some bus lanes would have flashing signs, while others would not. This inconsistency could be confusing to drivers who might not know why there is a difference.
- 3.39.4 The belief that some drivers may come to consider the lack of a flashing sign, as indicating a non-enforceable advisory bus lane.
- 3.40 If the ETRO recommended in this report is promoted nearly all of Edinburgh's bus lanes (excluding bus gates, Park and Ride sites and contra-flow bus lanes), would have the same peak periods operational hours and this would remove any confusion amongst drivers.
- 3.41 It is therefore recommended, that any further investigation of this issue, should be postponed, until after the results of the proposed peak periods bus lane trial are known.
- 3.42 The results of the two proposed bus lane trials, future bus lane expansion plans for the city and an update on bus lane camera enforcement will be reported to the Committee in due course.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Adjustment/removal of ineffective bus lanes will improve traffic flow and reduce congestion at these locations, which in turn will improve air quality at these locations.
- 4.2 If the peak periods bus lane trial is successful and the proposals are made permanent, there would be a single operational category for approximately 90% of the city's bus lane network. This would reduce any confusion over when bus lanes were operating, improving compliance and possibly removing the need to investigate additional bus lane signage.

Financial impact

- 5.1 The cost to make the ETROs is estimated to be around £5,000. This will be funded from current bus lane Penalty Charge Notices' revenue.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that signage costs of £130,000, required as a result of these proposals, will be met from 2015-2016 Penalty Charge Notices' revenue.
- 5.3 If either or both the trials are unsuccessful there will be additional costs to change the bus lane signs back.
- 5.4 If there is an objection from a bus operator there will potentially be additional costs for up to two changes of bus lane signs (at the end of the ETRO and following any public hearing).

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The recommendations in this report do not impact on any existing policies of the Council.
- 6.2 There are not expected to be any health and safety, governance or compliance implications, arising from the proposals set out in the report.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The bus lane trial will affect cyclists, by reducing the amenity provided by bus lanes. SPOKES will be consulted, regarding any proposals to permanently make all-day bus lanes into peak periods bus lanes.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The impacts of this report, in relation to the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties, have been considered and the outcomes are summarised below.
- 8.2 Relevant Council sustainable development policies have been taken into account.
- 8.3 The proposals in this report will:
- reduce carbon emissions as the adjustment/removal of ineffective bus lanes, will improve traffic flow, reduce congestion and carbon emissions thus making a contribution to better air quality in the city; and
 - help to achieve a sustainable Edinburgh because an improved transport system, based on sustainable alternatives to the car, will reduce congestion and enable everyone to have the best possible access to jobs and essential services.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Edinburgh Bus Service Development & Operations Group (EBSDOG), SPOKES, taxi operators and Police Scotland have been asked for their views regarding allowing PHCs and motorcycles into bus lanes. They were also asked for their views on the need for flashing bus lanes signs.
- 9.2 On 24 April 2014 a presentation on the Bus Lane Network Review was given to the Transport Forum.
- 9.3 The main PHCs operators and motorcycling users' organisations, were given the opportunity to comment and submit evidence supporting the case, for allowing their vehicles to access bus lanes.
- 9.4 As part of the statutory ETRO process, the trials to change all-day bus lanes into peak periods lanes and to allow motorcycles access to with-flow bus lanes will be formally advertised, to allow any interested party to comment or object to the proposals. The relevant Neighbourhood Partnerships, will also be consulted on these proposals.

- 9.5 Ongoing engagement with organisations representing bus lane users, the Transport Forum, Police Scotland and other stakeholders, will continue with regard to bus lane hours and in the identification of ineffective bus lanes.

Background reading/external references

- 1 Transport and Environment Committee (4 June 2013) - Bus Lane Camera Enforcement Expansion and Bus Lane Network Review
http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/39383/item_7_8-bus_lane_camera_enforcement
- 2 Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee (13 September 2012) - Bus Lane Camera Enforcement Review
http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/36452/item_no_6_5-bus_lane_camera_enforcement_review
- 3 Assessment of TfL's experimental scheme to allow motorcycles onto with - flow bus lanes on the TLRN (June 2010) - Transport Research Laboratory
<https://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/motorcycles-in-bus-lanes-full-report.pdf>
- 4 Motorcycles in Bus Lanes – Monitoring of the second TfL Trial Version 1: December 2011, Transport Research Laboratory
<https://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/motorcycles-in-bus-lanes-full-report.pdf>
- 5 Evaluation of Journey Time and Emissions of PTWs in Bus Lanes, January 2011, Transport for London Motorcycle Policy Unit
<https://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/pt-emissions-study.pdf>

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Links

Coalition pledges	P19 – Keep Lothian Buses in public hands and encourage the improvement of routes and times.
Council outcomes	CO22 – Moving Efficiently – Edinburgh has a transport system that improves connectivity and is green, healthy and accessible.
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4 – Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric.
Appendices	