

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM LOTHIAN BUSES

Lothian Buses is the main bus operator in Edinburgh and the surrounding area. Its fleet consists of around 900 vehicles of which 810 are used on regular scheduled services. The fleet travels over 30 million miles annually, almost all of which is on local roads mostly in Edinburgh but also in East, Mid and West Lothian.

The quality of the road surface is directly related to passenger comfort during a bus journey which in turn has an effect on the attractiveness of buses as a mode of transport. There is also a noticeable correlation between road surface quality and the reliability of on-board equipment. The increase in spending on resurfacing over recent years has brought about a welcome improvement in the level of comfort experienced by our passengers and drivers but there are still many areas of our network (most noticeably within Edinburgh) where we still suffer from the previous under-investment in the road network.

In Edinburgh there has been a significant programme of reconstructing and resurfacing the carriageway at bus stops. Buses create a very large force on the road as they brake to pull into bus stops and the resulting damage was previously patch repaired, a repair that never lasted long. A more suitable material is now being used to replace the carriageway at bus stops and the number of stops with dips in the road that fill with water has dramatically reduced.

Where possible, Lothian Buses has worked with local authorities to discuss resurfacing plans and agree diversion routes that reduce the inconvenience to bus passengers but allows resurfacing to be carried out in a way that maximises the quality and life of the finished surface. This is on the basis of "short term pain for long term gain" and should allow resurfacing to be carried out more cost effectively. It is hoped that this in turn allows more roads to be resurfaced for any given budget. As part of these discussions it has been possible to agree adjustments to the road design to solve previous problems (e.g. improving the width of bus lanes and more appropriate location of bus stops). Such improvements are not possible when more localised repairs are carried out.

As previously mentioned there are still major bus routes with a very poor road surface. We would want spending on roads maintenance to be maintained at a level that ensures that these are resurfaced sooner rather than later to improve the ride quality for existing passengers and encourage modal shift.

If the level of spending is to be reduced, it is imperative that it is targeted at works that will create the most benefit. To do this the assessment tools used to make this judgement need to be robust and at present there seems to be a problem in this area. On two main routes on our network, the bus lane is in such poor condition that buses will use the normal running lane unless traffic is queuing; the relevant sections of road are not programmed to be resurfaced. This would indicate that either the

road has not been assessed or that the result of the assessment has been affected by the condition of the general running lane and not produced a realistic assessment of the bus lane. The needs of all stakeholders must be considered if resurfacing projects have to be prioritised and it is important that there is a sensible framework for such consultation.