

York Bus Forum Meeting Tuesday 19th October 17.30, by Zoom

Attending: Doreen Magill (Chair), Graham Collett (Vice Chair), Andrew Jarvis (Speaker), Richard Parker, Jim from Harbus, Roger Pierce, Barry Connor, Duncan Miller, Tony Hudson, Alan Robinson (Membership Sec.) John Bibby, George Wood, Roger French (Treasurer), Barry Thomas, David Stuart, John Slaughter, Eleanor Tew, Gordon Smith, Diana Robinson, David Merrett, Eden Blyth, Donald Southall, Catherine Croston (First), Stuart Wilson, Councillor Andy D'Agorne (up to and including item 3) and Gail Shuttleworth

1. Welcome and Apologies – Apologies were received from Niall McFerran.
2. Minutes of 21st September meeting – accepted. There were no matters arising – none.
3. Presentation by Andrew Jarvis Managing Director of First Group based in Aberdeen “Hydrogen or Electricity- Do we need to choose?”

As background Andrew outlined his role which was being in charge of First Group operations covering the North of England, Wales and Scotland with each local First Bus Managing Director accountable to him.

Andrew outlined that Aberdeen City Council had in 2010 recognised the need to look forward to secure the local economy with a decline from the peak of oil and gas production and secured £21m in funding (the majority secured via the EU) to deliver 10 hydrogen buses and explained the technicalities of fuel cell hybrid buses (hydrogen, with each bus costing £835,000 and 6 being produced for Stagecoach Bluebird and 4 for First Aberdeen.

The project lasted 5 years to evaluate the operation of the buses and proved that the buses worked, though support from the manufacturer was inadequate and maintenance times protracted.

Nonetheless the City Council instituted a second development project which began in January 2017 with support once again from the EU and involvement from First Bus, though Stagecoach had decided not to continue involvement.

This second project, value £8m, was to deliver 15 double Decker buses with the cost of each having fallen to around £500,000 compared to £230,000 for a diesel and £450,000 for an electric powered bus.

The manufacturer had changed to Wright from Northern Ireland and support was very good. Experience suggests that Hydrogen buses are very reliable, and popular with drivers and customers, but still not commercially viable with maintenance costs in particular 2.5 times those of diesel buses.

Andrew also outlined First Bus's experiences with funding for electric buses with 148 new electric buses, 45% of the depot's fleet, being secured for the UK's largest bus depot in Glasgow to be delivered over the next 18 months. Funding has been secured from Transport Scotland and First itself.

The current costs of fuel are diesel £0.66 per mile, Electric £0.25p per mile and Hydrogen £1.05 per mile.

The costs of maintain an electric bus is considerably lower for an electric bus for the majority of its 15 year life but with a sharp spike when the battery needs replacing that means the whole life cycle costs are roughly comparable.

Cabling, however, is expensive and currently is the factor making electric less commercially attractive than diesel though Andrew was optimistic that more demand would bring prices down and of course tail pipe emissions are zero. Andrew concluded that for City bus routes electric was the future.

Barry Connor asked re the comparison of electric v hydrogen and felt that any private car journey could be undertaken by an electric car which was not the case for hydrogen and Andrew concurred but offered the view that established manufacturers and suppliers would push blue hydrogen, which was itself essentially a fossil fuel, because they could adapt their current infrastructure easily.

Richard Parker commented that in Harrogate electric buses are charged in the bus station between journeys whilst passengers are loading and asked whether that was better than the buses having to go to a separate site to charge as in Glasgow.

Andrew acknowledged the attractiveness of that process but felt it was sub-optimal because it relies on buses being always on time on routes otherwise there would be delays in the bus station as late running buses came in but could not then leave until recharged with a knock on effect on other routes.

Dave Merrett asked how electric and hydrogen vehicles compared weight wise and Andrew stated that a conventional single deck vehicle weighs about 8 tons, an electric about 12 tons and a hydrogen vehicle 7 tons.

Diana Robinson asked whether the future was smaller demand responsive buses rather than big buses, but Andrew speculated that without subsidies fares would need to be much higher for demand responsive transport to be viable.

Alan Robinson noted that Andrew had said hydrogen vehicles were only 25% efficient and Andrew explained, in some detail, how the inefficiencies were in the energy used to produce hydrogen- basically using electricity internally within the bus to produce the hydrogen that was required to power the bus.

Councillor D'Agorne referred to the comparison between the lives of electric and hydrogen vehicles and the need to change batteries in electric vehicles after 7/8 years wondering how firm this lifespan was. Andrew Jarvis commented that new learning and data was always occurring and pointed out that in predominantly hill areas there was a greater battery use whereas more flat or downhill areas used less battery and also stated that on cold, wet days battery use was much greater than in sunnier, drier climates.

Eden Blyth offered the view that hydrogen had been hijacked by the internal combustion lobby in order to confuse the general public, lead them to use fuel cell technology and therefore internal combustion technology.

Doreen Magill on behalf of members thanked Andrew for a very detailed, interesting and informative presentation.

4. York Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and City Centre Bus Study report and update.

Graham Collett reminded members of the process and timescales for the production of the BSIP and expressed disappointment that the Bus Forum had heard nothing from acknowledgement of the Bus Forum priorities on 7th June until Monday 11th October and Alan Robinson commented on the mad scramble that had been necessitated to send the document out, read and feedback comments.

Alan asked for a specific commitment that all long distance buses would stop at the Railway station to promote intermodal transport and requested that City of York Council look again at the feasibility of a bigger interchange at the station.

He highlighted the fact that a new draft was due by the end of the week and there would be just a few days for the Forum to comment on the revised document.

Diana Robinson asked that the comments that had been submitted to date be circulated to members and expressed a view that rather than heated shelters priority should be given to well-lit shelters in the interests of safety and to allow timetable information to be read.

Roger Pierce expressed the view that the plan was a poor, biased presentation of what had been done over the years which didn't augur well for securing additional funds.

Barry Connor pointed out that justifying the past rather than setting a vision of what could happen in the future seemed to be a common theme of the BSIP's stating that the North Yorkshire BSIP was in the same vein.

Dave Merrett tempered the comments pointing out that the government timescale had been very short and acknowledging work pressures at the Council notwithstanding that he felt that the submission as it stood lacked ambition.

Alan Robinson pointed out that the BSIP was meant to be a live document to be updated at least once a year.

5. "5 Worst Bus Stop"- Better Bus Stops Campaign and other activities.

Graham Collett encouraged members to send photographs for the 5 worst bus stop campaign to Niall McFerran.

6. Subscription Renewals

Roger French thanked those members and organisations who had renewed their subscriptions and urged those, some of who were present at the meeting to, renew as soon as possible either by cheque to the membership secretary or via on line faster payments

7. When to return to face to face meetings? Or do we operate hybrid events?

Doreen Magill informed members that the committee had been debating when to return to face to face meetings and, when we are able, the advantages of hybrid meetings , not least in allowing a wider range of speakers who could attend "remotely" and for those members who, for whatever reason , were unable to attend in person.

Representatives of the committee had also spoken to City of York Council and had the impression that the Council were not yet in a position to offer the opportunity of face to face meetings.

The committee had concluded that, given the approaching winter and on-going covid issues, it would be prudent to maintain the current position of zoom only meetings.

Roger Pierce offered the view that there was an apparent paradox in a meeting advocating the use of public transport, deciding to hold zoom meetings therefore not journeying via public transport and he would prefer face to face meetings.

Cathy Croston representing First Bus informed the meeting that First Bus themselves were not having face to face meetings currently and for the time being she would attend by zoom not face to face.

Diana Robinson pointed out that it was possible to attend via phone as she did for those who did not have access to computers.

Barry Connor pointed out that for some, such as himself, bus was not an option as there were no services in his village, so attending via zoom avoided unnecessary car journeys.

After discussion, acknowledging the differing viewpoints, it was agreed to hold zoom meetings until the spring.

8. Any other business

Doreen Magill said that the preceding Sunday, the date of the Yorkshire Marathon, she had the opinion that there were lots of signs advising car drivers of alternative routes but little information for bus passengers.

However, others felt in their localities there had been messaging for bus passengers and Cathy said that First Bus had provided information and guidance on the day. It was felt that perhaps the Heworth area from where Doreen was using the bus was perhaps untypical and something had gone wrong with the information in that particular area of the city.

Roger Pierce informed the meeting that he had attended the meeting where the BSIP was discussed as a member of the public and he was disappointed that the majority of meeting time had been devoted to the proposed Tadcaster Road scheme with relatively little discussion of the BSIP draft submission by comparison.

Diana Robinson raised the matter of the digital information screens which, disappointingly, were not working properly on a frequent basis giving a recent example where the screen date was several days in error.

Dave Merrett suggested a speaker from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority discussing the Demand Responsive pilot in East Leeds would be appropriate for a future meeting and Graham Collett agreed to pick up this suggestion.

9. Date of Next Meeting 16th November with speaker being from Munster, Germany, offering a view on that City's experience of operating electric buses.