

Retail Policy Group Minutes

Meeting held at John Lewis, 9 July 2009 at 3pm

In Attendance: Isabella Miller (Chair)
Michael Apter (Paper Tiger)
Rochelle Weir (St James Shopping)
Denzil Skinner (Hamilton & Inches)
Fawns Reid (GATA)
George Bell (Jenners and House of Fraser)
Graham Russell (West End Association and Leith Walk Traders tbc)

Guest Speaker: Steven Bell, Tram Project Director, tie Ltd
Accompanied by: Gordon Christie, Customer Service Manager, tie Ltd

Apologies: Graeme Birse (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce)
Tom Campbell (Essential Edinburgh)
Gordon Drummond (Harvey Nichols)
Robert Winter (Princes Mall)

Isabella Miller (IM) welcomed the guest speaker Steven Bell to the meeting.

Steven Bell gave an update on the status of the different aspects of the work on Princes Street from April to date, and outlined the projected status of the work until the end of November. He stated that he hoped to be in a position in September to announce the date for the commencement of the Christmas embargo.

He explained that the utility work would continue at York Place / Picardy Place through July, August and September. Tram construction work would not begin at this site until 2010. He outlined that it will involve the most complex traffic management arrangements in the city.

Questions for Mr Bell

A request was made that Mr Bell alert TOG of the traffic management solution for implementation at York Place / Picardy Place / Leith Street / Waterloo Place / North Bridge as soon as possible.

Denzil Skinner (DS) requested that signage directing drivers to car parks be very obvious and distinct from other signage. He asked that the use of language be carefully thought out.

Mr Bell responded that they are learning as they go with regards to signage.

IM stressed the importance of the removal of out-of-date signage and expressed frustration at the preponderance of old signage still on display.

Mr Bell replied that all signage is systematically audited but would investigate out-of-date signage if any specific examples could be given.

DS asked if any process had been put in place for Christmas 2010. He pointed out that the city could require more dramatic traffic management given the topography of the next stages of the routes.

Mr Bell replied that work is being carried out towards the target of having Shandwick Place completed and Lothian Road connected to the junction at Haymarket by September 2010. He noted that the work remaining in this area (the implementation of the overhead lines) is far less invasive

and easier to implement than the previous civil engineering works. Mr Bell pointed out that there is the potential for a greater impact on the east end of the city in the run up to Christmas 2010 (taken to mean east of St Andrew's Square as far as Constitution Street).

IM asked, in the context of what the current west end disruption looks like, what will the disruption at the east end look like? She stated that this information will be necessary for budget setting for 2010.

Mr Bell replied that the east end is a different situation involving larger sites in place for longer durations and that a lot will depend upon the traffic management solution.

Mr Bell confirmed that the west end entry would be complete by 2010 with no work taking place until the implementation of the overhead wire run.

Graham Russell (GR) pointed out that 'no work' should not be taken to mean 'no disruption' as this is inaccurate.

Mr Bell reiterated that when digging up a very old city there is always the chance of unpredictable discoveries under the road surface.

DS asked why these discoveries, for example the large underground cavity at Haymarket, are not used as hooks for positive PR stories. He felt that these unforeseen setbacks should be presented to the Edinburgh public as of city interest rather than as yet another obstacle. DS said that there is plenty scope to get constructive stories relating to the trams into the public domain.

George Bell (GB) asked that all signage should be ready for use as soon as fences are erected.

Mr Bell pointed out that Princes Street was very much a test bed for the signage but accepted the comment.

IM asked why the pedestrian crossing lights along George Street seemed incorrectly phased, noting that often a 'red man' would be displayed with no traffic on a green light from any direction.

Mr Bell took the feedback on board but mentioned that the situation may be arising because of unavoidable traffic phasing 'further back'.

DS requested that the fences be as far back as possible during the August festivals.

Mr Bell appreciates that the space must be maximised.

On the issue of there being only one stop on Princes Street, Mr Bell stated that there was no intention to review the situation at present but that there was space for capacity enhancement in the future.

DS voiced his thoughts on the lack of retailer consultation with regard to the locations of the stops.

Mr Bell and Mr Christie left the meeting.

IM agreed to raise the following with Mandy Haeburn-Little (MH-L), Communications Director for the tram project at a meeting on 13 July 2009:

- The necessity for the right signage in the right place, at the right time.
- The problems with the pedestrian and traffic light phasing
- The need to keep pedestrian access points as fixed as possible

- The group's desire to be kept informed of all alterations to traffic management

POST MEETING NOTE: All of the above points were raised with MH-L. Area management support is being put into place.

Matters arising from minutes of the previous meeting

IM updated the group on behalf of Rob Winter that there was still no further news on the timing of the city's Winter Festivals. Rob Winter will update the group as soon as information is available.

Open for Business Update

Rochelle Weir (RW) asked about the existence of the OFB marketing plan.

Michael Apter (MA) expressed his concern that Burt Greener Communications were no longer providing the group with "as much bang for our buck" as had been the case previously when the account was managed by different personnel.

POST MEETING NOTE: Graham Birse was unable to attend the RPG meeting but subsequently provided IM with this information, following the group's questions:

The two year marketing plan for OFB (attached) was approved at the January OFB meeting and subsequently discussed at the TOG meeting and the April Retail Policy Group Meeting.

Changes in personnel at Burt Greener have led to a hiatus in support service for businesses as the new team get up to speed. Discussions are underway with BG on improving liaison with business and ensuring promotions and opportunities receive widespread support. However, BG are already 50 consultancy days over budget for the year and unless new money is found for the OFB, I will be advising BG to live within the available budget. Discussions are underway with tie on how we can maintain open communication in support of OFB initiatives without incurring over-spends on budget.

Christmas Opening Hours

IM made a plea to other members to support John Lewis in trading until 21:00 on Thursday evenings from 27 November 2009. (John Lewis' proposed Christmas trading hours are attached.) IM asks that the group considers extending their opening hours at Christmas to match the proposed John Lewis hours.

GR enquired about carpark incentives.

DS replied that Essential Edinburgh are already planning subsidised parking over the Christmas shopping period.

Discussion on the future direction of RPG

GB felt that the RPG was an important group as it is often difficult to ascertain where specific responsibilities lie amongst OFB, Essential Edinburgh, DEMA, etc.

IM agreed to approach Graham Birse regarding the production of an organisation chart to provide clarity amongst the various groups involved in retail, transport, tourism and trams.

POST MEETING NOTE: Graham Birse has agreed to do this.

DS is of the opinion that the role of the RPG is to tell Essential Edinburgh “what retail looks like”, and encourage Essential Edinburgh to feed this information to the Council.

Date of next meeting and guest speaker

RW requested a speaker from DEMA.

Tom Campbell (Essential Edinburgh) was also discussed as a potential speaker to cover:

- What is EE doing for retail?
- How does he see the relationship between the BID area and other areas of the city, e.g. Grassmarket, West End?

Attachments

OFB Two Year Plan

John Lewis Edinburgh’s proposed Christmas trading hours.