

City Council given more time for Trams compulsory purchase

✘ The Scottish Government yesterday laid before Parliament two Orders to extend the time limits for the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) to compulsorily acquire the land needed to complete its trams project.

CEC requested the extension of these powers under provisions in the Edinburgh Tram Acts authorising construction. The extensions are needed to enable the project to move forward after resolution of the current contractual dispute.

The contractual dispute between CEC/tie and its contractors has significantly delayed the project beyond its original completion date of Summer 2011 and this has directly led to CEC's application for additional time to complete the land acquisition.

Keith Brown, Transport Minister, said:

"The Scottish Government's position on Edinburgh trams is clear. We opposed the project, but in June 2007 the Scottish Parliament voted that we provide funding to a maximum of £500m. The project is and always has been the responsibility of City of Edinburgh Council.

"We want to ensure that nothing stands in the way of delivering trams for the benefit of the people of Edinburgh. Given the delays caused by the current contractual dispute not extending these powers of land acquisition would seriously compromise the Council's ability to complete the project.

"The Scottish Government is simply not prepared to place the people of Edinburgh and the public purse in such a position."

Mr Brown also reiterated the Scottish Government's commitment

to assist the Council in resolving the project's current difficulties.

"With mediation due to start next month (March) it is not the right time to be discussing substantial changes to the governance of the project. However, we want to ensure that every opportunity is taken to resolve this long running dispute so that a tram service can be delivered in Edinburgh, and have agreed that Transport Scotland will take part in the mediation process."

The two Acts (the Edinburgh Tram (Line One) Act 2006 and the Edinburgh Tram (Line Two) Act 2006) provide for CEC to construct and operate the tram line between Edinburgh Airport and Leith. The powers of compulsory acquisition were granted for an initial period of five years and are due to expire in April and May 2011 for Line Two and Line One respectively. The powers can be extended for a further period by Order of the Scottish Ministers following an application from CEC. The extensions provided by the Orders are for five (Line 1) and ten years (Line 2).

As a result of the delay arising from the current contractual dispute, it would otherwise not be possible within the time remaining to complete the acquisition of all the land required – a small amount of land between the airport and St Andrew Square and some larger parcels of land, most of which are in the north-east part of the City.

The Orders come into force on 1 April 2011.