

Tram Consortium update media

☒ Yesterday's press briefing held at The City Chambers Business Centre was aimed at alerting the media to only some of the latest developments of the [Edinburgh tram project](#). The atmosphere in the room was tinted with a glimmer of hope but was ultimately overshadowed by a 'here we go again' ambience.

In front of just over a dozen journalists were Sue Bruce, Chief Executive of Edinburgh Council, Vic Emery, Chair of **tie**, Martin Foerder of Bilfinger Berger, Alfred Branderburger of Siemens and Antonio Campos of CAF. (The latter two remained virtually silent throughout.)

Edinburgh City Council leader Jenny Dawe, who was sitting in the front row, pointed out that this was the first time the consortium had publicly been seen together, proving an apparent progress and new way of working which might have emanated from the mediation process.

First, we were given an introduction. Sue Bruce explained that by exploring the matters which had arisen and through the use of several working procedures, the consortium arrived at the process of mediation. She confirmed that the Council and the contractors had reached areas of common ground. She emphasised that the week when the mediation took place, each member worked around 100 hours, examining "very substantial legal and technical work" as it was "important to nail down all the elements that needed nailing down".

She confirmed the "priority areas" as the line between the airport and Haymarket and, of course, Princes Street. Key work at the depot is currently visible when entering the City Centre from the West – this work apparently restarted in "early May" (this year) with "a number of staff" on the case. It was then announced that there will be no buses on Princes

Street from July 2nd 2011 to 'Spring/Summer 2012", with Bruce saying it would "depend on the weather " to determine when work would actually be done, rather than giving an exact date. The construction team will have to dig out around 25cm of tarmac with their 'plainers', which can tackle tarmac, but could be damaged if the mechanism comes into contact with the steel track itself.

A stern silence was upheld in the room as the reason for the reconstruction was levelled at the substance used during original construction. Martin Foerder of BB said that it was "not the wrong substance, as it has a proven global track record of being acceptable". Presumably the harsh Scottish winter is the true culprit of the tram fiasco. It was confirmed the consortium were paying for these works, with no more money from the taxpayer being used.

Bruce continued that the consortium have "Focused on coming together – it's a long but necessary process but we are all committed to getting the project back on track, if you'll pardon the pun." Silence. Then a perplexed observation from Sue about the silence. "Just give us a minute", said one journalist.

Then, the onslaught. One particular quizzing 'attack' wanted to cut to the chase: "You owe this to Scotland and the Scottish people to tell us how much this is costing, how long it is going to take and why it has taken so long", one reporter demanded. No detailed figures were given, although it was eventually confirmed by Dave Anderson, Director of City Development, that £411.5m out of the initial £545m had been spent by the end of the 2010 financial year.

There was then a demanding and upfront hunt for apologies particularly for the delay in the project, before the briefing was conveniently wrapped up. Sue Bruce immediately apologised but there were more direct apology requests, one of which was made to Jenny Dawe, who turned around from her front-row seat,

saying: 'Of course none of us wanted to be in the position we are now, but I do apologise for the situation.'

Another journalist questioned the absence of Richard Jeffery, Chief Executive of **tie**, and whether or not he might like to apologise. Vic Emery then expressed his concerns, saying he wanted Edinburgh "to look less like Tripoli", Princes Street to "look less like a bomb site" and his thought that Haymarket is currently "unattractive".

Sue Bruce re-emphasized that there is "An enormous amount of complex, legal and technical work still required. Edinburgh is a historic city and we must look forward to the great festival coming up – we want to keep Edinburgh vibrant."

Despite this optimistic message, throughout the meeting there was an underlying feeling of discomfort. An [STV Local](#) poll on the day revealed that nearly 80% of people want the whole project to be scrapped.

There are to be more press conferences in the coming weeks with more detailed statistics. A council meeting will be held on Monday 16th May. You can see the unfolding events as expressed through Twitter [here](#).

Share your thoughts on the tram with us below.