

Edinburgh Trams are go



Council Leader Jenny Dawe speaking to the media after the meeting

The council met this morning to discuss one item, and that was trams.

They had just met in full council last week, but it was widely recognised after that meeting that tactical political voting had resulted in a nonsensical decision to stop the tram line at Haymarket. Many councillors have said this week that the decision came as a surprise. It was alleged by the LibDems that stopping short of the already agreed target of St Andrew Square would mean that the trams would be a loss-making enterprise, and that the council would have to pay £161m in this financial year to the contractors as compensation for not continuing the line as far as anticipated.

During the meeting council officials were questioned by elected members for about an hour and a half.

The expected result of this morning's meeting was that the decision would be reversed, the tram project would be revived and the end stop would again be St Andrew Square, as it was after the June council meeting. Indeed just before 1 o'clock today the vote was eventually taken to approve the recommendations in the report presented by the Chief Executive together with the LibDem amendment. (The LibDem amendment was fairly cosmetic, for example adding to the end of clause 14 (v) "and instructs the Chief executive to continue to pursue further mitigation of risk prior to settlement and beyond."

Otherwise it does not detract from the points set out in Clause 14 which have been approved.)

The final vote depended on the coalition partner, the SNP

group, voting alongside the LibDem administration and this they did. The motion was carried by 28 votes to 15 with the Greens and Conservatives eventually both abstaining from the fourth and final vote. The SNP had abstained from the vote last week leaving it open to the Labour and Tory group to vote together to defeat the administration motion.

There are two enhancements to the project as it is now envisaged. The first is that almost £1m will be available to assist businesses affected by tramworks, which is double what was being offered last week. The funds will be offered by way of the Open For Business scheme for marketing and new media initiatives as well as support to individual businesses. The second is that the governance arrangements for the project will include an All-party Oversight Group. During the debate Council Leader, Jenny Dawe welcomed both of these, but also cautioned that the council had lost reputation and hard cash since last week.

The Labour group leader, Andrew Burns, said that he will be surprised if the eventual price does not exceed £776m and called for a public inquiry.

There were two deputations to the meeting this morning, one by Unite on behalf of employees of Lothian Buses and the other Dr Ashley Lloyd on behalf of the Moray Feuars.

One result from the deputation by Moray Feuars is that it seems likely that the council will now make available more up to date data about emissions in the city centre, following claims by the group that the data on air pollution provided by the council is about six months out of date. Councillor Gordon Mackenzie, whose own statement and general demeanour this morning were the subject of some cross-party praise, also confirmed to the deputation that up to date data will be made available soon. The Moray Feuars represent those living at the West End who are affected by the diversion of traffic from Shandwick Place in two ways: the increase in traffic noise and

the increase in harmful emissions in the area.

We ran a [liveblog](#) which gives you the blow by blow account of the proceedings by including tweets as well as our own updates from the City Chambers. The public gallery was full to bursting with journalists from every medium, along with some tram supporters as well as some dissenters. We will bring you our audio coverage shortly.

