

Transport Scotland in the driving seat to deliver Edinburgh trams

- ✘ The Scottish Government has announced that it will help oversee the final delivery of the Edinburgh trams project.

Ministers have also confirmed that the remaining £72 million Scottish Government grant will be reinstated to the project now that the route to St Andrew Square has been similarly reinstated, at odds however with the council who tell us that the tram is going to York Place.

Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment Alex Neil announced that a team of experienced project managers from Government agency, Transport Scotland, will fill key senior roles in the new governance structure with The City of Edinburgh Council, and will bring the professional approach that has seen major projects such as the M74, which the government has always proclaimed as “completed ahead of schedule and under budget”.

Working alongside managers from the local authority, the Transport Scotland team will work closely with the Council’s own team to provide strong managerial and technical assistance to ensure the delivery of a viable tram service between St Andrew Square and Edinburgh Airport for Scotland’s capital city.

As part of the agreement with The City of Edinburgh Council, Ministers will have the power to direct strategic project decisions. Ministers will also be given regular progress updates from the project team, which is more than the public can obtain, as no freedom of information request to the council will be entertained about any details of the contract which is covered by commercial confidentiality.

Alex Neil said:-

“The Scottish Government did not back the trams project when Parliament voted on it in 2007, and we share the frustration of many people in Edinburgh over the way the scheme has developed since then.

“We made it clear two weeks ago that we were no longer prepared to commit further public money to a route which was not financially viable and which did not deliver the link to the city centre which people rightly expected.

“However, now that that link has been reinstated, it is vital that the remaining stages of the trams project is delivered on time and within the £776m budget that we are advised by CEC is needed to complete the route to St Andrews Square by Summer 2014. That is why today I am announcing that senior management from Transport Scotland will now help complete the trams project.”

Mr Neil added:

“The Scottish Government has a strong track record, through Transport Scotland, of delivering major projects like the M74 early and under budget and secured significant savings on the three contracts to deliver the new Forth Replacement Crossing.

“As part of the arrangements put in place today, Ministers will receive regular updates on the progress of the project, and will also retain a veto over strategic decisions in respect of remaining Government funding.

“We must make sure that we work as closely as possible with those who will be affected and make sure that the impact of the work is minimised for Edinburgh businesses and communities.”

The move builds on the agency’s involvement with the Council in mediation discussions which have been ongoing since earlier

this year and which have resulted in an expected settlement being reached later today between CEC and its contractors Bilfinger Berger/Siemens.

CEC has calculated that the overall budget for the project is now £776m, comprising of a base budget of £742m and a risk allowance of £34m. This increase of £231m above the original project budget of £545m will be funded through the Council's prudential funding facility.