

Edinburgh Tram enquiry ordered by The Scottish Government



Today at First Minister's Questions The Rt Hon Alex Salmond confirmed that The Scottish Government will now order a public enquiry into Edinburgh Trams.

The First Minister answered a question from Marco Biagi SNP MSP for Edinburgh City Centre about the matter.

Mr Salmond said:-" I am sure that everyone in Edinburgh will be delighted to see that the Edinburgh Trams are fully operational and carrying passengers. We cannot however lose sight of the considerable public concern over the conduct of the project, the disruption it has caused to households and businesses in the city of Edinburgh. I have therefore recommended to the Cabinet and it has been decided to establish a judge led public enquiry to enquire into the Edinburgh Trams project, to establish why the project incurred significant overruns in terms of cost and timing requiring in particular a considerable reduction in the original scope.

"It is important that lessons be learned from the conduct of the Edinburgh Trams project and I think that the course of action we are proposing will be of substantial assistance in doing that.

Marco Biagi welcomed the First Minister's announcement and replied:-" All of us who opposed the tram project from the start as risky and over-engineered have been disappointed almost daily to be shown to be right." He asked the First Minister if he agreed that now that the trams are rolling, if there is to be any faith from the public in the future

management or potential cost estimates for projects like this we need to know for sure that these mistakes will never be repeated.”

The First Minister explained that the enquiry ordered will be a non-statutory enquiry for two reasons; one is timescale and the other is that the Transport Minister has been assured by the Council of full cooperation and documentation of all aspects of the long process of the trams project.

But the First Minister continued:-“It is simply not the case that other major public projects in Scotland are running over time and over budget. The Forth Replacement Crossing project which is the biggest infrastructure project in Scotland for over a generation is running on time and under budget. A total of £145m of savings has been released from the project since construction started in 2011.

“Huge numbers of public investments in Scotland have been completed on time and in many cases under budget. I know the whole chamber will await with great interest the findings of this enquiry.”

The government have always said they would not initiate any enquiry until after the tram project was up and running, so it is not a real surprise that the enquiry has been announced now in the week when the trams started carrying fare-paying passengers.

When [The Edinburgh Reporter interviewed](#) the Transport Minister Keith Brown MSP on the launch day last week he confirmed:-“The First Minister made it quite clear that he would welcome a public enquiry. What we have always said is: ‘Let’s get the trams up and running. Let’s get people on the trams and then have a discussion with the council.’ The council as you will know have a number of legal actions which they have undertaken, and anything that we do in terms of an enquiry should take account of that so that the two things don’t

conflict. I will be meeting with the council leader shortly. I have met with him before today and I will be meeting him again shortly to discuss how we go forward.” Clearly that meeting must have taken place this week and the government has now decided to instruct the enquiry.

✘ Councillor Adam McVey the vice-convenor of Transport and Environment said:-“The announcement by the Scottish government of a tram enquiry is very welcome.

“Edinburgh citizens have suffered a great deal as a result of the this partial tramline’s construction, people deserve answers on the causes of delays and overspends.

“This announcement will undoubtedly give hope to many that an element of accountability will be part of this process. I share that hope.”

The Edinburgh solicitor Daniel Donaldson who led a petition to require a public enquiry begun only last week, says he is now asking the First Minister for a meeting to discuss the terms of reference to ensure that the views of petitioners are heard.

Speaking after the announcement, Daniel Donaldson said:-“The acid test of the trams inquiry will be in its scope, which is yet to be announced

“680 people have signed the online petition calling for this inquiry, many of whom feel they have lost out as a result of complete mess that was the Edinburgh Trams Project

“There remains a strong sense of resentment towards the City of Edinburgh Council in particular, with Councillors perceived as arrogant and having acted with total disregard to the views of residents

“The terms of reference must afford those affected by the Edinburgh Trams Fiasco the opportunity to have their voices

heard

“The terms must also allow a full forensic analysis of where the money was spent, whether the business case was actually viable, the qualifications or lack of experience of those put in charge, the contracts written, the forward planning that took place, the politics behind the project amongst many other important issues.

“Lessons will have to be learned from this project, and politicians and public officials will be held to account for their maladministration.”

The Edinburgh Tram project started off as a scheme to run a line all the way from Edinburgh Airport to Leith and also Granton. The costs have risen to £776m, the timescale has been exceeded and the 14km line from York Place to Edinburgh Airport is a fraction of what was initially planned. The new tram began carrying passengers last Saturday 31 May 2014. In the first weekend over 40,000 people used Edinburgh Trams.