

Time for a tram down Leith Walk?



The council's Transport Convener is asking the council for more money to prove a new report on the viability of providing new types of public transport across the city, including an extension of the tram down Leith Walk.

Councillor Lesley Hinds explained to The Edinburgh Reporter that such an investigative report would cost up to £400,000, but although an extension to the tram line was important the council would be looking carefully at the integration of any future tram line to new developments such as those at St James Quarter and the Leith Programme, and it would have to present a robust business case.

[The Edinburgh Reporter NEWS – Are we ready for more trams?](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

A firm of consultants would be employed to crunch the numbers, consider the implications of a new part of the tramline and how it would work with existing and proposed public transport, whether road or rail.

The council will hear what the report has to say in the first quarter of 2015 before making any new decisions on building more lines, and it is clear that the Transport Convener is most keen to learn from the experiences of constructing the first part.

The city's population is estimated to grow by 136,400 by 2037 and the number of households will increase by 39% in the same period.

Leith is one of the most densely populated areas of the city

and over half of those living in the Leith Walk and Leith Wards where rents are among the lowest in Edinburgh, do not own cars.

The original plans for the tram encompassed two lines and were part of a wider policy of sustainable transport. This has stalled over recent years during the stop start of the tram project, which took much longer and was more expensive than originally planned. The existing tram line has a temporary stop at York Place which was clearly introduced to allow the tram extension down Leith Walk to be accomplished more easily.

The Leith Programme has been partially completed, but work has been concentrated so far towards the lower half of Leith Walk. If the go-ahead is given for a tram on Leith Walk it is probably true to say that any work around the top half near Picardy Place roundabout will await the new development at St James Quarter as well as completion of tramworks.

With passenger numbers of 90,000 per month the council says this is all in line with their predictions.

A tram to Leith would enhance the possibility of more building on brownfield sites in Leith and Granton which again stalled due to the lack of progress on the initial tramline, but which were also affected by the downturn in the property market.



One of the parts of the potential extension to the route would introduce the tram to Constitution Street with a stop at Bernard Street. Works were completed this time last year on Constitution Street which is possibly the street with the best surface in town at present, but the plans would be for the tram to share the space with other traffic here.

One of the most important reasons to do something about the extension now is to keep the powers in the legislation alive. The council still has power under the Tram Acts to run a line

out to Newbridge and down Leith Walk to Newhaven and Granton, so it has the power to compulsorily purchase any land necessary to complete those routes at present. However the powers do have a lifespan and these run out from 2016 onwards, so the council must do something about planning now otherwise it will require new consents from The Scottish Government.