

Council keen to stress the positives about tram extension

Having conducted an independent survey about the tram, the council is now keen to get views from the public on extending the line to Newhaven, and the way that this will unfold during construction.

They are using the phrase Open For Business with regard to businesses in the areas along the route, particularly on Leith Walk. They are already talking about financial and other support for affected businesses, although the way this will work has not yet been fully determined. Questionnaires are being sent to businesses along the route, and 28,000 letters to residents asking for their views.



The arrangements for all traffic whether vehicular or otherwise during the construction phase have not yet been set in stone, but there is one proposal which they have already suggested as a way forward.

THREE LANES ON LEITH WALK to CLOSE FOR 18 months

The council plans to close three lanes of Leith Walk for 18 months. There would be one lane open southbound (towards the city) and Constitution Street (which itself was resurfaced in recent years) would be partially closed.

This throws up some obstacles in ensuring that the people who live in the area can still get to and from their homes easily, and that those running businesses are able to do so without too much disruption to deliveries and parking.

But the plans to close the street should, we are told, allow the whole project to be conducted at the best pace. If one area on Leith Walk encounters difficulties then the contractors will be able to continue working simply by moving further down the workspace. This is what the council calls 'lessons learned' from the previous tram project.

This is the same idea as that adopted since September 2017 in closing Leith Street for 44 weeks. This closure is to allow major infrastructure works to be carried out while traffic is rerouted on a one time diversion route. Part of the criticism for the last tram project was that the diversions were constantly changing, and the council is keen to avoid the need for that this time.

Customer service officers will assist during the construction period by directing pedestrians and other traffic at key times. There will be logistics hubs to help with deliveries to shops and businesses.

There is an overarching caution at the City Chambers about the tram, but also a certain confidence that lessons have been learned, and this time round it will be done properly. They want to minimise any disruption and the fact that they called all the media outlets in for a lengthy briefing is one way of emphasising that. They have appointed a Community Engagement Manager to talk to all the people who might be affected, whether businesses or residents. We were told they have already met with many businesses and stakeholders in recent months.

The council says it is listening, and their plans for the tram line are up for further discussion into the late summer. They will speak to representatives of all modes of transport with a view to accommodating as many needs as possible during construction.

The plans to close Constitution Street are partly to take down

a listed wall, deal with some old graves which are close to it and then put the wall up again. This will be a complex project, but they are forward planning as much of it as they can.



DEVELOPMENT

Developers have indicated a revival of interest in North Edinburgh, particularly around Ocean Terminal where Cala's plans to build houses are underway. The tram is regarded as an economic key to unlocking the potential of other developable sites along the route.

The council administration is keen to deliver the tram extension. With the SNP/Labour group in charge they want to do this within the lifetime of the current administration and before the next elections in 2022.

The reason for this is quite simple. Council Leader Councillor Adam McVey explained last year that he wanted the accountability to rest with one administration, rather than being split over the lifetime of two separate political entities as it was during the last tram project. The tram was begun under the LibDem council led by Jenny Dawe and completed under the Labour/SNP administration led by Councillor Andrew

Burns.

They will no doubt come under fire from their Conservative opposition. The 18 Tory councillors do not want the tram completed. They suggested at last month's budget meeting that they would prefer to have the dividend from Lothian Buses spent on road and pavement repairs and not on trams.

Now Edinburgh Trams is showing a profit much sooner than anticipated, and during last week's inclement weather it was the tram which kept running, and carried tens of thousands of passengers.

During the last three days here's how many journeys were taken on [@EdinburghTrams](#) pic.twitter.com/KZfvt9HZB3

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [3 March 2018](#)