

Transport Convener writes on Trams to Newhaven

The public consultation Edinburgh Trams to Newhaven has just ended and here Councillor Lesley Macinnes, City of Edinburgh Council Transport Convener says thank you for the contributions from all members of the public.



Illustration of what tram would look like arriving at Ocean Terminal

The consultation asked for feedback on the way the next part of the line with its eight stops might be built and what the streets would look like when the work is complete. The population in Leith has the lowest level of car ownership, and around 25,000 people live within 800 metres of Leith Walk. The extension of the tram to Newhaven depends on a decision by councillors later this year on whether to proceed with the extension or not.

Councillor Macinnes writes:

I want to start by saying a huge thank you to everyone who's taken part in our six-week consultation on draft plans for

taking Trams to Newhaven. The consultation closed yesterday 29 April and we were delighted by how many people had their say, whether it was submitting their views online through the Consultation Hub, coming along to one of our public information events or business forums and chatting to the project team or getting involved in the conversation on social media.

We're still totting up the final figures but we estimate that the consultation produced more than 3,000 separate interactions, which is fantastic. Every single bit of feedback will be invaluable – we've recorded the comments received. Our next task will be to take that feedback and use it to re-examine the draft plans for traffic management, business support and final street design before bringing forward further consultation at the end of the summer.

Of course, no final decision on taking trams to Newhaven, or not, will be made until much later in the year, when we'll consider a Final Business Case based on the tenders submitted and the outcome of our ongoing consultation with residents and businesses.

But it's interesting to note that our face-to-face interaction with the public at the consultation events has mirrored the results of the recent I Love Leith poll on Facebook, with a majority expressing support in principle for the project.

One of the key themes which emerged during our first period of consultation was a misconception that the project will divert resources from other Council services.

Our outline business case explicitly states that the tram will not redirect funds from existing Council budgets over the life of the project, and instead, all borrowing costs will be met by an extraordinary dividend from Lothian Buses, as well as future tram revenues.

I want to assure all those who have voiced these concerns that there will be no negative impact on the maintenance of roads and pavements – or any other services for that matter.

That's not to say I don't appreciate the real frustration at deteriorating road surfaces and cracked pavements. We really are doing everything we can to address the issue. We've already added almost £1million to our usual roads budget this year, along with an expected substantial extra contribution from Holyrood, reflecting the severe winter weather's impact.

Another key element of the business case is support for businesses. We are well aware of the repercussions for local traders following the original tram project and, while some have claimed we are not taking this into account, I want to make it clear that businesses are at the heart of our plans.

We're in close dialogue with all those who will be affected, and are currently in the process of developing a financial support scheme. Traffic management for the project is being mapped out extremely carefully to mitigate disruption to businesses, ensuring continued service access, while we will be deploying a dedicated team of officers to help with logistics and deliveries.

Another key concern strongly voiced during the consultation was the need to achieve the best possible balance for all road users at the northern end of Leith Walk, ie between Pilrig Street and Foot of the Walk. Respondents felt the current plans gave inadequate provision for pedestrians and cyclists – this is something we are now actively addressing as we revisit the plans ahead of further consultation at the end of the summer.

Edinburgh is growing faster than any other city in Scotland and we cannot simply stand still. Whatever the outcome of this process, we need to get things right so that future generations of residents and visitors can enjoy the excellent

quality of life the Capital has now become so synonymous with. A modern, sustainable public transport system is absolutely critical to this.

There will be a second consultation by the council in late summer/autumn of this year followed by a decision by councillors. If the council decides to proceed then construction will begin in Spring 2019 and the next part of the tram line will be completed by Spring 2022 for testing ahead of the line becoming operational in Summer 2022.