

# Happy fifth birthday Edinburgh Trams

We recall the day the trams began in Edinburgh. It was an early start, but thankfully a sunny day! Somebody claimed his dog was the first to travel on a tram, enthusiasts lined the platforms to take a wee hurl on the newest form of public transport in town, reinstated as the trams were removed in 1956.



Lea Harrison Photo Ian Georgeson

One time tram driver, now Managing Director, and self-confessed 'tramorak', Lea Harrison made the trip up for the opening weekend. He said: "Some colleagues and I came up from

Nottingham Trams to Edinburgh to see the system in action for the first time, the city was buzzing and the platforms were heaving. I remember thinking how much potential the tramway had to improve the way people move around the city. A few years later, after completion of the Nottingham challenge, I returned to lead the organisation and was able to build on what had already been put in place for the customer. With the support of my team we provide a service that the city can be proud of.”

Five years on and trams are a familiar addition to our transport mix, and despite challenges during the building phase, residents have embraced Edinburgh’s new transport. There has been a steady growth in users totalling 27.7 million customer journeys since 2015. Year-on-year Edinburgh Trams have reported increasing patronage, with a total growth of 40 per cent between 2015 and 2018. Last year they carried 7.3 million people, taking them to work, college, on holiday or just to enjoy all the capital has to offer.

Edinburgh Trams has made improvements to the existing timetable increasing services by 23 per cent offering more trams and more seats, and reducing the travel time between Edinburgh Airport and the City Centre to less than 30 minutes. There is a really smart use of all the trams that Edinburgh has on match days when most of the 27 trams in the garage are brought out to ensure that all the people wanting to get to Murrayfield can do so as easily as possible. As a result, there has been significant growth in those choosing Edinburgh Trams to travel to and from airport, with these journeys increasing by 56 per cent between 2015 and 2018.

It came as no surprise that Edinburgh Trams recorded a profit two years earlier than predicted, and in 2017 profits were £1.6 million.

The next step is to take on the responsibility of the maintenance agreements which will happen this year. The new arrangements

mean that Edinburgh Trams will have all the tools to further improve service and value for money by directly managing the maintenance contracts.

**Councillor Adam McVey, Leader, City of Edinburgh Council said:**“Trams have become a crucial part of Edinburgh’s transport system over the last five years, carrying millions of passengers on one of the most sustainable forms of travel. Working with and complementing our fantastic bus services, they have outstripped passenger and income forecasts and won hugely impressive industry awards for their excellent customer service and performance as an operator. As we look to expand tram services to more people in the city, the future success of the tram will be even more important to help Edinburgh move ahead.”

**George Lowder, Chief Executive, Transport for Edinburgh said:**“The introduction of trams was a major step in creating a truly integrated public transport system for Edinburgh, as well as offering modal choice for the customer. In five short years Edinburgh Trams have changed perceptions and exceeded expectations.”

The look of the trams have changed in the last five years and it’s not unexpected to see a clown’s face or an octopus holding Christmas presents gliding along Princes Street. In 2017 the City of Edinburgh Council transferred the advertising rights to Transport for Edinburgh and Edinburgh Trams.



Gerard Eadie CBE and George Eadie of CR Smith

The first commercial agreement took place with CR Smith who had 18 trams within the fleet branded with various scenes from across Scotland. In 2018 Edinburgh Trams advertising was at full occupancy thanks to new partnerships with Diageo, Parabola, Aberdeen Standard Investments, Qatar Airlines and others as well as small-to-medium local businesses and complimentary advertising for local charities.

Edinburgh Trams have continued to push the boundaries on industry norms by being the first UK system to allow bikes on board, supporting the city's desire for integrated transport and active travel. Making the system truly accessible, Edinburgh Trams permitted mobility scooters on board, allowing those who need that bit more support able to travel safely and confidently.

Their mantra "Excellence for Edinburgh" is the core of staff training and development and resulted in Edinburgh Trams being voted the UK's No 1 transport operator in 2016 for Customer Satisfaction by an in-depth study conducted by Transport

Focus, with an outstanding 99 per cent rating. This outshone the performance of any other tram, train, bus or ferry operator across the country, coming out a full six points above the industry average. That success was replicated in 2018 when a survey undertaken by the Institute of Customer Service awarded Edinburgh Trams a score of 87.9 – more than 15 points above the transport industry average, and 10 points higher than the multi-sector average.

*Trams are running [@EdinburghTrams pic.twitter.com/pIcLZxUH9c](https://twitter.com/EdinburghTrams/pic.twitter.com/pIcLZxUH9c)*

*– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [March 1, 2018](#)*

The ‘Beast from the East’ in early 2018 failed to curtail Edinburgh Trams’ operations with more than 30,000 customer journeys recorded during the three days of extreme weather conditions. When most other public transport came to a grinding halt, employees at Edinburgh Trams pulled together with dedicated shifts working tirelessly around the clock to keep tracks clear of snow in order to allow trams to continue to run through the city. Edinburgh Trams provided a lifeline to many customers by offering free services throughout the night on the worst hit day, meaning passenger-carrying trams ran continuously for 43 hours.

**HR Manager Sue Bucher worked through the snow and ice. She recalls:**“I have never seen the city look so beautiful all covered in snow, until we had to dig it out of the tracks, again and again! It was a hard few days but these are the times that our team pulls together and to be able to keep people moving made it worth it.”

The awards shelf in Reception in the tram depot at Gogar proudly displays numerous trophies and certificates won over the last five years, but always serves as a reminder to keep standards high and continue to exceed expectations.



Going back to that day in May where it all began, we ask the staff of Edinburgh Trams what it felt like to bring trams back to the city.



First day of operation Edinburgh Trams 31 May 2014

**Laszlo Suto, Tram Driver, Edinburgh Trams said:**“It was slightly overwhelming on the day to see all the people who wanted to get on board, but the training kicks in and on that day to do it ‘for real’ felt fantastic and it still does today.”

**Sharon Peat was a Ticketing Services Assistant on the first day, but is now a Tram Driver, she remembers:**“Being on board on the first day of service was an exciting time for every one of us as it was a completely new experience. The trams were so busy, but the passengers were all pretty excited. It is still great when you have customers who have travelled with us from day one who you’ve built up a rapport with and they give you a friendly wave and a wee chat when possible.”

**Ally Petrie, Duty Manager, Edinburgh Trams said:**“Back then I was a Controller. I was nervous but also very excited for the first passenger service day and to put into practice all the

hard work we had done during the testing phase. On the day there was hiccups but that's what is great about Edinburgh Trams. We have always delivered for the customer."

**Sarah Singh, Operations Manager, Edinburgh Trams said:**"I was then a Duty Manager, working on shift the night before. It felt like Christmas Eve with the anticipation of something big about to happen. The last five years have been the best whirlwind and I'm so proud of the service we provide to the city."

It's hard to predict what the world will be like in five years' time when Edinburgh Trams celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, however with the extension to Newhaven approved and the potential to double customer numbers, it's one small step for tram, one giant leap for tramkind.....



Councillor Lesley Hinds on the first tram PHOTO Thomas Haywood



















