

Unite warn strike action at Edinburgh Trams may continue into the new year

Notice has been served on Edinburgh Trams by Unite the union warning of strike action which will begin on 17 November and will last for ten days.

Unless agreement is reached between the union and the company then there is a threat, according to Lyn Turner, Regional Officer at Unite the Union, that strikes could go on into the new year.

The tram company and the union have already struck an [agreement](#) on pay which has been implemented, but the stumbling block for the union is over sick pay. Unite asked for six months full pay and then six months half pay for those members of staff who are unfortunately off sick for a long time. Edinburgh Trams have told The Edinburgh Reporter that they thought the negotiation process was ongoing, while at the same time explaining that the improvements to sick pay are unaffordable for the network as it continued to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

Lyn Turner, Regional Officer at Unite the union, said: "Strike action will be discontinuous until midnight on 27 November. This will affect the SRU Autumn Test series and the start of Christmas activities in Edinburgh.

"We have an agreement with Edinburgh Trams signed by both

parties in late July, early August this year which is a wage deal. Part of that deal was the review of long term sick pay to six months full pay and six months half pay.

“Basically we entered into that agreement in good faith and we have now been informed that they will not be introducing any review and we can speak to them next year when we have further negotiations for 2023 to see if they can introduce it then.

“This was not an issue during the wage negotiations, it was a given. It was never a stumbling point. They knew they were up against it as we had balloted our members for industrial action. The negotiation was conducted by George Lowder CEO of Transport for Edinburgh. Lea Harrison was not involved in the discussions.

“By withdrawing from that part of the negotiations that our members were balloted on and had accepted, is unacceptable and therefore our only redress for that is for our members – who are incensed by this – is to take industrial action.

“I have always said that I stand ready to find settlement but Edinburgh Trams are not talking to us. I talk to our senior reps every day. If we are going to enter into discussions whether direct or with ACAS we have not heard anything from Edinburgh Trams. So we stand ready to take industrial action.”

The union would like the company to sit down with them and review the sick pay arrangements. At present Mr Turner said that Edinburgh Trams have simply said they will not now review it.

Mr Turner said the company has been dismissive. He said: “I have suggested an insurance company to them. They have never meaningfully sat down and said this is what the cost is going to be and discussed whether it could be phased in.

“They moved from the question about what the definition of what long term sick means – suggesting it would be 13 weeks

and not four as it is in most other companies, and this after the deal was signed. So we are not playing on a level playing field. The goalposts keep moving.

“The membership that I represent has had enough. And if there is no action then I will serve notice of further strike action.”

Mr Turner admitted that the company had kept to part of the [deal](#) by which additional payments were made and backdated to 1 April 2022, including a headline payment of £2,300 to all staff.

But he said: “There are other elements of the deal that they have reneged on. Our members like tram drivers and ticket sales assistants don’t get to work from home but if you are unwell and you work in an office then you can say you’re working from home. Our members don’t have that luxury. In this cost of living crisis, sick pay should be there to protect the individual who is genuinely unwell. For some reason Edinburgh Trams think they’re going to get 150 Unite members phoning in sick going long term. That is not the case.

“There is a policy in place which manages sickness. What we agreed and signed was for the genuine people who are longterm ill or unwell with serious critical illness to be protected with six months full and six months half pay. This is needed especially during a cost of living crisis.

“And this is a municipal tram company here. Lothian Buses pay six months full pay, six months half pay. We are asking for Edinburgh Trams to support its employees at genuine times of longterm sickness.”

Mr Turner says he recognises the importance of the tram to public transport network. He said: “Trams are the flagship of Edinburgh at the moment with the tram extension and all the investment in that. I am disappointed to say the least that the company has reneged on our deal. We will be back in

January with a new pay demand.

“We should be focussing on testing the new line and setting up rosters and rotas for the new line and discussing new starts for the new line. At the moment we are still talking about something we thought was agreed months ago.”

A spokesperson for Edinburgh Trams said that their position remains the same: “We are sincerely disappointed that Unite has decided on this course of action, having previously accepted a generous pay increase and enhancements to terms and conditions that were overwhelmingly accepted by colleagues.

“As promised, we have been in further consultation regarding the additional points for review, and we have made progress in all areas. However, the Union is now demanding further improvements to sick pay that are simply unaffordable for the network as it continues its recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Despite these unrealistic demands, we will continue to talk to the Union and colleagues with a view to reaching an amicable agreement that will avoid unnecessary disruption for our customers.”



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