

# **Opinion – Cllr Scott Arthur Transport and Environment Convener**

**This is an article written by the council's Transport and Environment Convener, Labour councillor Professor Scott Arthur.**

"Last week we made history in the city, when the first tram in almost 70 years ran down Leith Walk and to Newhaven.

"I was delighted to be part of the occasion, as I'm sure lots of members of the community were too, judging by the many people taking photos and cheering us on along the route.

"Monday, 13 March marked the first phase of testing for the Trams to Newhaven project. Throughout the week, overnight, the team, along with Edinburgh Trams, took trams along the track at a walking pace to test the safety and efficiency of the infrastructure.

"They're now beginning to test traffic signalling and sensors and will soon be trialling the tram at half speed (10mph) and full speed (20mph) on the tracks. This period of testing and commissioning is crucial to the safe and effective running of the tram, and I'm pleased to say it's going well.

"Trams in North Edinburgh's streets at last will be a welcome sight for many, particularly people who live, work and own a business near the line. I appreciate the upheaval they've had to contend with over recent years, and I'd like to take this opportunity thank them for their patience and resilience

during this time.

“I’m confident that, before long, these communities – and the wider city – will reap the benefits of the Trams to Newhaven project. Not only will it connect the city centre to Leith’s vibrant waterfront, but it will also open up the area for further economic development. We’re already seeing positive signs with the newly-redeveloped Stead’s Place on Leith Walk fully let out to traders, and data is showing that Leith is proving itself to be resilient in terms of vacancy rates and new businesses opening on the route.

“The introduction of a high capacity, reliable tram will sustainably serve one of the most densely populated parts of the city too. This kind of step-change in the way people move around Edinburgh is essential if we are to improve air quality, cut congestion and reach our Net Zero 2030 goal.

“The project is on time and on budget despite COVID and Brexit, and we’re fast approaching the moment people can catch a tram to Newhaven. As testing continues to go smoothly, we’re beginning to plan towards and a launch date with further information to follow – watch this space!

“While we don’t yet have a start date, the project’s completion is on the horizon. That we’re set to deliver trams to Newhaven on time and within budget, despite an extremely challenging few years worldwide, is proof of the project team’s hard work. None of this would have happened without Senior Responsible Officer Hannah Ross, and I want to applaud her leadership and her team’s dedication to working collaboratively with the contractor.

“We’ve already seen the original Edinburgh Airport to York Place service go from strength to strength, and I have no doubt the completed line to Newhaven will do the same. The success of the Trams to Newhaven contract means we’re now looking to the future of the tram network, which we hope to

bring to communities around the city. The inclusion of the potential to extend the tram line in Transport Scotland's second Strategic Transport Projects Review is a welcome vote of confidence and will allow us to move forward to consult the public and businesses on plans for both tram and bus transit.

"For now, I'm enjoying watching the first trams in decades on Leith Walk, which will soon become a familiar fixture in the north of the city."



First trams since November 1956 go down Leith Walk on 13 March 2023 during testing phase PHOTO Thomas Haywood Photography