

Mark Lazarowicz – calls for a tram network

Mark Lazarowicz lives in Broughton, Edinburgh. He is the former MP for Edinburgh North & Leith, and also a former Executive Member for Transport on The City of Edinburgh Council.

Mr Lazarowicz travelled on the tram on Wednesday when the first tram carrying paying passengers went from Picardy Place to Newhaven and back.

Mark writes:

Now for an Edinburgh tram network – not just one line!

“Today, as Edinburgh’s trams made it down to Leith (or rather returned), was the end of a troubled story. But in spite of that history, I found that the mood on the tram today, and on the couple of stops, was one of quiet civic pride. There were a lot of ‘first day tram tourists’ of course today (not me, I just happened to need to travel down Leith Walk, honest!) but the impression I got was that the tram extension to Leith and Newhaven will be very well used. I am confident that it will provide a real boost to many businesses along the route, many of which badly suffered from the mishaps with the original tram project.

“However, the extension isn’t just significant for Leith. What has now been completed is the section of route which can be the core of a significant further development of the tram

network. Putting trams down the middle of busy streets was never going to be easy (although it needn't have caused the chaos caused by the project's management failures, on which Lord Hardie will shortly be reporting). But now they are down, the basis is there to construct new sections of line to feed into the current line. And the beauty of trams is that they can carry many more passengers than even the biggest double decker bus, so more extensions could provide improved public transport links for tens of thousands more each day.

"I'm glad The City of Edinburgh Council has already agreed to look at extending the trams along the other new routes originally proposed, one to North Edinburgh, and another to South Edinburgh. Those would certainly be good candidates for extensions. I hope though, that, in developing those plans, the council avoids, as far as, possible choosing routes which might have serious disruptive effects on business and communities while they are being built. There seems to me to be a good argument that further tram extensions should, as far as be possible, be built along roads and other corridors which are wide enough to take trams without major engineering works. The emphasis should be on extensions on routes which are deliverable within a reasonable time frame and budget.

"However, I know that the council will have plenty of amateur tram experts drawing lines on maps to argue where the next lines should go, and I won't add to that. I make one exception to that, though. The next stage of the development of Edinburgh trams should also include the potential to make them more than just an "Edinburgh" service.

"Let's remember that The Scottish Government, when they decided to build the new Forth road bridge (Queensferry Crossing to you and me), said that the existing bridge would become a "public transport corridor". As anyone who travels over the other bridges, or indeed just has a look from below, knows, that definition has meant just that a relatively low number of buses and coaches use it.

“Now is time, surely, to use the space on that old road bridge to take trams across to south Fife, providing direct links into both Edinburgh itself and Edinburgh airport – and maybe a tram line running along the old ‘south suburban’ rail line across South Edinburgh.

“All this may seem too ambitious to some – but as anyone who visits most European cities, including ones similar in size to Edinburgh, a comprehensive tram network is frequently part of their public transport provision.

“It’s time – in fact, long past time – for Edinburgh to have the same – and for The Scottish Government to give its enthusiastic support to such an extension.”



PHOTO Ross Nixon