

Edinburgh Tram Inquiry branded a disgrace

It was meant to be a “swift and thorough” investigation – but for nine years people were left waiting for answers.

Why it took so long to determine what went so horribly wrong with the project that returned trams to Edinburgh remains a mystery, but at last the [findings of a £13.1 million inquiry have been released.](#)

While its long-awaited publication will go at least some way to explain why the 11.5-mile line eventually delivered cost more than double the original estimate – for less than half the length initially proposed – and completed three years late, questions about the inquiry’s own cost and timescale are not likely to go away as a result.

An investigation involving sifting through millions of documents and interviewing dozens of witnesses was never going to be straight forward nor speedy. Since the then First Minister Alex Salmond announced it would be a “swift and thorough” process back in 2014 however, an entire new spur from the city centre to Newhaven has been built – not to mention the four new UK Prime Ministers and two World Cups in the intervening 111 months.

If given the opportunity to quiz inquiry chair Lord Hardie, one city centre councillor who was on the front line of the tram disaster dealing with residents’ woes said she’d bluntly ask: “What took you so f***** long?”.

Cllr Jo Mowat said: "It hasn't been swift at all, but Alex Salmond was a fool for saying that because he made it an independent public inquiry so immediately lost any control over the timescale."

She said: "I think it's been an absolute bloody disgrace that it's taken so long.

"He was asked to do a job with public money and he was asked to do a swift job. It is a complete disgrace. I would ask Lord Hardie to account for the millions of pounds of public money."

She urged MSPs to haul Lord Hardie, who was paid over £1 million, before a Holyrood committee so he could provide some answers as to why the inquiry became so drawn-out.

However Cllr Mowat said usually politicians were "too wimpy to ask the hard questions," adding: "Frankly if Lord Hardie was in front of me I'd be saying 'what took you so f***** long?'"

As news broke in April that the elusive report had been 'sent to the printers' the public braced themselves.

MSPs have called for 'an inquiry into the inquiry' whilst Edinburgh Council's transport chief Cllr Scott Arthur jokingly asked the report was "being copied by monks onto parchment".

He said the delays to the people Edinburgh finding out "the truth" were "beyond a joke," adding: "How can it possibly take six months to publish a report which has taken nine years to write?".

However the inquiry team argued preparing a document of its size for publication was "a complex and lengthy process" however.

Reflecting on why the public have had to wait so long for answers, former Lord Provost Lesley Hinds who served as transport convener during the last phase of the Airport to York Place line construction and who with Dame Sue Bruce took

part in the Mar Hall negotiations to bring a delay in construction to an end, speculated whether the remit was "too wide".

Lord Hardie was tasked with finding out "why the project incurred delays, cost considerably more than originally budgeted for and delivered significantly less than was projected through reductions in scope" as and examine "the consequences of the failure to deliver the project in the time".

Mrs Hinds added: "I just don't understand why it's cost so much.

"I know you have to get into detail, but why would it take so long to do this and cost so much money?

"If you're in charge of an inquiry you should set out what you're going to do, how much it's going to cost and when you're going to do it by."

Cllr Steve Burgess said he wondered about the "value" of the inquiry report.

He said: "If they were able to do a quick inquiry and provide something useful for the next project that would have been good, but god knows what they're going to come out with now and whether it's going to be of any use whatsoever.

"People knew what had gone wrong; the thing about the contract not being the right one, and obviously the main lessons were learned because they've been applied to the Newhaven line and it's worked. Things like shutting the entire street and not doing it piece by piece.

"I'm not sure that an inquiry that has dragged on and on and on is going to be very helpful.

"I think at the time it was kicked off there was a justification for it, but it would have been good if they had

reported before the next line began.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

