

Edinburgh councillors line up for the next debate on trams

The council's Transport and Environment Committee will meet on Thursday to discuss which option or options for a second tram line in the city it might then progress to a 12-week public consultation.

(Committee members have been presented with 708 pages of documents to read ahead of the meeting which cover many more aspects of transport policy than just the new tram route but this is the one topic which has been the subject of hot debate on social media since the papers were published).

The preferred route is the one from Roseburn to Granton which is proposed by officers following "detailed evaluation of the

potential mass transit options from Granton to BioQuarter and beyond”.

POLITICAL POSITIONS

The Labour administration propose that both the Roseburn Corridor and the Orchard Brae Corridor options are put forward for public consultation (with high quality walking and cycling facilities alongside the Roseburn option).

The SNP also want both options put forward for consultation, and would like to split the consultation into two parts – the northern route to Granton and the southern route to BioQuarter. (and the group wants the BioQuarter route renamed as the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh which people are more familiar with).

The Liberal Democrats “refuse to accept the potential loss of the Telford/Roseburn Path given its importance as an active travel route and nature corridor. They propose that the Orchard Brae option is designated as the preferred option. (Separately the LibDems have set up a petition to “Save the Roseburn Path”).

The Edinburgh Greens, while supporting the need for improving public transport and reducing car dependency, “express concern over the negative ecological impacts projected in the report as well as the adverse effect on active travel if cycling was to be discouraged on a potential path next to the tram route”.

The Conservatives want the committee to note the lack of funding which they say would be £44 million to prepare the Outline and Final Business Case and want to know what Scottish Government funding would be allocated.

SECOND TRAM LINE

All of the discussion about the proposed second tram line will have to sit within the council's [City Mobility Plan](#), (CMP) which was adopted in 2021, and is to be reviewed for the first time at the meeting. The implementation plan relating to the CMP is also included in the papers to be approved by councillors.

One of the overarching themes is that the council intends to reduce car kilometres in the city by 30% by 2030. This runs alongside The Scottish Government's aim of achieving a 20% reduction within the same timescale. The council has also set out its stall to create more walkable communities with better active travel and public transport. By 2032 around 44,000 new homes will be needed in the capital to accommodate the number of people expected to live here by then and a move to public transport will be a must.

Transport Convener Cllr Scott Arthur believes the Granton line should have been built first.

Cllr Arthur said: "I don't know any other city with a first tram line connecting the city to the airport. I think that connecting these massive employment centres, massive destinations, and massive development opportunities is probably what should have gone in first. Also with this second line we will connect the Western General Hospital to the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh." Cllr Arthur previously explained to The Edinburgh Reporter that this would offer staff at the hospitals a good direct mode of transport between the two, and it is believed the staff members would form a considerable part of the tram patronage.

The proposals have caused much social media chatter over the last few days since the papers for the meeting were published, but the interesting thing this time round is not whether or not the next part of the tram line should be built – it is

much more about which route it should take.

The options to consider are set out in the lengthy reports on the council website and are to run a tram line down Orchard Brae, across Dean Bridge into the west end of the city centre, or take it all the way down the Roseburn Path connecting at Roseburn.

GRANTON LINE

The new part of the tram line is intended to link Granton, the site of 3,500 completely sustainable new homes – a net zero community with one parking space for every four houses, and which will be heated with heat from the sewer – with Edinburgh College and beyond to south east Edinburgh. Council officers were pushing for only the preferred tram route along the Roseburn Corridor to be put forward for consultation.

The Granton to BioQuarter route through Roseburn would link two areas where development is planned. It would proceed from Roseburn up Telford Road past the Western General Hospital, rather than using the entire length of the Roseburn Path, past Craigleith Retail Park, into the city centre, through a “delta” junction on Princes Street at the junction with St Andrew Square, up the Bridges past Edinburgh University (which is the area safeguarded in the Local Development Plan), Cameron Toll Shopping Centre (again safeguarded in the Local Development Plan), past the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, through the BioQuarter and then on to Midlothian. The hope is to connect the tram line to the Southern Suburban Railway in due course.

The new second line would join the existing line from the airport at Roseburn where there is already a spur built in to the existing tramline to take the tram on to Granton.

Alongside the new line there would be a “high quality walking route” but cycling would be provided on parallel routes. The

Transport Convener said he would like to aspire to 24/7 cycle paths, and that the off road path network does not work for everyone after dark.

The second line is expected to double the capacity of the existing tram services. Cllr Arthur reported the patronage predictions as 13.5 million for the Roseburn via Telford Road route opposed to 12.5 million on the Orchard Brae/Queensferry Road route.

Cllr Arthur said: "That took us past Craigleith Shopping Centre which is great, but it did not give us a close connection with the Western General. To get there you would have had to cross three roads, part of which is quite narrow, so not a great route. We cycled the route a couple of months ago and it convinced me that we need a really good connection with the hospital.

"So the plan is to take the line off the Roseburn Path at Groathill Road to proceed down Telford Road, it will turn at Crewe Toll under the Red Bridge and then into Granton Station."

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE on Orchard Brae Corridor

This route would allow the Roseburn Path, formerly a railway line to remain untouched. The impact on the natural environment on the path network would be avoided. But council officers say the opportunity to run segregated cycle lanes along this corridor would be limited. Dean Bridge is seen as a "significant constraint" and if cycle lanes were to form part of the design they might need to be added on to the historic structure as it is quite narrow. This is the route which would be more affected by traffic and so council officers say journey times would not be so reliable and possibly impact passenger numbers.

You may read Cllr Arthur's own thoughts on the decision to be made by members of the Transport and Environment Committee between Orchard Brae or the Roseburn route [on his blog here.](#)

Meanwhile there are several deputations ([read any written deputations by clicking here](#)) on the subject to be heard ahead of the main part of the monthly meeting from the following:

- Edinburgh Bus Users Group (verbal and written submission)
- Spokes Planning Group (verbal and written submission)
- Transform Scotland (verbal deputation)
- Friends of Dalry Cemetery (verbal and written submission)

The line between Newhaven to Granton will not be joined up as the Business Case does not according to the council stack up right now but it may be considered later.

The timescale for the second line is estimated to be around 10 years and new trams would have to be purchased to run services on the extended line. Tram technology is said to have "moved on" since the original trams were bought so the council will also be looking at battery technology to reduce the number of overhead lines which would be needed.

[Watch the Transport and Environment Committee live or afterwards in a recorded version by clicking here.](#)



18/09/2023 Picture Alan Simpson