

Edinburgh Trams will continue to provide free fares for under 22-year-olds

Edinburgh Trams has confirmed it will continue to provide free fares for under 22-year-olds despite the Scottish Government refusing to stump up funding to cover the cost.

The concessionary scheme started in 2022 at the same time free bus travel for youngsters was introduced Scotland-wide.

Initially funded by the city council, it later said it could no longer afford the £300k-a-year bill and councillors cut support in 2023.

Edinburgh Trams has continued to allow under-22s to ride free of charge on an interim basis while other options were explored, meeting the cost within its own budget.

However in March the Scottish Government ruled-out subsidising fares on both Edinburgh Trams and the Glasgow subway as part of its Fair Fares Review, which was set up to make Scotland's public transport system more accessible, available, and affordable.

It argued this was "not considered a good use of resources compared with other options" as the two cities already have "strong bus systems".

Now Edinburgh Trams have opted to continue funding the scheme rather than see it scrapped.

The decision was made “on the basis that the board, mindful of their responsibilities as a publicly owned company, consider that there would be a detrimental impact on both Edinburgh Trams and Lothian Buses if they did not offer free travel on the same terms as Lothian Buses now offer it,” a report to the transport committee on Thursday, June 20 said.

Board members also had concerns there could be a “risk to their front line staff to remove the benefit”.

Transport convener Scott Arthur previously said the Scottish Government not treating concessionary travel on bus and tram on an equal basis “will only make it harder for Edinburgh to meet the Scottish Government’s own climate and traffic reduction targets”.

He said in March Edinburgh Trams continuing to cover the cost was “neither sustainable nor acceptable”.

Cllr Arthur was approached for comment following the latest development.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter