

# Tram to Granton – the options discussed

**Spokes, the cycling campaign group, held a public meeting to discuss proposed routes for the tram extension to Granton on Wednesday evening with a panel of four, comprising:**

- Lesley Hinds who was formerly the Transport Convener who delivered the trams in 2014 after a woeful election result unseated the Liberal Democrats who had previously led on the project
- Euan Baxter who founded the Save Roseburn Path campaign when proposals for the extension were outlined by the council earlier in the year
- Alex Robb who is a member of the Spokes Planning Group, and
- Professor Adrian Davies who heads up the Transport and Health department at Edinburgh Napier University

More than 180 people attended, filling the downstairs and the gallery upstairs at St Augustine's on George IV Bridge to capacity, with some people turned away at the door according to Spokes. There is a high level of public interest in Edinburgh in the tram extension, but it became evident during questions that some of the finer details have not yet filtered through to all members of the public. That is not their fault. It is one of the problems of the council system that it appears unattainable and indecipherable to many.

The discussion was a little muted without many up to date details provided, and certainly without the high emotion which has been displayed on social media. The current Transport Convener, Cllr Scott Arthur, is out on the election trail as a candidate, and so could not be on the panel. If he had been – or if any councillors from the Transport Committee had been – then the discussion might, in our view, have been more meaningful and informative and might have produced some solutions or suggestions.

Instead, some of the questions were light on detail, or even basic knowledge of the background of the project. Many answers can be provided from reading the February report by council officers putting forward the Roseburn Path as the preferred route, but it appeared that not everyone had read it. [It is available here.](#)

There was no mention of the instances of violence which have occurred on the [North Edinburgh paths](#), there was no mention of the reduced carbon emissions which could be brought about by building on the former railway line, and there was little mention of the fact that this line (whichever way it reaches Granton) would be only a small part of a larger project, and would deliver significant economic benefits. The north-south extension would take the tram to the BioQuarter through Cameron Toll which, according to the council, makes the strategic business case stand up. The Transport Convener, Cllr Scott Arthur, has said in the past that the patronage between the two hospitals would make the line worthwhile.

The council now want to extend the tramline further from Roseburn to Granton along the Roseburn Path or the Orchard Brae route which incorporates the Dean Bridge. Nothing has yet been agreed. There will be a 12-week consultation on both routes and the dates for that have not yet been announced. It is likely to be later in the summer or even the autumn. Until then there is nothing wrong with debating the options, except that the options are not yet drafted in minute detail.



Euan Baxter

## **Save the Roseburn Path – Euan Baxter**

There was scant mention of the real details of the ecological and environmental impact of using the Roseburn Path for the tram extension – except for Save Roseburn Path speaker, Euan Baxter, who said that some 3,500+ trees would be lost, and that adopting this route would mean losing the “linear park” which it provides. He talked of the active travel benefits of the path, what it delivers as urban green space and also why an on road route would make most sense for mass transit in North Edinburgh and that the path should be retained for cyclists and pedestrians, and children learning to ride bikes. He mentioned that five bridges will have to be “demolished”, but did not say which particular ones, and claimed the existing natural habitat would be “completely removed”. He rejected the idea that the council have confirmed they will

build alternative cycle routes as part of the project, although there is one line in [this report](#) which confirms the point at 9.5.

## **Cycling infrastructure**

Pedal on Parliament, the group which campaigns to make Scotland a cycling-friendly country, set out their demands in their manifesto: “Well-designed, joined-up cycle routes that keep people away from fast and heavy traffic both enable and encourage people to cycle who might not otherwise take the risk. This is particularly the case for many women, parents travelling with children, older people and disabled people.”

But for many that does not mean sending cyclists and pedestrians along a path which can at times be secluded and often empty – an argument well-rehearsed in speaking up for segregated cycle lanes alongside Lanark Road. Opponents of the cycle lanes first established on Lanark Road during Covid said that there were good alternatives either along the Water of Leith or the Canal. But cyclists argued that these were not suitable for those who want to use their bikes on a commute, and that the Water of Leith path in particular can be both muddy and uninviting on dark winter evenings.

## **Mass transit scheme**

Mr Baxter said that a mass transit scheme “absolutely must be delivered” to deal with “Edinburgh’s three strategic priorities, tackling the housing crisis, reducing inequalities and the push towards net zero”. He argued that what we know now about the mental health benefits of greenspaces was not known when the Roseburn Path option was first mooted 20 years ago, and that in between times the path has increasingly been used for active travel.

But he also said that the council must address what is best

for the tram, and said it must align with national transport policy. He argued that the Orchard Brae route would take the tram through a more densely populated area and referred to a report by Jacobs Steer who have advised the council on trams since 2005 where he said that option was preferred. Whether the high density equates to more tram passengers is a moot point, but council officers say that the Roseburn Path route would introduce more reliability in terms of journey times, and it avoids traffic congestion. There is also the possibility of introducing a Granton to Edinburgh Airport route allowing a tram to turn right at Haymarket – or simply allow for an interchange for passengers to get on an airport bound tram.

Mr Baxter said that things have changed in 20 years since the city set out on the tram project, but does not want any change on the Roseburn Path saying that a tram built on the path would risk the key piece of the north Edinburgh network, trees, wildlife and the nature network.



Lesley Hinds

# For the Roseburn Path

Lesley Hinds was a councillor when decisions were made about creating the first tram line since 1956 in the capital. She spoke from her own knowledge of the difficulties with the first tram project, and explained that this spur would in fact complete the routes which had originally been called 1A and 1B.

Some of the alignment for the tram route was included in the Tram Act 2006 – the statutory permission from The Scottish Government to proceed to build a tram in the first place. And since 2006 the plans were to build a tram from Edinburgh Airport to Newhaven with a spur to Granton.

Mrs Hinds explained that many of the difficulties with the first project came from the discovery of unknown utilities in Edinburgh, remembering meetings with sobbing business people on Shandwick Place where the construction work faltered as a result.

She has lived in north Edinburgh for 40 years and said her personal opinion is that things have moved on since 2006. There is now a climate emergency and that should lead us to consider what we are leaving to the next generation. She outlined that in Edinburgh the increased congestion and associated poor air quality has led to the city setting a target of reducing car kilometres by 30% and to deliver net zero carbon by 2030.

In 2023, Mrs Hinds said that 1.89 million vehicle miles were travelled in Edinburgh and the number of cars have doubled in the last 30 years. This far she had largely agreed with the Save the Roseburn Path campaign.

But she said that Edinburgh is one of the fastest growing regions in the UK, and that the Granton Waterfront development in north Edinburgh is the largest regeneration project in

Scotland, and the people of north Edinburgh had long ago been promised a tram.

She explained that trams are the solution for capacity and reliability. Boarding times are around 50% faster than the bus. She said: "What we need in Edinburgh is integrated transport and a mass rapid transport system. I urge everyone to look at the report which went to the committee in February because it is stark as to why it is Line 1B (the Roseburn Path) which should be supported. It's an off-street tram corridor which will be quicker with reliable greater transport planning and city plan benefits including maximising the potential of the Granton Waterfront. It will serve the Western General, Craighleith Retail Park, heavy rail interchange and the new offices and hotels in Haymarket. It minimises impact on existing streets during construction, ensuring quicker construction, and less impact on other businesses, traffic and residents.

"I believe this project is at no risk to utilities. Anyone who went through the first tram project knows the issue of utilities. And it is important to realise that cycling and walking will be retained – and we need to ensure that it is retained – on line 1B.

"It provides better economic performance with expected lower capital costs and operating costs. It delivers better value for money."

Mrs Hinds admitted that among the risks and challenges there is concern over the community and wildlife, and conceded this has to be dealt with, as well as the cycling challenges – which may mean demanding a single track in places or lowering the tram bed below bridges.

But she continued that the Orchard Brae option would snarl up traffic and "the construction period would be more complicated. It has not been costed at all and there could be

constraints along the route leading to necessary land purchases". She also said that there would be no parallel safe segregated cycle paths along the route – there is an obvious difficulty crossing Dean Bridge. But she also recited the difficulties in using Queensferry Street and the knock on effect that would have on the city's bus services. The potential for a tram from Granton to the airport was limited by not being able to make a right hand turn onto Shandwick Place.

She said: "My view is that we should have a phased delivery with line 1B first – we should keep the original plan for a Telford Drive tram stop. For a few hundred metres of difference the cost [of taking it nearer the hospital] is just unsustainable. We should carry out partnership working with cycling and walking organisations to deliver an active travel corridor. We should spend no more time or money on the on road option – in my view it is not feasible. The Line 1B option is the only one which addresses cycling, walking, and public transport links to the waterfront – and it isn't always going to be that way. Unless we invest in public transport our city will come to a halt and we will have the worst pollution and the worst air quality."

By 2014 the council built the line from the airport to York Place. In 2023 the council built the line from York Place to Newhaven. Now it proposes to finish the initial project by creating the spur from Roseburn to Granton, but until the consultation goes live the timescale for the next part of the line is uncertain.

When the plans were brought to the Transport and Environment Committee in February the proposal was a single aspiration to recommend the north south line from the Royal Infirmary and Bioquarter in the South to Granton in the North. The ultimate decision was to put forward two options to the consultation phase of the project – to take the tram down the Roseburn Path or alternatively to run it out along Queensferry Street, over



Dean Bridge and down Orchard Brae. This latter has not ever been costed, and includes the challenge of finding innovative engineering solutions to take the tram over the historic bridge.

[Watch this space. Or watch the next Transport Committee meeting. The papers will be published here a week ahead of the meeting.](#)

This event was part of the Edinburgh Festival of Cycling which runs until 9 June 2024. [Find an event to interest you here.](#)

