

Drivers said to be “fed up” with Sheriffhall delays

Drivers are “fed up” with delays at Edinburgh’s Sheriffhall roundabout and are growing impatient over an “upgrade” promised six years ago, according to a Conservative councillor.

Cllr Graeme Bruce said the lack of progress on major works aimed at cutting traffic jams at the junction was “extremely disappointing,” adding the economic prosperity of the region “heavily relies on” the project going ahead.

The Pentland Hills councillor also questioned why it was taking so long for an independent report containing recommendations on how to proceed with the scheme to be made public.

Findings from a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) set up to consider more than 2,000 individual objections remain in the hands of Scottish Ministers, despite the report being completed a year ago.



Cllr Bruce at Sheriffhall. Image: Graeme Bruce

The “flyover” at Sheriffhall would separate local traffic from motorway traffic, cutting peak journey times on the A720, and is a flagship project of the [Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Regional Deal](#). This was signed in 2018 to deliver £1.3 billion investment from the UK and Scottish Governments as well as the region’s six councils and other organisations.

Plans were approved in 2021, but soon derailed by objections. Climate campaigners warned that the changes would generate more traffic at a time when Transport Scotland wants to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by the end of the decade, while the significant roadworks would involve “immense carbon emissions”.

Cllr Bruce said: “Money was set aside back in 2018 as part of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland region Deal to make traffic move more freely at this junction.

“It is extremely disappointing to find that six years later there isn’t even a spade in the ground while traffic jams get longer and longer as the years progress.

“Over the last 30 years huge numbers of housing developments have sprung up on the south side of the city but also around the Lothians. People need their own transport at times, to get to their place of work or shopping or visiting relatives, and of course not forgetting the tourist and HGV traffic as well.

“A tram or other forms of public transport isn’t going to cut the mustard when somebody wants to bring home five bags of cement, several wooden posts, rails, and slats along with a bag of nails.”

Originally priced at £120 million, an updated cost of the improvements is yet to be announced, however it’s feared it could now be above £200m.

However The Scottish Government, which would be responsible for covering anything over the previously agreed funding package, remains “steadfast” in its commitment to the project, a recent meeting of stakeholders heard.

Paul Junik from Transport Scotland said the PLI report remained under “active consideration”.

He said: “It’s not unusual for complex road projects like this where there has been a significant number of objections for the period of time to elapse in terms of I think we’re at 11 months.

“Scottish Ministers’ commitment to this remains steadfast.

“The work is ongoing, active consideration is currently underway and as soon as possible that decision will be made by Scottish Ministers and as soon as a decision has been made they will be publishing the outcome of that review.”

East Lothian Council leader Norman Hampshire said: “The City

Bypass is struggling because of that roundabout and the City Deal have got that as a flagship project.

“The City Deal are delivering lots of projects and this particular project is causing us not particularly good publicity, and it would be good if we could get at least some sort of timeframe.”

Cllr Hampshire added: “When the City Deal took this project on we had a budget of £120m, at that time when we were looking at this project we had estimated it could come in around £80m . . . this potentially could be £200m or more.”

Cllr Bruce continued: “Our citizens, not just in Edinburgh but around the Lothians, are fed up with the constant delays at Sheriffhall and indeed across the length of this road. Sorting this junction to get traffic moving again is absolutely imperative. The sooner you start, the sooner the better in my opinion.

“Also, it is clear for everyone to see that it needs the lanes in each direction with the appropriate road infrastructure to keep the traffic moving. The economic prosperity of our city and surrounding areas heavily rely on the improvement of this junction and we cannot afford any more dither and delay.”

Uncertain future and objections

But the future of the Sheriffhall Roundabout remains uncertain and has stalled in recent years with a public inquiry being held. As at April 2024 the inquiry report has been with Scottish Ministers for six months with no announcement made as yet – and still no announcement today.

When the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt Hon Ian Murray, spoke to The Edinburgh Reporter shortly after his appointment in July this year he agreed that the terms of some

City Region Deals may have to be revisited.

He said: “The problem of the city deals – particularly the early ones like the Edinburgh one is that inflation and construction costs have blown a lot of it out of the water unless it was started earlier.

“So the Edinburgh Futures Institute, which was a part of that it started, it’s open. It’s fantastic, and a great resource for the city and for Scotland, going forward. But actually some of the other projects now might be unviable or requiring additional funding for them to happen.”

Cycle campaign group, [Spokes](#) has expressed concern over the provision for walking and cycling- which they feel would become worse not better. And Spokes have expressed their support for the group [Sheriffhall Overarching Objectors](#) (SH00) which set up a crowdfunder (now closed) to raise funds for expert advice in connection with the inquiry.

The two campaigns joined together to produce a report to the public inquiry in 2023, with a legal team advising and cross examining Transport Scotland’s “tired evidence”.

SH00 set out their objections as these:

- The proposal would generate more traffic and contradicts Transport Scotland’s goal “A route map to achieve a 20 percent reduction in car kilometres by 2030.”
- The construction of the Scheme would involve immense carbon emissions, primarily through the consumption of diesel oil, concrete and steel, when immediate reductions in emissions are essential to avoid catastrophic climate change.
- In its operation, the scheme makes no significant or genuine contribution towards the rapid carbon reductions required to meet the targets of the Scottish Climate Change Act: building and operating it jeopardises any

chance for Scotland to deliver net-zero as required by the Scottish Government's own laws.

- The initial budget for the Scheme was £120 million, but with massive inflation in the building industry, the actual cost would likely be at least £200 million. Even if those sums are available for transport, given widespread poverty and the financial pressures on government, they could be far better spent on public transport and active travel.

Main story by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.