

Trams to Newhaven is not yet finished – two years after opening

Although the extension of the tramline to Newhaven opened almost two years ago a master list of items to be fixed is only now being compiled according to the council.

In the latest papers for a Transport committee meeting next week, a benign version of events is included saying that a “final list” of works will be circulated by the end of the month (Monday) and works will begin in April. This conceals a great deal of work on behalf of local residents and businesses in the Leith Walk area.

The local community councils combine as Community Councils Together on Trams (CCTT), and it is this body which has kept the question of dealing with defects on and around the tram line on Leith Walk alive, most recently presenting a deputation to the Transport Committee in December. Their constant plea has been to say that the Trams to Newhaven project is not yet complete and the group of four community councils alleges that there may be as much as £20 million of defects to be remedied either by the council or its contractor, Sacyr, Farrans and Neopul (SFN) who won the £210 million contract to design and build the 4.7 km extension from York Place to Newhaven. The new part of the route was opened in June 2023.



Trams to Newhaven launched on 7 June 2023 at noon Left George Lowder, then Chair of Transport for Edinburgh, piper Louise Marshall and Lea Harrison CEO of Edinburgh Trams ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

The December deputation was presented by Mike Birch of New Town and Broughton Community Council on behalf of CCTT who said: “It is important that the council has adequate resources in place to deliver expected project outcomes. We will continue to monitor progress and highlight issues where we believe actions are not matching words.”

The council agreed that there would be more engagement and contact between the community councils and council officers as, according to the Transport Convener, Cllr Stephen Jenkinson, “the community felt there were a number of discrepancies between what was originally agreed as scope for the project and the expectation residents and businesses on Leith Walk”.

This is a bit of an understatement as the collective of four community councils – Leith Central Community Council, Leith

Links Community Council, Leith Harbour and Newhaven Community Council and New Town and Broughton Community Council – has in the past had to resort to making Freedom of Information requests to obtain information that they thought should have been in the public domain. CCTT have reported damage to the public realm, safety issues including uneven surfaces on the cycle track, and problems with traffic signalling which they say almost led to a strike by tram drivers. The group says the list runs to hundreds of items big and small.

CCTT

Harald Tobermann on behalf of CCTT told The Edinburgh Reporter: “CCTT welcomes the collaborative effort to address outstanding issues related to the Trams to Newhaven project, announced by CEC in the latest TEC Business Bulletin. This process was initiated in November 2024 and agreed at a meeting with the Interim Executive Director of Place in January 2025.

“This process brings together in a standard format previously separately monitored defects, a number of previously unidentified defects, items descoped during construction for various reasons and road safety issues. The resulting comprehensive list once finalised will provide detailed analysis – by type, scale and gravity – of the outstanding issues. Such analysis was previously impeded because issues were raised by a variety of sources using various different reporting formats.

“The list – still being added to and under review jointly by CCTT and Trams to Newhaven (TTN) – already includes a substantial number of items, some of which are “quick wins”, while “big ticket” items will require planning and the development of appropriate works packages .

“The aim is to resolve as many items as possible by the end of 2025, and to “find a home” – i.e. identify a clear route to

resolution – for the remaining ones.

“To fulfil this ambition, CCTT continues to call for increased council resources to be focussed on truly completing the Trams to Newhaven project to meet the goals set out in the [TTN Final Business Case](#) and the reasonable expectations of residents and businesses along the tram construction corridor.”

Traffic signalling system

Council officers confirmed that a contemporary traffic signal system has been introduced and has been operating for the last few months. This should “improve connectivity and detection”. The lack of priority for trams at traffic lights had increased the journey time down Leith Walk, and the council says it has now resolved 95% of the issues the tram operators have had.

A spokesperson for Edinburgh Trams said: “The signalling system SPRUCE is in the final stages of implementation and is being tweaked and refined to improve its efficiency. The temporary timetable we have had in place since December seeks to mitigate minor delays along Leith Walk caused by signalling. We continue to work closely with the City of Edinburgh Council to help refine the last few remaining issues and will then seek to resume previous journey times.”

Freedom of Information requests

CCTT made an FOI request to obtain a copy of the Road Safety Audit (RSA) from November 2023 which was not made public. The groups also says the defect log had not been made public. They then discovered that the RSA recommended 145 changes to improve safety, but the council proposed only fixing around 49 of those. CCTN said some of these were serious safety defects such as a lack of tactile paving and poor signage.

Following a review process of the entire tram route the

Transport Convener told The Edinburgh Reporter that council officers have now identified a list of contractual defects and the concerns raised and the final list is imminent. The work to fix the defects is expected to begin next month.

List to be published

The Transport Convener was keen to stress that this is “quite healthy” and he agrees that “the community was quite right to call out that they were unhappy”. It was acknowledged that both residents and officers were “ a little further apart than we would like and the team have engaged and hopefully will be working a lot more collaboratively going forward to resolve as many of these contractual defects as possible”.

Cllr Jenkinson also accepted that this is a lessons learned exercise which will be useful in forming the basis of any future tram project.

We are assured that the final list of “defects” will be published. Cllr Jenkinson said: “At this stage the list hasn’t been published and I’ve not seen it, but I would like to think it would be comprehensive and I would like to think that we’d have support from the vast majority of stakeholders and the local community.”



The Trams to Newhaven extension opened to passengers on 7 June 2023 PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter