

BRIEFING FOR CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCILLORS: Edinburgh Trams – Building on success

Monday 2 November 2015

Joint briefing from SCDI and Transform Scotland

1. Introduction

- 1.1. As Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh yet again faces a crucial decision on the future of transport provision in the City. This decision will send important signals about how Edinburgh and Scotland are planning for its long-term future development.
- 1.2. As national organisations, Transform Scotland and SCDI recognise that what happens in Edinburgh – the strongest economy of any city in the UK outside London and with population growth forecast, at 28 per cent over 25 years, to be the fastest in Scotland (alongside Aberdeen City) – is key to Scotland's success as a sustainable, low carbon economy
- 1.3. Although delivery of the tram project faced a series of difficulties the first year of operation has been one of success. 4,920,000 passengers were carried 370,000 ahead of target. Passenger satisfaction is running at 95% and service reliability is 99%. Overall, the combined bus and tram network carried an extra 6,000,000 passengers during this first year. Trams have become an everyday part of life in the city. They frequently feature in media coverage of the city as images of a capital city with a modern transport system.
- 1.4. However, the lines so far built do not fully utilise the tram fleet and its associated infrastructure nor do they best serve the city. We believe that it is now essential to extend the tram system to Newhaven. This extension has the strongest business case and will help to unlock the huge development potential of the brownfield land in Leith as well as removing many buses from Leith Walk and so also from the city centre. Failure to do so will most likely lead to more dispersed development outside the city with its adverse environmental consequences as people commute ever longer distances to work.

2. Why trams are the right choice

- 2.1. Our Capital's competitor cities internationally have already made significant investments in high quality tram and metro systems, closer to home the Northern Powerhouse in England is investing heavily in infrastructure. It is imperative that Edinburgh takes further steps to ensure that it too can pride itself with one of the best public transport systems in Europe.

2.2. Key factors include:

- Quality of life is an important factor in attracting a high quality workforce and visitors to Edinburgh. A modern public transport system centred on trams will help to maintain a high quality of life in the city.
- Congestion poses a serious threat to the city and its future growth. The existing bus system has coped well in the past but buses inevitably become caught up in general traffic congestion.
- Trams are very efficient at carrying large numbers of passengers and are proven to be much more attractive at persuading car drivers to change mode. Modern trams are readily accessible to parents with pushchairs and by those using wheelchairs.
- We face very demanding air quality targets: electric trams generate no emissions at the point of use.
- By providing electrically powered trams we are investing in a transport system that is not dependent on future oil supplies, which are now the subject of numerous global threats. Electricity can be generated from many sources, including a variety of renewable options.
- The unique character and setting of the City have made it a World Heritage site. Trams will help to reduce the overall level of traffic in the city; they are already a common sight in historic cities around Europe.

3. First choice around the world

- 3.1. New tram systems are under construction around the world as well as extensions to existing networks. In the UK all six existing systems have been or are being enhanced and two new lines have recently opened in Nottingham, a city much smaller than Edinburgh. Light rail systems are seen as essential for growing urban areas around the world.

4. The way forward for Edinburgh

- 4.1. The Edinburgh tram project has not been without its difficulties – political differences and project delays have caused reputational damage to Edinburgh and Scotland.
- 4.2. However the successful operation of the trams in the first year has brought many plaudits and a general change in the public mood. Visitors to the city readily take the tram and at times of major events the trams move many thousands of people. Already at peak times the trams are running at capacity.
- 4.3. Now is the time to take the next step towards a comprehensive network by extending the lines to Newhaven and so joining up development in Leith and Newhaven with the developments at the St.James Quarter, Edinburgh Park and Edinburgh Airport. This will send positive signals that Edinburgh is following the worldwide trend of developing sustainable transport infrastructure and intends to keep pace with competitor cities.

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