

Community Councils Together on Trams

Press Release

29 June 2018

The proposed extension of the Edinburgh tram to Newhaven has come under fresh scrutiny from a group of community organisations who are urging the city council to reconsider the wider implications, the detail, and the timeline of the controversial development.

A joint statement urging caution and seeking improved communications as a matter of urgency has been issued by a coalition of the four community councils through whose wards the extended tram would run, if given the green light by the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC).

The statement released by Community Councils Together on Trams (CCTT) – which includes the community councils of Leith Central, Leith Links, Leith Harbour and Newhaven, and New Town and Broughton – says that while all four groups approve the proposed extension of the tramline in principle, if it is to be done well, they highlight a number of concerns on which they are seeking reassurances from the trams team and CEC.

The statement says: “The communities that we represent are understandably extremely eager that the mistakes of the previous tram construction works should not be repeated. We think all sides can agree on that. Consequently the community is seeking a high standard of solid evidence that this time the work will be better planned and implemented.”

While the document says that the community council coalition views the proposed extension as “an important opportunity for the broader social and economic development of the Leith area and beyond”, it adds the caveat that there is “an unavoidable impression that issues are being rushed or key information is not being shared”.

It continues: “The result is that, as of the present time, the four CCs which are party to this submission do not have the level of confidence and standard of evidence that our communities seek.”

Their key areas of concern focus on the design philosophy of the extension and the route, the consequences for the local economy, the desire for a realistic appraisal of the environmental benefits of the extension, and the entire readiness of this enormous project to get the go-ahead at this time.

The Outline Business Case for the tram extension was approved by CEC last September, and the city council is scheduled to make a final decision on whether to proceed with the project, or not, towards the end of this year. If approved, preparatory works could begin next spring.

In the meantime, as the consultation process continues and the project leaders await the bids from the four joint ventures vying to win the contract to build the extension, details of which are due at the end of July, the findings of the Hardie Inquiry into the original trams fiasco are yet to be presented, although they are due to emerge in the autumn.

Sally Millar, secretary of Leith Links Community Council, said: “Leith has seen an enormous amount of development in recent years and, with more to come, we need to be increasingly mindful of all the design considerations relating to the tram extension and how these impact on the local community. And we are determined to do that.”

Carol Nimmo, chair of New Town and Broughton Community Council, added: “The design of the tram extension should be aligned with the city’s over-arching transport and design priorities of environmental improvement, reduction of traffic, and people-led ‘place-making’.”

Charlotte Encombe, chair of Leith Central Community Council, noted: “The proposed tram extension passes through a unique eco-system of distinct communities, businesses, cultural spaces, cafes, pubs and restaurants, and spontaneous meeting places. It is vital that a realistic compensation scheme is agreed well in advance of the tram extension project being approved by the council.”

Rob Levick, chair of Leith Harbour and Newhaven Community Council, added: “Inevitably there will be disruption to community life during the construction phase. Everyone understands that, but in order to keep that to the minimum we’re looking for evidence that the key milestones have been identified and each will be achieved before proceeding to the next stage, that the community are not left with open construction work that unnecessarily impacts them any longer than is absolutely necessary.”

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Contact:

CCTT principal spokesperson Harald Tobermann (vice-chair, Leith Central CC)
planning.LCCC@LeithCentralCC.co.uk
0131 554 7698

Other contact points are:

Carol Nimmo (chair, New Town and Broughton CC) - chair@ntbcc.org.uk

Sally Millar (secretary, Leith Links CC) - sally.millar@icloud.com

Rob Levick (chair, Leith Harbour and Newhaven CC) - chair@lhnc.org.uk

Notes For Editors:

1. The proposed tram extension passes through the most densely populated area in Scotland (census 2011).