

Future of trams splits city

Evening News poll shows 47% favour ditching project

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THE latest crisis over Edinburgh's troubled trams project has left the city divided over whether to scrap the scheme or carry on, an exclusive *Evening News* poll reveals today.

Our poll – the biggest to date on the scheme – found 47.4 per cent of those questioned in favour of ditching the project altogether. A total of 39 per cent wanted to see work completed while 13.6 per cent were unsure.

The survey comes as councillors meet today to debate the future of the project. SNP deputy council leader Steve Cardownie said he would be calling on the council to issue a formal apology to the people of Edinburgh over the trams debacle.

Today's survey also showed some 76 per cent backed the latest plan to get the airport to city centre part of the route built first. But 63 per cent of the 1,700 readers taking part said they had not supported the idea of a tram system in the first place.

The future of the project was plunged into uncertainty last week when a report warned the council would have to borrow another £55 million to cover a 10 per cent contingency on the £545m scheme. The report – which was being debated by councillors today – also outlined how the tram route could be delivered in sections.

Yesterday the *Evening News* revealed tram firm TIE is locked in talks with contractor Bilfinger Berger about a "mature divorce" which would involve the firm completing the line from the air-

port only as far as York Place.

Councillor Cardownie said he could understand that with £348m already spent on the project, many people would feel it was better to carry on. But he said the poll was a clear indication that there was not majority support for the trams in the first place.

He said: "I'm going to call for the council to issue a formal apology to the city for embarking on this ill-thought-out scheme, riven with risk and now likely to end up as only half what was expected. We should never have embarked on this scheme. I said at the time the business case did not stack up."

But city transport convener Gordon Mackenzie said he was "pleasantly surprised" at the strength of the 39 per cent support for continuing with the project.

He said: "Progress has been far from satisfactory and I can easily understand why 47 per cent think we should scrap it, but we are determined to get the best deal for people of Edinburgh. I must apologise for the difficulties and disruption, but I don't apologise for having the ambition to undertake this project, which I believe will help to transform public transport in Edinburgh."

Today's poll also shows that, 41.1 per cent of those questioned put the majority of the blame for the project's problems at the door of the city council.

It is understood that if the council opts to take the trams only as far as York Place initially, that part of the line could be up and running by June 2012 and cost less than £500m, but it would raise major

doubts over whether the full route would ever be completed.

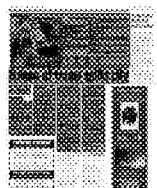
Edinburgh North & Leith Labour MSP Malcolm Chisholm said people in Leith should not have to pay for the council's "catalogue of incompetence" over the trams. He said: "It's appalling that residents and traders in Leith who have endured so much disruption for years are now hearing that the tram may not come to Leith.

"The whole project has been shockingly mismanaged by the council and the Scottish Government has just washed its hands of it. It is high time the Government worked with the council to sort out this sorry mess. Audit Scotland gave the project a clean bill of health in 2007 but since then it has been downhill all the way."

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DIVIDED WE STAND



Do you now feel that the tram project should be scrapped?		
Yes	47.4%	
Unsure	13.6%	
No	39.0%	
Who do you believe is mostly to blame for the project's problems? (please select one only)		
Edinburgh City Council	41.1%	
Bilfinger Berger (company hired to build tramway)	20.9%	
Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE)	19.1%	
Scottish Government	6.9%	
Unsure	12.0%	
If only part of the route is to be built initially, which section do you believe should be running first?		
Airport to City Centre	76.0%	
Leith to City Centre	14.7%	
Unsure	9.3%	
Did you support the idea of a tram system for Edinburgh before building work began?		
Yes	28.8%	
Unsure	8.2%	
No	63.0%	
How has the tram project affected your view of the political parties - please state whether your opinion of each party has...		
	Worsened	Improved
Labour	2.9%	50.4%
Liberal Democrat	3.6%	39.3%
SNP	14.0%	41.9%
Conservative	7.2%	24.4%

The *Evening News* polled 1735 people living within the Edinburgh area on Tuesday June 22 and Wednesday June 23. All participants are registered users of The Scotsman Publications online database.

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