

20 June 2007

City Council welcomes positive independent audit on trams

The City of Edinburgh Council's Transport spokesperson, Councillor Phil Wheeler, today welcomed the positive outcome of the Audit Scotland review into Edinburgh's tram project.

'Being close to the project, my confidence in Edinburgh's tram project and the professionals involved in its development has always been high. Staff involved and contractors under consideration have UK and world-wide experience in delivering high quality light rail systems on time and budget. This independent audit has now confirmed to the whole of the city and country that robust management and procedures are in place to deliver a successful tram scheme.

'The independent audit does issue a warning that that current uncertainty may jeopardise its successful delivery though. It with this in mind, that I urge the First Minister to make a swift decision that will equip the city and country with the modern transport system it needs to help commuters, attract investment and make us a greener city. Buses alone cannot manage the growing travel needs of the city there is no practicable alternative to meeting the forecast demand for public transport along the Airport to Leith route.

nor attract the kind of businesses that would lead to more jobs and opportunities.

By heeding the views of major businesses, his fellow parliamentarians, green groups and the public he will be sending a message to the rest of the world that Scotland is a modern, dynamic and ambitious country.'

The case for trams has been well made by politicians and businesses and Mr Salmond has access to the Draft Final Business Case, which was approved by Ministers at the end of last year, which lays down in detail exactly why this is the right scheme for a modern 21st Century capital city.

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Notes to Editors:

1. UK growth: There has been dramatic growth in the use of light rail systems in the UK since the 1990s, with new lines and systems opening and a 52% patronage increase in all UK schemes since 1999.
2. Trams are an attractive option for motorists: 20% of peak hour and 50% of weekend UK tram passengers previously travelled by car.

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3. Trams allow more people to travel to city centres and retail areas. For example, Dublin has seen a 35% increase in footfall at an end-of-line shopping mall. In Strasbourg, the number of shoppers in the city centre rose from 88,000 in 1992 to 163,000 in 1997 after the opening of two tram lines.
4. Trams increase overall public transport journeys. Montpellier has seen an increase of 36% in public transport journeys between 1999-2002, following the trams opening in 2000. Strasbourg figures increased 30.8% between 1993-1996 after the trams opened in 1994.
5. Property values and rental prices increase along tram lines, both commercially and residentially. For example, Dublin reports an increase in property of up to 15% along Luas lines, while Strasbourg has seen an increase of 7% in rental prices. Real estate agents in Strasbourg say 50% of passengers wishing to rent want access to the tram.
6. Trams have a positive impact on the image of the city and on attracting business. Benefits include attracting investment, increasing business, attracting more tourists, and improving access for customers and staff.
7. Trams carry more people. At very high frequencies (of 60 vehicles per hour) bus-based modes can carry 4,500 to nearly 10,000 people per hour per direction, whereas the larger vehicle size of light rail and the ability to couple vehicles together, means that a capacity of 20,000 or more.
8. Trams can improve accessibility and mobility for people with disabilities. The Croydon tramlink is becoming more popular with those with impaired mobility than the "dial-a-ride" service, because the system is fully accessible for people in wheelchairs and is highly reliable. Trams are highly accessible to all users and can provide 100% level boardings at stops. Other features include highly visible stops, good information, easy to purchase tickets and security measures.
9. Light rail schemes can improve safety: Government statistics indicate that people driving or travelling in cars are 11 times more likely to be killed than rail passengers and more than 30 times more likely to be injured. In addition, pedestrians are much less likely to be involved in accidents with light rail than with general traffic.