CEC 'TRAMS: GRANTON TO THE EDINBURGH BIOQUARTER AND ROYAL INFIRMARY OF EDINBURGH AND BEYOND CONSULTATION'

Transform Scotland response

Monday 17 November 2025

1. Summary.

We welcome the opportunity to set out our views on the proposed new tram route from Granton in the north of the city to the Edinburgh BioQuarter and Royal Infirmary in the south.

As The City of Edinburgh Council itself has established, trams are the only mode of transport which can offer the capacity, speed, reliability, attractiveness and comfort required on the city's main transport arteries. The benefits they can provide have also been emphatically demonstrated by the existing line from Edinburgh Airport to Newhaven.

A great success – from the start, passenger numbers and revenue on Edinburgh's trams have exceeded forecasts.

In just six months after the extension to Newhaven opened, tram passengers more than doubled. The success of the existing tram network in Edinburgh shows that when good quality public transport services are provided, people will use them. Being near the tram line is now used as a key marketing point for properties along the route and businesses served by the tram benefit from increased patronage. The tram system has also provided a reputational boost to Edinburgh, frequently highlighted in media coverage of the city.

In addition, tram passenger numbers have grown year on year. In 2024, the first full year with the Newhaven extension, a record-breaking 12 million journeys were made. This is over 2.5 times the passengers travelling by tram in the year before the extension. It included a new high of a quarter of a million journeys over a single weekend of concerts at Murrayfield and 1.2 million journeys in August 2024 alone.

Building on the success of the first two phases of the tram network, a new line to Granton, in particular, is the essential next step.

A new line to Granton will connect a highly-populated area of the city that includes a major area of regeneration as well as some of the most socioeconomically-disadvantaged populations. An expanded tram network in Edinburgh will increase connectivity for a large section of the city including some of the lowest income areas, allowing better access to jobs, shopping, and activities. The link to Granton will provide an important north-south line to complement existing services, and contribute to achieving the economic potential of this important part of the city.

We need quick and decisive action so that the process to build this next phase can commence rapidly.

Edinburgh must ensure that the momentum and expertise provided by the successful extension to Newhaven is not squandered. And unless the line to Granton is started soon, it will not be operational in time to support the Granton Waterfront regeneration, putting at risk the success of commercial, cultural, and recreational spaces due to be developed over the next decade.

With an increasing population, high quality transport links are fundamental to Edinburgh's future growth.

Edinburgh is a thriving city – home to just over 500,000 people with the population projected to grow a further 15% by 2041. Trams will provide the necessary quality connections between where people live, work, study, shop and take part in leisure activities. They will play a vital role in creating an efficient, sustainable, and reliable transport network.

The tram is essential to cut travel times and make Edinburgh competitive.

Current travel times from local centres in Edinburgh are not competitive with comparable cities, and this impacts both the economy and quality of life for residents. The Edinburgh Strategic Sustainable Transport Study found that for Edinburgh to meet its 2050 City Vision, City Plan 2030, and traffic reduction targets, it will be necessary to extend the tram network to both Granton and the south-east serving the Royal Infirmary and the Bioquarter.

Expansion of Edinburgh's tram network has strong cross-sectoral support.

On 9 September 2025, we published a statement of support which was supported by an alliance of 18 organisations ranging across the third, public and private sectors highlighting the need for sustainable and equitable transport which is key driver of economic growth in Edinburgh. Alongside Transform Scotland, the supporting organisations were:

- **Asthma + Lung UK**
- **Capital Rail Action Group**
- **Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport**
- **Edinburgh Airport**
- **Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce**
- **Edinburgh College**
- **Edinburgh Trade Union Council**
- **Essential Edinburgh**
- **Friends of the Earth Scotland**
- **National Museums Scotland**
- **Prosper**
- **ScotRail**
- **Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance**
- **Scottish Association for Public Transport**
- **SEStran**
- **Spokes Lothian Cycle Campaign**
- **The University of Edinburgh**

These organisations will all have their own views on the specifics of the new tram development, but all were united in their support for the further development of tram routes in Edinburgh.

2. Why trams work.

Fast, efficient travel

The ability to reduce traffic and move lots of people means that trams are a key component in the best transport networks around the world.

Trams are comfortable, accessible, fast, attractive, and very efficient at carrying large numbers of passengers. They combine the frequent stops and on-street accessibility of bus services with the speed of train travel. This high quality experience and reliability has proven to be effective at persuading people to switch from driving, with data showing that new and extended tram networks in the UK take thousands of cars off the roads as motorists leave their cars to catch the tram instead.

In Edinburgh, the existing tram network has already reduced the number of cars entering the city as can be clearly seen at Ingliston Park & Ride which is running out of space. The reduction in traffic benefits everyone – buses are more reliable, and those walking, cycling, and wheeling have fewer cars to contend with.

A sustainable city

A city the size of Edinburgh needs the capacity and speed trams can provide on major transport corridors.

While Edinburgh has an excellent bus network, it is at or approaching capacity in key areas. Peak time delays can be significant as buses queue at crowded stops. Princes Street, in particular, cannot reasonably be expected to accommodate more buses. Extending the trams will increase capacity, decrease journey times and make it easier for people to choose public transport.

A better quality of life

Trams provide an opportunity to improve our streets and public realm.

With the construction of a new tram line, streets and junctions can be redesigned to follow modern best practice on roads that have been unimproved for decades. This provides the opportunity for wider footways, more pedestrian space, facilities for cyclists, amenities like benches and reduced pavement clutter. If done well, attractive and distinctive spaces can be created which support local retail and enterprise.

3. Economic benefits.

Catalyst for investment

Evidence from key Edinburgh developers has shown that the existing tram network was factored into their decision to invest.

On average, offices on the tram route are more profitable and perform better in retaining and attracting staff. The improved connectivity of the current tram network is dramatic: travel time by public transport between the city centre and Edinburgh Park has been slashed from 50 to 15 minutes, and peak hour travel time between Leith and Princes Street cut by 60%.

Increased productivity

Trams are efficient at getting people to switch from driving, cutting congestion and increasing productivity.

Congestion poses a serious threat to the city and its future growth. It will discourage investment and reduce the economic activity generated by people visiting different areas of the city for shopping, eating, and leisure. Congestion imposes economic costs because it increases journey times, unreliability, and accidents.

And because trams are effective at getting people to switch from driving, they encourage denser developments centred on the areas served by the network in the longer term. These denser areas provide well-known benefits from clustering people and organisations together which lead to increased productivity.

Internationally competitive

It is imperative that Edinburgh takes action to ensure that it can pride itself on having one of the best public transport systems in Europe.

Our Capital's competitor cities internationally continue to make significant investments in high quality tram and metro systems. Quality of life is an important factor in attracting a high quality workforce and visitors to Edinburgh, which in turn drives economic activity. A tram system serving all key areas of the city will help to maintain that high quality of life.

A tram system is vital to attract inward investment to support the major Granton Waterfront and Edinburgh BioQuarter projects.

In many cities, international investment is targeted at areas with strong public transport links, but in Edinburgh many major development areas are currently poorly served by fast and efficient transport. Aside from the economic growth and employment trams generate, extending the tram network to these areas will demonstrate local commitment and investment, which will stimulate further external investment.

4. Environmental benefits.

Cutting carbon

Trams will play a vital role in helping the city meet its 2030 climate target.

Trams are a fully-decarbonised form of public transport. Furthermore, away from the city centre, the tram network encourages higher density development, which in turn makes both public transport and active travel more efficient and attractive. These are by far the lowest carbon forms of travel, and this virtuous circle will reduce the number of people driving. Higher density development also supports local shops and restaurants, so that people don't need to travel as far for common tasks, contributing further to sustainability goals.

Improving health

Trams improve local air quality.

Because trams are electric and displace a significant amount of car use, they contribute to much improved air quality which drastically improves outcomes for lung health and asthma, which are impacted by exhaust fumes. And the majority of primary particulate matter (PM2.5) from road transport comes from non-exhaust emissions, such as rubber dust coming off tyres. Researchers have found that PM2.5 dust could be just as deadly as that from diesel exhaust with its links to cancer, heart disease, and lung disease. Trams, on the other hand, do not produce this air pollution. If they are powered by renewable electricity, their running doesn't contribute to wider pollution and climate emissions either.

Increasing public transport and active travel

People in Edinburgh need to be provided with more sustainable transport choices if the city is to meet its target of a 30% reduction in car kilometres.

A successful reduction in traffic will be dependent on the availability of fast, frequent, high quality and affordable public transport services that provide an attractive alternative to driving. An extensive tram network will support the bus network and active travel, and will be necessary to realise a significant modal shift from the car to public transport and active travel. Extending the tram network as swiftly as possible is the best way to secure the consequential reduction in car use that is needed.

5. For the northern section, the 'Roseburn' route is the only feasible option.

The Council's Transport and Environment Committee required that the consultation should present objectively the pros and cons of both the 'Roseburn' route (more correctly, reopening of the former Granton Branch Line railway) and the 'Orchard Brae' (on-road) route However, it is clear from any reading of the results that there is in fact only one option, namely restoration of the railway corridor to its previous use.

As such, Transform Scotland supports the implementation of the existing legislation in the *Edinburgh Tram (Line One) Act 2006*, which provides for walking and cycling access to be retained in parallel with the reinstated railway.

Construction costs and passenger revenue

It is estimated that the Orchard Brae option would cost between £650m - £850m and is forecast to carry out 3.75 million passengers per annum by 2042, whereas re-opening the existing railway corridor to light rail services is estimated to cost between £350m - £480m and is forecast to carry around 4.25m passengers per annum by the same date. So, in terms of construction costs and passenger numbers/ revenue alone the 'Roseburn' option wins hands down.

Dean Bridge

A major obstacle to the Orchard Brae option is also posed by the Dean Bridge. The Orchard Brae Corridor Dean Bridge Structures Report strongly recommends that an alternative route be taken forward in lieu of the Dean Bridge routing proposal, as this would mitigate the concerns pertaining to modifying the structure to accommodate trams and their operation. Any talk of demolishing the existing structure would not be seriously entertained by city planners or heritage bodies.

Flexibility

The Roseburn option also provides greater flexibility as it will facilitate interchange with the public transport network at Haymarket (and from there towards the Airport), and increase regional connectivity. Such an option simply does not exist with the Orchard Brae route which could only turn left where it meets the existing line at Shandwick Place.

Disruption during construction

Using the Roseburn section will avoid much of the need to remove and redirect utilities along the alignment of the route north. Experience from the construction of the original tram line through the city centre demonstrates that it is much easier to build off-road sections, thus minimising the problems relating to costs, utilities and construction delays, and transport and business disruption.

Retention of cycling and walking facilities

Active travel plays an important role in creating a greener, fairer and more sustainable city. It is noted that the City Council has significantly modified the original plans to accommodate the maximum provision of such facilities within the constraints of the trams scheme. The ability to use the route for such purposes will therefore be retained.

Communities served

The line north will help increase connectivity for some lower-income areas which are currently underserved by public transport options. It will improve links within Edinburgh and beyond, whilst ensuring that public transport plays a role in helping achieve social equality. Those benefits should be borne in mind, in particular when considering any opposition to the Roseburn alignment.

6. Action for the future needs to start now.

Realising the city's potential through swift action

Edinburgh's climate strategy sets a target of being a 'net zero' city by 2030. And in the City Mobility Plan, Edinburgh is committed to completing a 'comprehensive mass rapid transit plan for the city and region' by 2025. In a similar timescale, the Granton Waterfront project is due to develop 10,000m2 of commercial and cultural space and 1,500 homes, and then doubling that by 2035. To meet the city's targets and ensure the success of these important developments, it is crucial that work to extend the tram network starts now.

Using our experience and learning from others

European cities have built extensive tram networks in recent decades because of the well-recognised and considerable benefits they provide to residents, visitors, and the economy. Having successfully extended the original tram line, the city has learned much about how to avoid pitfalls and delays. By using this experience and learning from European best practice, Edinburgh should make a swift start on building the extension to Granton so it can start contributing to the economic and environmental needs of the city.

Building on success and retaining skills

If Edinburgh fails to move forward with extending the tram network soon, it will lose the skilled workforce built up in recent years, making extension in the future more difficult and expensive. To ensure the city is best placed to capitalise and expand on the success of the tram network, we must see:

- Political commitment
- Efficient and clear decision-making
- Financial commitment
- Strong governance

Securing our future

Trams are a key component of the best transport networks across the globe. They increase connectivity, reduce journey times, reduce car use, cut carbon and improve public health. They stimulate economic development, improve local economies, and benefit disadvantaged communities. Edinburgh has already seen the advantages a tram network brings, and with the city's population growing we must act now to extend and embed these benefits throughout the city and beyond.

It is absolutely clear from the investigation into the two northern routes that the Roseburn alignment offers the only feasible option in terms of construction costs, passenger use and revenue, utility redirection, practical engineering and impact on other forms of sustainable transport.

On the basis of the overwhelming evidence in support of trams as a form of transport, and the pros and cons of the route to Granton, we therefore strongly urge The City of Edinburgh Council to extend the tram network to the Royal Infirmary in the south, and beyond, and to Granton in the north, and specifically by reopening the former Granton Branch Line railway to light rail services as specified in the existing 2006 Scottish Parliament legislation.

Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

transform scotland

Transform Scotland
5 Rose Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PR
t: 0131 243 2690
e: info@transform.scot
w: transform.scot