

Initial Findings on Benefits Realisation of the Edinburgh Tram Extension to Newhaven

This summary presents initial insights from recent assessments, stakeholder engagement, and survey data regarding the impacts of the Edinburgh tram extension to Newhaven. The findings highlight progress, benefits, challenges, and ongoing opportunities associated with the project.

Residential Development and Urban Regeneration

The tram extension has catalysed significant residential development within Edinburgh, with over 250 allocated sites and a pipeline extending into the 2030s. Notably, around one-third of these sites within 750 metres of tram stops have secured planning consent, including high-density sites with over 400 dwellings. Development activity remains concentrated around key areas such as Newhaven, Leith, and Edinburgh Airport, reflecting increased confidence and regeneration momentum in these locations. There is also a noted increase in property transactions around the tram corridor, suggesting a positive influence on land values and developer interest, although further analysis is ongoing to confirm to what extent the tram has accelerated planning permissions and concentrated development along the corridor.

Passenger Experience and Usage Patterns

A dedicated user survey of 913 respondents reveals high satisfaction with journey times, reliability, and frequency, particularly among regional commuters from the Lothians. Many respondents reported substantial reductions in travel times compared to previous bus journeys, supporting the tram's role in regional connectivity. Notably, 53% of respondents had not used the tram prior to the extension, indicating the extension's success in attracting new users. The survey also highlights a significant modal shift: 34% drove less frequently, demonstrating the tram's contribution to reducing car dependency. Satisfaction levels remain high across journey times, safety, stop locations, accessibility, and comfort, although some areas for improvement, such as interchange with buses and crowding, have been identified.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Business and Community Impacts

Interviews with local businesses, tourism operators, and community stakeholders highlight a generally positive but uneven impact. The tram has improved access to employment, leisure, and visitor destinations, supporting dispersal of tourism activity beyond the city centre. Stakeholders recognise increased attractiveness and confidence for development and investment in Leith and Newhaven, with visible regeneration and rising footfall contributing to economic vibrancy.

Access to Jobs and Commuting

The extension has enhanced public transport access to employment, especially for regional commuters. Survey respondents, particularly those living in the Lothians, report high satisfaction with journey times and reliability, underlining the tram's role in facilitating regional travel into Edinburgh. While the benefits are more pronounced for office-based and regular commuters, shift workers and those travelling outside typical hours may experience fewer benefits.

Benefits for Retail, Leisure, and Tourism

Enhanced connectivity has improved access to retail, leisure, and cultural sites, encouraging wider dispersal of visitor activity. The extension supports increased tourism, with 92% of

survey respondents agreeing that Leith and Newhaven are more attractive places to live, work, or visit. Stakeholders note that the tram has strengthened the areas' appeal for visitors, residents, and developers alike, contributing to a broader regeneration narrative. Cruise passengers arriving at Newhaven are increasingly using the tram to access the waterfront and wider city, reinforcing the tram's role in supporting tourism.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The initial evidence suggests that the Edinburgh tram extension to Newhaven is delivering on key objectives, supporting urban regeneration, enhancing accessibility, stimulating economic activity, and encouraging shifts towards sustainable travel modes. Some further considerations are needed around improving interchange with bus and potentially how to support shiftworker movements in future. A full report will be shared with City of Edinburgh Council Councillors later in 2026.