TRANS*form* Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

'Tramtime' consultation: Edinburgh tram proposals

July 10th 2003

1. Summary

TRANS*form* Scotland are supportive of the development of a tram network as part of a city strategy to deliver road traffic reduction and improvements to sustainable transport services. For a city the size of Edinburgh, trams are the correct public transport technology to augment the existing well-developed bus network.

However, the consultation does not provide adequate information. In particular, the consultation sets out no information on the regulatory framework in which trams would be expected to operate. The consultation also gives very little information on expected design standards and service quality, or on expected private sector developer contributions.

We cannot currently support the Line Two alignment because it omits serving the densely-populated centre at Gorgie/Dalry.

Lastly, this response suggests a more financially realistic way in which the tram can provide rail access into the Airport, obviating the need for the excessively expensive tunnel currently proposed by the Scottish Executive.

2. Why trams will work in Edinburgh

Tram systems are a key component in the best transport networks around the world. They combine the frequent stops and on-street accessibility of bus services with the speed of train travel. They emit no fumes at street level and so do not damage the health of the people or the buildings they run past.

Trams offer four key qualities that make them more versatile than conventional "heavy rail" trains in an urban context:

- lighter weight vehicles
- ability to negotiate sharp curves and steep gradients
- lower track construction costs
- fast acceleration and deceleration, giving stop-start capability ideally suited to urban operation.

Trams are perhaps best suited for medium-sized cities where full metro systems would not be justified. In the largest cities, metro systems tend to be the mainstay

of public transport although such cities might use a light rail solution to supplement the metro system. While a number of Europe's largest cities (e.g. Berlin, Milan or Vienna) feature extensive networks, trams more often form the backbone of the public transport network in cities similar in size to Edinburgh's 450,000 population (e.g. Helsinki, Dresden or Zürich). As such, we take the view that trams are the correct public transport technology for a city the size of Edinburgh.

3. Integration with public transport services

It is disappointing that the tram consultation provides so little information on what the repercussions are for Edinburgh's bus network. We take the view that three key factors must underpin the creation of the tram network:

- segregated running should be provided wherever possible
- trams should provide the backbone of the local public transport network
- tram services should be integrated into the bus network

3.1 Segregated running should be provided wherever possible

Trams, like buses, benefit from the provision of segregated running, wherever possible. Edinburgh has an advantage in this area in as much as the success of the Greenways shows how road space reallocation to the sustainable transport modes can be achieved.

3.2 Trams should provide the backbone of the local public transport network

Trams are well suited to higher-volume public transport corridors where bus services cannot provide sufficient capacity in a satisfactory fashion. Bus services are ideal for lower passenger flows. With larger passenger flows, tram services become more appropriate until a point where bus services are not suitable. For moving large numbers of people, heavy rail services are best.

It is therefore welcome that the Line One proposals incorporate the high-volume Shandwick Place, Princes Street & Leith Walk routes. It is disappointing, however, that the Line Two proposals do not take the opportunity to serve the densely-populated Gorgie/Dalry area (or indeed Corstorphine Road, albeit with a lower population density but with established public transport priority).

In general, the consultation says nothing about the bus network remodelling that will undoubtedly have to occur. Remodelling of bus routes will be necessary in order to provide feeder services into the tram routes, and in order to free up road space on the City Centre sections where tram segregation is desired. Cross-city bus routes could be retained through greater use of Queen Street, where there is much available road space: establishment of high-quality bus-tram interchanges at Elm Row and Shandwick Place could help accomplish this.

3.3 Trams should be integrated into the bus network

There will be clear benefits if the delivery of tram services can be integrated into bus services. The horror stories of damaging bus-tram competition in cities such as Sheffield must not be repeated in Edinburgh: *it would be a major political failure*

should this be repeated. The failure to integrate tram routes into bus service provision would raise the prospect that existing, commercially viable, bus routes could be undermined. This would have clear social justice and economic efficiency implications.

It is worth noting that the most recent British tram system to be introduced, Croydon, has had no problems with damaging and counter-productive competition. This is because London retains public transport route franchising.

There may be benefits in the same company operating both trams and buses (see Nottingham). There may be opportunities to use the Quality Contract provisions of the Transport Act 2001 to ensure service quality and integration.

4. Design and service quality issues

The consultation primarily addresses route alignments yet the success of the tram system will depend as much upon design and service quality issues. These include:

- availability of multi-modal ticketing (bus, tram, train)
- fare levels
- quality of vehicle design (e.g. vehicle interiors, level access)
- quality of tram stops (e.g. ticket sales, service information, security features, shelter design & lighting, cycle parking)
- quality of pedestrian and cycle access routes

There will need to be much effort put into innovative and high-quality rearrangement of streetspace on the street running sections. This will be especially important at locations such as Shandwick Place where available road space is scarce.

The consultation does not present any information on whether the modelling for the tram design has been based on road user charging being implemented - or whether it is based on a "worst case scenario" of no road traffic demand management measures being implemented. Should the latter be the case, this will presumably have changed expectations of what can be done with the available street space. We seek clarification on this issue.

5. Cycle integration

5.1 Off-road tram-cycle issues

It is disappointing that the consultation refers only to the provision of alternative off-route cycle routes "where possible" rather than the apparent guarantees given previously to Spokes and others.

We suggest that the land requirements for alternative cycle routes be included in the Compulsory Purchase Orders for the tram routes.

We look forward to receiving further information on how cycle provision will be accommodated at tram stops: security features (e.g. CCTV), secure bike parking and opportunities for on-tram bike carriage.

5.2 On-road tram-cycle issues

The Line One artist's impression of Leith Walk looks extremely poor from a cycling point of view. On-street cycle provision will have to be provided on roads such as Leith Walk. There are examples of good practice in planning for tram-cycle integration (e.g. as in Nottingham) and we trust this will be taken account of in the detailed design stage.

6. Line One proposals

6.1 City Centre: Princes Street / George Street

The Princes Street alignment is preferred because of greater passenger footfall and the high profile that it would give the tram system. However, the current volume of buses on Princes Street could be problematic. Visual impacts on Princes Street could be minimised by siting the poles in the Gardens.

There is, however, also a strong case for the George Street alignment because of possibilities for integration with streetscape and pedestrian improvements (see e.g. how trams have been accommodated in historic centres in cities such as Orléans). We do not believe that trams in George Street would have adverse visual impacts: indeed, the use of George Street might at least help facilitate the removal of the visually-intrusive surface car parking. We do not feel that a George Street alignment would inhibit public transport integration; a George Street alignment could however be problematic for the existing National Cycle Route.

We feel that there would be merit in both routes being constructed, with George Street mainly as an avoiding route for the numerous blockages of Princes Street by parades and marches, etc. (We understand that the historic tram set-up for Edinburgh had a single-track tram line on George Street for this very purpose.)

6.2 City Centre: integration with Waverley Station

The proposed integration with Waverley Station is unsatisfactory. We would prefer the use of Leith Street rather than St Andrew Square as this would allow the tram to interchange closely with Waverley Station. While we accept that road space is constrained at the top of Leith Street, there is already bus priority established on this route. The tram could share bus priority on this section.

6.3 Leith Walk

The stop spacing at certain points of the proposals are too large, in particular for the most densely-populated areas such as Leith and Newhaven (and presumably, once constructed, parts of the Granton Waterfront area). There should be a further stop at Pilrig on Leith Walk.

Stop 6 (Broughton Street) is poorly located as it does not provide ready interchange with London Road bus services. The current proposal would represent a missed opportunity to provide high-quality bus-tram interchange between Leith Walk and London Road bus routes and the Leith Walk tram.

6.4 Leith

We are not clear why the proposed alignment through Leith is to use Ocean Drive rather than Great Junction Street or Commercial Street. This appears to be a significant detour yet the route travels through an area that is less densely-populated than the other two routes.

If this route selection is driven by proposed future private sector property development in the area of Ocean Drive, the proposals should set out what the private sector financial contribution to the proposals will be. Private sector companies will undoubtedly benefit from land value increases from the trams accessing this area.

6.5 Craigleith

We prefer the Telford Road alignment because it runs closer to the Western General Hospital, a major trip generator.

6.6 Haymarket

Much work will clearly have to be done in this area regarding upgrading the rail station and providing for interchange with trams. However, the remodelling of this area needs also to take much greater account of the needs of pedestrians accessing the station area. The current conditions are unacceptable.

7. Line Two proposals

7.1 General comments

In general, it does appear that the Line Two preferred alignments appear to be more focussed on serving longer-distance commuters and new developments rather than serving existing public transport users.

Furthermore, the route largely duplicates the proposed heavy rail line to Edinburgh Airport. It appears increasingly the case that the whole of the West Edinburgh transport proposals are being skewed to suit the property development aspirations of private companies rather than a desire to improve conditions for existing public transport users. The public investment in this tram route will undoubtedly deliver windfall gains to landowners on the route yet we have seen no evidence of any strategy to ensure that private sector contributions are harvested.[1]

7.2 Gorgie/Dalry

We are disappointed to see that the proposals omit serving the most densely-populated centre on the route: Gorgie/Dalry. This area already has a road bypass, the Western Approach Road, yet it is disappointing that the tram should serve the road bypass rather than the population centre! The consultation provides no information on why this routeing has not been suggested.

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[1] See for example, Don Riley (Centre for Land Policy Studies: 2001): 'Taken for a Ride: Trains, Taxpayers and The Treasury.'

A Dalry Road / Gorgie Road alignment would also help to avoid encroachment on green space around Carrick Knowe golf course.

7.3 Gogar Roundabout / Airport access

We support Option 9B. This would allow better access to The Gyle shopping centre, a major trip generator. Secondly, Option 9B would allow interchange with a new heavy rail station to be provided on the Fife line north-east of the Gogar Roundabout. This would allow rail access to the Airport to be accommodated at lower cost than the excessively expensive £500 million tunnel currently proposed. The tunnelled option appears to be a poor use of scarce financial resources in terms of improving railways in the Edinburgh area, especially given the lack of secured funding for delivering much-needed major enhancements to Waverley Station.

Rail access to the Airport could be provided by taking the tram route via a new heavy rail station on the Fife line north-east of the Gogar Roundabout. With four-tracking from Saughton Junction to Dalmeny South (likely to be relatively easy using vertical retaining walls rather than sloping embankments) then a new double track chord linking across to the Dalmeny-Winchburgh line, the following benefits, amongst others, would be achieved:

- direct access into the heart of the airport complex by light rail
- frequent light rail shuttle from the heavy rail station (with trains from Glasgow, Fife, Aberdeen, etc) on existing line would avoid mammoth expenditure tunnelling under airport (with a heavy rail station potentially 5 or 6 storeys below the terminal building)
- diversion of Edinburgh to Glasgow and Dunblane trains via new Gogar station and Dalmeny chord would reduce maintenance requirements on Almond Viaduct and Winchburgh Tunnel, and free up capacity on Saughton Junction - Newbridge Junction section for Bathgate (and, eventually, Airdrie) trains.

This proposal would not rule out future development of a rail line underneath the Airport should finances become available to make this a realistic proposition.

7.4 Royal Bank of Scotland tram stop

We trust that RBS will be asked to make financial contribution to provision of this tram stop.

7.5 Ingliston

We support option 13A on grounds of lower cost.

TRANSform Scotland
the campaign for sustainable transport

72 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh, EH6 5QG

Tel: 0131 467 7714 Fax: 0131 554 8656
Email: campaigns@transformscotland.org.uk
Web: http://www.transfomscotland.org.uk