

TRAMS FROM GRANTON TO THE EDINBURGH BIOQUARTER / ROYAL INFIRMARY OF EDINBURGH AND BEYOND STRATEGIC BUSINESS CASE

CEC Transport and Environment Committee,
10 September 2026, Item 7.6

Written deputation from Transform Scotland

1. Introduction

As Scotland's sustainable transport alliance, we bring together seventy member organisations, ranging from volunteer groups, industry, NGOs and public bodies. As an organisation, we have long supported the Council's intention to build upon the city's existing tram line.

We set out the overwhelming environmental, economic, and social reasons for expanding Edinburgh's tram system in our original response to the consultation.¹ The present report to committee likewise describes the multiple and far-reaching benefits that completion of the north-south line will bring.

At that time, we also brought today 18 organisations involved in the business, academic, health, culture and community life of Edinburgh to urge The City of Edinburgh Council to take forward a north-south route from Granton to the Bioquarter. We were joined in this call by 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 and The University of Edinburgh.

2. Recommendations

Building on our previous arguments, we offer the following comments on the recommendations to the committee:

1.1.1 Agree that the findings of the Strategic Business Case demonstrate a strong case for investment for a North-South tram route in the city.

This is demonstrably the case and the Strategic Business Case provides a solid, well-founded basis for expansion of the tram system in line with the Council's previous commitment to complete an Outline Business Case by the end of 2028, and a Full Business Case and approvals by 2030 (as per Item 3.2 of the report).

1.1.2 Recognise that whilst there is a strong case for a tram connection between Granton and the City Centre, the Strategic Business Case shortlisted two alternative route options, both of which have deliverability challenges.

It is certainly true that there are deliverability challenges as regards the Orchard Brae option, particularly in relation to Dean Bridge, which essentially rendered that option entirely unfeasible from the outset. However, using the alignment of the former Granton branch poses no such challenges, precisely since it is a former rail track built for the purpose of carrying rail-based transport.

We note that the parliamentary powers already in place for use of this corridor specify that a cycleway should be provided alongside the tramway, and it has always been our view that the parliamentary powers should be utilised to retain walking and cycling provision alongside a reinstated rail corridor.

¹ <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Edinburgh-tram-consultation-Transform-Scotland-response-2025-11-17.pdf>

The sole deliverability challenge comes in the form of 'public acceptability', derived from a well-organised campaign against the use of the former railway line. This campaign while representing a degree of public opposition, has no bearing on the actual, practical implementation of the line. The Council needs to balance that campaign's views against the wider city-wide support for and benefits of extension of the tram network.

1.1.3 Recognise that one of the shortlisted options in the Strategic Business Case settled on an alignment for a southern section of route and that this section can complement the South Suburban Railway feasibility work currently being advanced by Transport Scotland and Network Rail. Therefore, agrees that this section of route is the Council's priority.

There are several reasons not to prioritise the southern section over the northern alignment. The first is the relative ease of construction presented by the northern section, given that the route largely follows an off-road, former track bed, and thus gives rise to many fewer problems in terms of costs and engineering, and, second, it meets the most immediate need (expanding housing and development areas in the north and providing a long-awaited public transport link for the less well-off communities there). In this regard too, the only argument presented against it is perceived public acceptability, which is not a physical limiting factor.

It should also be borne in mind that the tram link to the north will maximise the benefits of the housing growth and regeneration on the Granton Waterfront – a major £1.3 billion development aimed at delivering around 3,500 new homes – benefits which will be lost should the link be delayed.

1.1.4 Agree the need to retain ambition to deliver a mass transit connection between Granton and the City Centre, noting this section's importance for the delivery of City Mobility Plan, City Development Plan 2030 and the Granton Masterplan; whilst recognising further work is required on route options before this section could be progressed.

Whatever decision is taken, it is essential that the project to deliver a mass transit connection to the north is not abandoned. It is, however, by no means the case that further work is required on route options before this section could be progressed.

It has been clear from the outset that there is only one feasible route for the northern section, namely the former Granton branch line through Roseburn, which constitutes the only practical, efficient and economic option available. The Orchard Brae option is unfeasibly complex in engineering terms (Dean Bridge), generates less revenue (fewer passengers), is poor in terms of speed and reliability (slower running times), has a negative effect on other forms of public transport (buses on Queensferry Street) and is estimated to be almost three times more expensive. All other possibilities have been discounted over time and any idea of a third option is entirely fanciful.

1.1.5 Agree that the Strategic Business Case demonstrates the positive impact that a North-South tram route could have on the wider City Region and recognises the importance of aligning this work with the wider regional mass transit network plan (SEStran).

There is no doubt that the Strategic Business Case demonstrates the positive benefits of the new tram route to the wider City Region. There is, however, no reason to delay progression of the business plan procedure for the north-south route within Edinburgh pending the outcome of the work undertaken by SEStran on the South-East of Scotland Mass Transit System.

1.1.6 Agrees that this project should be considered as part of the wider SEStran programme, which will be developed to Strategic Business Case stage.

Whilst it is important to coordinate transport projects and outcomes and entirely reasonable to align work on tram extension with the wider mass transit plan across the region, that must come at the expense of advancing the north-south tram line in as timely a matter as possible.

3. Conclusion

We agree entirely that the Strategic Business Case demonstrates a strong case for investment for a north-south tram route in the city and that a north-south tram route could have a positive impact on the wider City Region.

However, we are unconvinced by the claims that both shortlisted alternative route options for a tram connection between Granton and the City Centre pose deliverability challenges, that the south section of the route should be the Council's priority, and that further work is required on route options to the north before this section could be progressed.

- The case for the tram has been made, environmentally, economically, and socially. The advantages that the existing line has brought and the recent effects of not being able to operate the section from Princes Street to Newhaven has demonstrated how vital the trams are to the city. The case for the north-south line has likewise been made in full, as has the case for the northern section to Granton along the Roseburn alignment.
- The cost of not progressing the northern section will be huge in terms of impact on modal shift, capacity, connection of areas of multiple deprivation, mobility, climate targets, congestion, health, development, housing, and economic benefit.
- The existing version of the entire project is supported by existing long-term Council policies and Parliament consent already exists.
- There are no overriding reasons not to proceed to the next stage of the business case process, prioritising the northern section of the line.

We would therefore strongly urge the Transport and Environment Committee to vote to proceed with the outline Business Plan procedure as agreed in previous policy and implement the entire north-south line, giving priority to construction of the northern section whilst planning exactly how to build the southern section.

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).