

Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Office Use Only

Witness Name: Robert Alexander
DRYSDALE

Dated:

THE EDINBURGH TRAM INQUIRY
Witness Statement of Robert Alexander DRYSDALE

Statement taken by Raymond Gray on 13 October 2016.

My full name is Robert Alexander Drysdale. I am aged 61, my date of birth being 4 September 1955. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

I am a retired Chartered Town Planning Consultant.

Statement:

1. I am a recently retired planning consultant with 37 years' experience in this role. I worked within the planning department of Midlothian Council from 1979 until 1986. Between 1986 and 2016 I worked within the private sector as a planning consultant, initially for large property consultancy firms and then from 1996 in my own practice. During this time I provided advice to companies involved in major developments including Edinburgh Business Park. An important part of these projects was to advise on strategic objectives such as transport links to the sites. In respect of Edinburgh Business Park I recommended, as part of the designing of the business park in the early 1990s, that provision be made for possible future rapid transit access to the development, by way of a reserved north-south route through the business park. It is this route which is now used by the Edinburgh Tram.
2. I have a keen interest in transport infrastructure both on a personal and professional level. I am currently a committee member for the Campaign for

Borders Rail and I have also served on the Transport Committee of the Cockburn Association.

3. In the late 1980s I became aware that Edinburgh Council were looking at ways of improving the transport infrastructure within the city and an Edinburgh Metro system was being talked about. Thereafter I had some correspondence with Councillor David Begg, Transport Convenor on City of Edinburgh Council, and Andrew Holmes, the council's Director of City Development, about the promotion of the Metro idea. I was very supportive of this type of travel system for Edinburgh and I submitted suggestions to the council regarding possible routes for the new Metro.
4. When the Edinburgh Trams Project began I was interested in what it would provide, and in 2000 I had correspondence with Andrew Holmes about options for the network. The initial proposals for a loop to incorporate Leith, Newhaven and Granton were very welcome because of the new journey opportunities and better access to Edinburgh Waterfront which the tram loop would provide. From the tram literature that I received during the initial public consultation period one of my concerns for the Leith to Granton route was that it would run along the busy main shore road, and I felt that there were too many potential restrictions on its chances to run smoothly. I felt that a better option in terms of cost and benefit would be to run this part of the system along the old railway between Ocean Terminal and Lower Granton Road, which would be easier to construct, would be traffic-free, and would serve a larger catchment.
5. In 2005 due to my professional background and interest locally in the tram project I was asked by the Newhaven Community Council to speak on their behalf when the initial tram bill was being examined by the Committee of Members of the Scottish Parliament. As part of my contribution to the public hearing into the Bill's examination I was given an opportunity to cross examine witnesses appearing at the hearing on behalf of Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE). These witnesses included the following

individuals who were giving expert evidence to the hearing, Andrew Oldfield, Neil Harper, Mark Bain, Les Buckman, Jim Harries and Stuart Turnbull. I challenged the TIE representatives regarding the proposed Newhaven and Granton route. I outlined why I believed it would be more cost effective and beneficial to have this line follow the former railway rather than being routed along the shore. I did not consider their responses to my cross-examination to be satisfactory, particularly because they were often either unable to answer my questions or else resorted to making changes to evidence already submitted by TIE in an attempt to overcome my criticisms. This was an early indication that TIE was not an organisation inclined to take on board opposing views.

6. As the tram project progressed I maintained my interest. I was initially very optimistic about the whole project and what it could potentially deliver for Edinburgh. I did however become concerned around 2006 when changes to the project became apparent. TIE announced that the proposed project would be split into phases instead of being constructed in its entirety at the outset, and that the first phase would comprise only the route between Edinburgh Airport and Newhaven via Princes Street. I felt less confident then that all the proposed routes for the tram would be delivered, as the timescale for delivery of the later phases was not specified.
7. As I resided in the Trinity area at that time I received tram literature through the post. Successive leaflets issued by TIE between March 2004 and January 2007 revealed a gradual reduction in the scope of the project, as well as escalating costs. The cost per mile of delivering the tram route was rising rapidly and apparently uncontrollably, to a point where it was going to be well in excess of the cost of tram systems provided in other parts of the UK, such as Manchester, Croydon and Nottingham. Proposed extensions to the Manchester and Nottingham systems were delivering far more route miles for well below the costs per mile now being revealed for Edinburgh. One of the few reasons given by TIE for escalating costs was unforeseen additional expense incurred in diverting services and utilities, but it was hard

to see how such challenges would be any greater and more costly in Edinburgh than in Manchester or Nottingham.

8. In April 2009 it was announced by TIE and the council that line 1b from Haymarket to Granton had been abandoned. This meant that one of the principal benefits of building the tram, to serve the redevelopment of Edinburgh Waterfront and to deliver many new journey opportunities in North Edinburgh which were not currently available, would no longer be achieved. This seemed to me to amount to a fundamental downgrading of the project, as well as a clear demonstration of the inadequacies and lack of ability of TIE to deliver the project.
9. It appeared to me that the original business plan was now totally discredited as it was not able to deliver what it had said it could. I made my personal thoughts known through the local media. I submitted a number of letters, regarding the tram project, which were published in The Scotsman. I was keen to highlight my concerns and was of the opinion that this was a good way to do it. In one letter dated 2 February 2010 I made mention that I thought TIE were out of their depth and an experienced project manager was required to rectify things. Richard Jeffrey from TIE also submitted a letter to the Scotsman newspaper around this time. In his letter Richard Jeffrey tried to provide reasons for the tram delays. It appeared to me TIE were failing to provide any plausible justifiable reasons for the escalating problems facing the Edinburgh tram project. In other letters to the Scotsman I highlighted the much faster and cheaper progress being made with tram projects in other cities, and that the cost of running the TIE organisation was excessive.
10. Compared to Manchester and Nottingham it did not appear everyone working on the Edinburgh Tram Project was part of the same team. The Manchester and Nottingham extension projects were being delivered by consortia comprising a range of highly experienced companies and contractors, including an experienced project manager working with the contractors, and everything was delivered on budget and largely on time with

no major issues. It seemed to me that with the Edinburgh Tram Project TIE and the contractors were not working together as a team. TIE was attempting to fulfil the role of project manager but set apart from, and increasingly antagonistic towards, the contractors. The project manager should have been part of the contractor team.


11. In the summer of 2010 it was announced that the tram line would now only run between Edinburgh Airport and the city centre as the remaining available budget would not cover the escalating cost of completing the line down Leith Walk and on to Newhaven. This was hugely disappointing given what the original project plans were. The scheme had now shrunk from 19 route miles to 8½ miles.
12. In 2011 there was a restructuring of the tram project after Ms Sue Bruce became chief executive of the City of Edinburgh council. It appeared that Ms Bruce very rapidly began to establish a much improved working relationship with Bilfinger Berger, the main contractor. TIE appeared to have taken the attitude of wanting to show that they were in charge and that all issues with the tram project were the fault of the contractors, whereas Ms Bruce showed awareness of TIE's failings. She recognised that the solution was not to dismiss the contractor but to repair the relationship and reach a new agreement. She also recognised that TIE should be disbanded and a new control structure should be established by the council.
13. On 20th May 2011 I emailed Mr John Swinney, the finance minister, to express concern at the possibility of City of Edinburgh Council abandoning the tram project having already spent 80% of the £500 million of taxpayer's money allocated to the project by the Scottish Government, and I asked Mr Swinney to advise as to the conditions which had been imposed on the £500 million of public expenditure. I also wrote to Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Transport and Housing, on the same issue on 2nd June 2011. I eventually received a reply dated 28th June from a Mr Ramsay of Transport Scotland, who had been asked to reply on behalf of Mr Swinney.

Mr Ramsay stated that “it would be unacceptable to leave the tram project unfinished”. I also contacted Sue Bruce regarding my thoughts around the tram project by email on 1st July 2011, and enquired as to the intended future of TIE. I received a response from Mr Mark Turley, Acting Chief Executive, on 19th July, explaining that the future governance of the project had been changed and attaching a link to a council report of 30th June, which was very helpful. This confirmed that TIE would no longer have a role in the delivery of the tram project. In subsequent correspondence with the Chief Executive she provided me with prompt replies and was very responsive to the issues I raised.

14. Since the trams began operating in 2014 I have emailed Alistair Sim and Councillor Lesley Hinds at Edinburgh Council regarding a number of issues I observed with the trams. I had observed that there was a problem with the tram signage and traffic control that led to confusion for motorists and delays with the trams. These issues were consequently largely rectified although some problems still persist. However one of the ongoing problems faced by the tram service is that the tram units specified at the outset by TIE are longer and heavier than trams used elsewhere in the UK and in most European cities. Because of their weight, the trams must negotiate bends at speeds which are significantly slower than most other tram systems, which means that journey times are longer. As part of this inquiry I think it would be beneficial if Lord Hardie and his supporting advisers could visit the tram systems in other UK cities, such as Nottingham, to compare what could have been achieved for less cost. I am aware that Manchester recently completed major extensions to its tram network within budget and ahead of time at a cost per mile of around £42 million, considerably less than the £91 million per mile (excluding ongoing borrowing costs) incurred in Edinburgh.
15. I would say that the overall passenger experience on Edinburgh trams is good and the system is of benefit to the city in general. I hope that it is seen as a starting point for further development of the tram network.

16. In conclusion I think that if Sue Bruce had arrived at the council earlier in the life of the project, more might have been salvaged from the original tram proposals. I think that the creation and behaviour of TIE was central to the problems with the tram project. The model used by other cities should have been adopted where a consortium had complete ownership and control and dealt with the project as a whole. If the consortium had worked to a fixed contract it would have been guaranteed to deliver the required specified end product.

I confirm that the facts to which I attest in this witness statement, consisting of this and the preceding six pages are within my direct knowledge and are true. Where they are based on information provided to me by others, I confirm that they are true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

Witness signature..... 

Date of signing..... 21/11/2016

