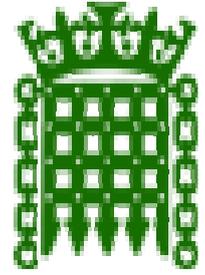


Light Rail (UK)

All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

"The past we inherit, the future we build"
Trams – Catalysts for Jobs, Renewal & Regeneration



Extension needed to cut air pollution

Edinburgh council will meet on Thursday to discuss a £145m plan to extend the tram line from the city centre to Newhaven via Leith

A LEADING expert on trams and light rail systems has made a dramatic late intervention on the issue of extending Edinburgh's controversial tram system.

James Harkins of the Light Rail (UK) organisation claims the capital's council must act to reduce vehicles on its roads – Edinburgh notoriously has some of the highest traffic pollution levels in the country – or face massive fines from the European Commission.

Edinburgh City Council will meet on Thursday to discuss a £145 million plan to extend the single tram line from the city centre to Newhaven via Leith.

This meeting by invitation only, where MPs, Stakeholders etc., within the Light Rail industry and invited members of the Public will have a chance to discuss debate and raise questions concerning Light Rail & Trams.

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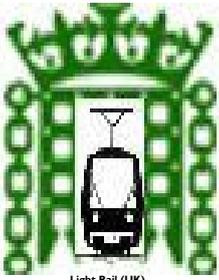
Mr Jim Harkins FCILT
www.aplrkuk.co.uk
Email aplrkuk@aol.com
www.lightrailuk.com

RSVP to aplrkuk@aol.com

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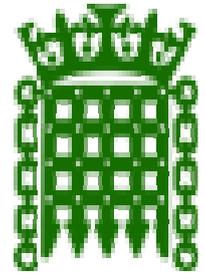


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The National revealed last week that SNP members on the council were set to vote against the project, effectively scuppering it, because the council could end up paying nearly £300m for the extension with interest payments of £9.5m a year for 30 years, should all the funding have to be borrowed.

Now The National can reveal that senior SNP figures have been talking to Labour colleagues in the capital coalition in a bid to thrash out a compromise deal which would allow the extension to go ahead.

The use of council-owned Lothian Buses dividends would be allowed to fill the £25m funding gap at the start of the project, and pay for a 21-month development plan costing £8.5m. Some SNP councillors remain vigorously opposed to the extension at this time, however. "We're facing £160m in cuts and cutting 2,000 jobs," said one source, "so why should we take the risk of landing ourselves with even more to be paid out for something that maybe half the people of Leith don't want."

According to Harkins, even the highest cost could pale into insignificance compared to the fines the council might have to pay for failing to tackle the level of nitrous oxide – almost totally produced by motor vehicles – in the city.

He said the business case probably "does not take into account any significant compliance with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) Air Quality report and the European Air Quality Directive limit values for nitrogen dioxide".

In April this year, the UK Supreme Court ordered the UK Government to submit revised plans to the EC by the end of December 2015 explaining how the period of exceeding the directive limits for nitrogen dioxide would be kept as "short as possible".

The UK has already been fined £300m by the EC for breaching pollution levels, and councils may have to pay up depending on their levels of nitrous oxide.

If that happens, said Harkins, because the fines have a cumulative effect, "Edinburgh's share will be greater than anything that is saved" by not proceeding with the extension.

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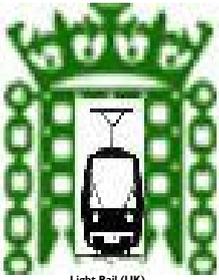
Mr Jim Harkins FCILT
www.aplrruk.co.uk
Email aplrruk@aol.com
www.lightrailuk.com

RSVP to aplrruk@aol.com

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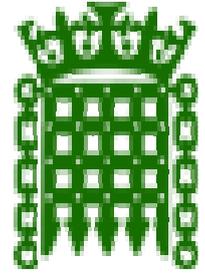


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He added: "While I appreciate that the cost so far is horrific which hopefully Lord Hardie may or may not unravel and allocate blame if appropriate, that must be put aside and not restrict further development."

Harkins pointed out that compliance with EC pollution limits – in some parts of Edinburgh pollution rates are 50 per cent over the permitted level – can be accelerated using a combination of measures such as the creation of clean air zones with the most polluting of vehicles including buses and taxis paying a punitive charge.

He added: "One of the original arguments for the building of the tramway was to address this air quality problem which has increased greater than that originally calculated, especially in light of the air quality issues highlighted by the current Volkswagen scandal.

"Expanding the tramway will show practical steps are being implemented."

Harkins has also queried the costs of the extension, saying: "There are cheaper tram construction equipment and methodologies now available."

Council leader Andrew Burns said: "The updated outline business case provides further justification for bringing the tram to Leith, clearly demonstrating the social and economic impact the extension could have.

"This first stage of development will allow us to take another step towards achieving this. A significant period of work will ensure robust governance, allowing financial evaluation and risk analysis to be carried out.

"By obtaining funding from the city's public transport revenues, we are satisfied there will be no impact on council budgets.

Courtesy of: [MARTIN HANNAN](#), The National

NOVEMBER 16TH, 2015 - 12:00 AM

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Email aptrguk@aol.com
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RSVP to aptrguk@aol.com

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