

You are here [News](#) > [Transport](#)

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Tram contractors go off the rails with latest blunder



Contractors working on York Place had to rip up foundations

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TRAM contractors were forced to dig up tons of concrete after they poured it in the wrong place.

Sources said that foundations for the poles which carry overhead lines for trams were laid 18 inches away from their planned position,

Council chiefs admitted that contractors working on York Place had to rip up foundations to a depth of six feet and recast them.

But they insisted it had not caused any delay to the project and said the cost of redoing the work would be met by the contractor – not the council.

York Place, normally one of Edinburgh's busiest roads in the city centre, has been closed since July and is not due to reopen until the end of this year.

Edinburgh Napier University civil engineering professor Charlie Fairfield said mistakes in this type of concrete foundation were uncommon.

He said: "It's a fairly straightforward operation, installing a set of bases for poles. Usually, they would be set out accurately, double-checked and then signed off. Occasionally, cock-ups happen."

He estimated that the foundation for each pole could involve around a ton of concrete.

And he said if concrete was allowed to set in the wrong location there was little that could be done other than dig them up and start again.

"Once it has gone hard, that's it. You have to open up the ground and make a new foundation," he added.

Poles for the overhead electric lines have already been installed on parts of the route, including Princes Street.

Transport convener Councillor Lesley Hinds said: "In order to accommodate a minor change, contractors removed and recast two pole foundations on York Place. This has not impacted on the schedule or cost of the project."

Trams are due to be running from the airport to the city centre from summer next year. York Place will be the terminus for the tram route prior to any extension to the line to Leith. Council chiefs decided to take the trams into York Place rather than end the route in St Andrew Square because it will take passengers one stop nearer Leith Walk and give builders more space for the "turnback".

Work in the area appears well advanced, with some rails already fixed in place.

But the construction programme in York Place includes plans to raise the level of the roadway by up to two-and-a-half feet.

From the beginning of the project, the corner of York Place turning into North St Andrew Street was

recognised as an engineering challenge because of the steep gradient. Raising the level of the road is intended to give the tram “a smooth trajectory” as it takes the corner.

The raised roadway does mean stairs will need to be installed at the top of Dublin Street, which is already closed off to traffic from York Place. Two sets of steps – one for the east footpath and one for the west footpath – will be built to accommodate the sudden change in level.

Council chiefs say the tram project is still within the revised £776 million budget.

READERS BACK CALL FOR OAPS TO ENJOY FREE RIDES

THE Evening News has been inundated with written pledges of support for our campaign for free bus passes to be accepted on Edinburgh’s tram project.

Over-60s and the disabled face being banned from using their passes on the trams unless the Scottish Government agrees to extend the concessionary fare scheme when the trams finally start running next year.

Failure to include trams in concessionary travel arrangements would mean more buses having to stay on the roads, undermining the benefits of the £776 million tram project and leaving thousands of OAPs already struggling with

sky-high fuel bills worse off.

A total of 191 residents have either written in or submitted vouchers backing the Fare Deal for Over-60s campaign since it was launched last week.

Pensioner Ian Galt, 74, from Restalrig, said public transport should be integrated, making the extension of free travel a must.

He said: “If there is to be any sense in public transport provision within an urban area, there should be common ticketing, as one finds throughout the Continent.”

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