

## Edinburgh tram works to be clear by end of 2013



*Edinburgh bosses have pledged to clear the streets by the end of the year. Picture: TSFL*

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ALL major tram works will be cleared from the streets of Edinburgh by the end of this year, city leaders pledged last night.

Andrew Burns, the leader of Edinburgh City Council, said barriers would be lifted and road diversions cleared to allow for trial runs ahead of the service launch next year.

In many areas the works will be clear within "four or five months", with the remainder removed by Christmas. The delayed £776m network - originally due to be completed by 2011 - is scheduled to begin operations in summer 2014.

Tram tests - which are already running on the completed 1.7 mile section between Edinburgh Airport and the Gogar depot - will become a common sight across the city towards the end of this year, the Labour politician leader told The Scotsman.

"There is going to be a public relations challenge for us in four or five months' time when all these road works will be pretty much cleared", he said in a briefing on its progress.

"At the end of this year all of the construction, the big construction, will be cleared and the trams will be tested all over the city and folk are going to start saying 'why can't we get on yet!'"

With work completed by the end of this year, mandatory testing along the entire route will get underway and is expected to last for around five months.

"It's a train, not a bus, it's on rails, not on roads, and it has to go through all the testing and regulatory approvals according to rail regulations", Cllr Burns added.

The original cost of the project was £545m of which £500m came from the Scottish Government and was to fund a network running from Edinburgh Airport to Newhaven on the coast.

The council then had to borrow £231m to meet rising costs, largely due to delays from encountering unmapped utilities beneath the city streets, and a major dispute with German contractors Bilfinger and eventually truncated the line to York Place in the city centre.

The latest financial report said £700m of the £776m has been spent with much of the rest committed.

Senior sources briefed on the project recently said they believe the finances will come "down to the wire", but Cllrs Burns insisted yesterday that costs would remain within the revised budget.

Business leaders in Edinburgh also say they have been told by tram officials on a number of occasions that work is progressing much quicker than expected, raising the prospect of the route being finished earlier than expected, but Cllr Burns played down such suggestions.

"Sections of it are ahead of schedule, by a considerable amount of time in some cases, but we also lost several weeks on-street construction over the past couple of weeks in February there when there was quite

bad weather, so it's swings and roundabouts.

"Whilst there's one section going quite well, there might be another section not going quite so well.

"The bit from the Gogar roundabout to the airport has got trams being tested at the moment and there is an official handover from the contractor to the council - which is quite an important turning point."

The next section to be completed will be the stretch between the Gogar depot and Edinburgh Park, in several months' time, after which testing will also begin.

The latest progress report on the project is expected to be made public ahead of the city's transport committee meeting later this month.

Transport Minister Keith Brown welcomed the pledged today:

"This is positive and welcome news for residents and businesses and offers further assurance that good progress is being made in relation to the revised timetable.

"Since the new governance arrangements were put in place, Transport Scotland has played a key role in supporting the Council and Contractor in getting the project back on track.

"While contractors need to conduct in the region of 800 individual tests to fully test the entire system once the works are complete, if the current level of progress is maintained then we are confident of more good news when the project team reports back later this year."

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