

Fact or fantasy, truth or.....?

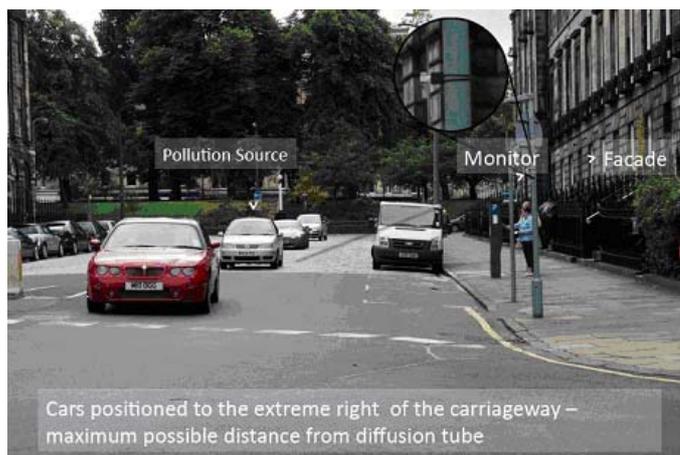
On our website at www.edinburghtramfacts.com we have built up a record of articles, blogs, videos but most of all official documents, reports, statistics and data.... a very long and very detailed record. They are all there, so in blogs and articles like this one, we do not always *have* to list all the reasons for saying what we say.

Below are a couple of questions; have a go, there is no catch, these really are not difficult questions.

1) The Credibility Gap

This two minute video explains the point. <http://tinyurl.com/cdfy3t6>

This picture shows the question: Does traffic flow less than a couple of **centimetres** from the right kerbside, or about 3 **metres** further into this street?



This briefing note in an email from the Head of the Council's Scientific Services to senior colleagues explains why this distance is important: (RA stands for 'Residents Association')

4 The RA will apply a diffusion factor to the calculation of NO₂ levels at the building facade which is larger than the factor we would apply. The diffusion factor is related to the distance from the diffusion tube location to the pollution source (in this case vehicles in the road). The RA have argued that the pollution source is in the middle of the road, whereas we have taken the source to be the outside edge of the kerbside parking bays. This difference has been the subject of debate and the RA's view has been rejected by DEFRA and [redacted] who have endorsed our approach. Use of the larger diffusion factor may tip the values above the 40mg/m³ limit.

For clarity DEFRA did not reject the Resident's views - like so much of what the Council say, it is not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The 'limit' mentioned is the EU statutory limit for this pollutant; felt to be psychologically important by the Council, for public relation reasons.

The picture is not faked.

2) Four road signs that aren't what they seem



A few weeks ago at a Public Hearing the Council's top team of experts in Transport, led by Mr Alisdair Sim and Ms Ann Faulds, were asked this question about these signs.

"Imagine you are driving up this road and see these signs, one after the other within a couple of hundred yards, are you more likely to plough on straight ahead?...or turn right?"

Here is another extract from a batch of emails obtained under a different FOI, circulated by senior council officers to colleagues (in 2011) which offers one explanation as to why the signs may have been put up.

"The idea is to replicate similar high end town houses offices that are located in places like Bedford Sq and Grosvenor Sq London both of which have a list of "Who's Who" of blue chip companies as resident tenants..... The plans will involve re-routing traffic so that Charlotte (Square) becomes more private to the tenants....."

Anyone turning right would have been re-routed away from Charlotte Square.

3) Why the answers to the two questions are illuminating

The Council experts in both cases above were reduced to giving answers that fly in the face of the plain evidence of one's eyes. In the first the council fought long, hard and desperately to continue measuring the distance as a couple of centimetres, despite the plain reality on the road.

In the second, experts felt forced to say these street signs have little of no effect on traffic flows into Charlotte Square despite the fact the three sides are now almost deserted of traffic.

Their fear in the first example is outlined clearly by their own expert in his non-public advice to senior colleagues. Their fear in the 2nd is that the signs went up to fulfil the promise to the developer to quieten the street BEFORE the process of deciding whether the project should go ahead had been completed.

It's a blunder of course, and one that leaves the hapless officials with only the same obtuse denial of reality as their earlier colleague. They are between the rock of enacting traffic changes they haven't yet had properly debated with the public and the hard place of a developer having already finished the refurbishment of their offices for which they were promised a traffic free street.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a developer requesting cooperation from a council, nor a council giving them help and co-operation.

What is intrinsically wrong, is when the deals are done away from the Council Chamber with officials, the same ones who are supposed to advise councillors, simply turning a blind eye to more and more traffic displacement, and the pollution, noise and misery it causes, from main roads no-one lives in (for good reason) to residential areas where everyone lives.

What links these two issues is one seeks to minimise the actual levels of pollution produced by traffic that is measured, the other seeks to pretend traffic displacement that inescapably adds to pollution is not really happening.

These are two very simple examples amongst a huge number we could give where spin and denial of reality has become the only option for a council unable to face up to the facts that their own actions are inflicting upon the city. This is a cynical and corrosive policy that not only threatens to blow up in the face of the council- but deserves to and the sooner the better.

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