

Nowhere in the city has been worse served than Leith during the tram project.

Streets have been dug up, filled in, dug up again and filled in again to no apparent effect while the promises that have been made and re-made even more frequently than Leith's roads, are now being made once again.

Now the Council are quietly moving ahead to extend the Tram project to Leith and Newhaven.

The press releases sent out to generate the media coverage talk in upbeat fashion of targets exceeded, passenger numbers above expectation, and so talk up the \*possibility\* to extend the system, as originally planned, to Leith.

The inconvenient truth for Leithers may be that even after another few years of upheaval, disruption and yet more cost, nothing much may change even if the tram *is* built.

The tram is presented as the solution- when in reality it is the problem.

The targets made by the same people now patting themselves on the back for achieving them are soft targets. They don't argue openly for pressing on, in effect they lie to serve that aim.

Even though the 'targets' are being met the tram is still making an operational loss every year that needs to be added to an even larger annual financing and interest payment. Of course this time there is talk of a promise of Developer's money to pay for the extension; again this is a similar type of promise made at the beginning of the failed project.-The developer's money never materialised.

The City borrowed instead, and a few months ago revealed a £20M or so emergency shortfall in cash, for each of the next three years.

This amount is almost exactly the amount going out to cover the operational loss plus the interest charges.

This shows clearly one way the city is harmed by stumbling on with a failed project.

The vow, made specifically to the people of Leith by Edinburgh Council; was that the tram would spark the regeneration of Leith.

The reality is that cheap money was the main ingredient in the regeneration of Leith, not the tram and once that ended then the developments dried up. The collapse of the world banking system that became known as the credit crunch was the thing that stopped development dead in its tracks long before the tram problems became common knowledge.

*\*On Time and On Budget\** became a familiar PR message even as the council's arms-length company was collapsing into bankruptcy, without an inch of track to show for it.

That was Council spin; and until the council put real context into the sort of figures released recently about their *\*targets\** they are just continuing to spin.

Instead of continuing to spin about targets being met in order to push forward with the project, there needs to be a proper debate in which straight questions get straight answers.

- The tram makes traffic congestion, and so, air pollution worse across the city-not better?
- Pollutants that cause respiratory problems such as asthma and other wheezy chest conditions, but also cardio-vascular effects such as increasing strokes and heart attacks?
- This is a worse public health hazard than passive smoking and physical injuries from traffic accidents combined?
- Why have the council never owned up to this pollution raising penalty created by their pseudo-green tram projects?
- Why are local communities encouraged to see traffic problems as simply their own inexplicable problem and not as part of an overall interconnected city wide problem the council know them to often be?

By covering up inconvenient truths and at the same time pushing the convenient untruths the council pushes its agenda without any full or fair public debate.

Would Leithers be so keen if they were being told:

- Pollution, congestion, noise and disturbance from traffic will increase in many of Leith's narrow residential streets as officially sanctioned rat-running becomes the final available policy to the council to keep the city's traffic moving.
- The Council expect little modal change...which in ordinary language means hardly anyone stopping using the car because of the tram.

- In effect it cannibalises passengers from the buses--and at some stage, by taking passengers from flexible, low cost public transport and carrying them on less flexible, debt encumbered public transport, the whole system of public transport in the city could be swept into the debt crisis.

The very first step in any solution is for the Council to stop spinning and in place of spin posing as information from the PR department, have a proper debate in which the points above are treated as legitimate questions and not dangerous, inconvenient truths that have to be covered up from the council tax payers and residents of the city.

Any project should serve the city and the interests of the people who live in it-not the other way around.

ENDS