

**107w – Change? We can!**

**But it may take Independents Day to trigger the change we need!**

**Change? ----** The approaching election is vital in regaining control of all aspects of the City's Public Services that are spinning out of control.

The major concern of our group is clearly in the Tram Project.

But we can see things like the current Property Repairs scandal and the Scottish Information Commissioner recently (19-04-2012) accusing the Council of breaking the Law, in the published reaction from that office to the 'shredding of the Truth' FOI scandal, along with other similar examples in other areas, as all being connected by a single thread.

This connecting thread is an administration which for a while now has effectively acted as its own Judge, Jury and even Prosecuting Lawyer in making decisions, with the Council Chamber acting merely as a rubber stamp.

**The situation around the Property Repairs scandal has been taken from the Council and placed in the hands of the Police.**

**What is now needed is that the Tram project be similarly taken from the Council and opened up to a full examination in a Judge led Inquiry.**

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The decision last summer on whether to continue with the tram project, or not, can serve as just *one* example of the way the project continues to be forced through without the full facts being available.

The Press coverage emanating from the Council PR machine before a Vital Council meeting to settle the tram's future in June last year, as well as immediately, afterwards, highlighted the closeness of the three option prices.

- Incredibly, to press on to St Andrew Square priced at £776M was only just over a mere £20 Million more than the price of scrapping the project completely!!
- Total scrapping itself was actually £50M **MORE expensive** than building to Haymarket and stopping there!!!
- The complete madness in having the price of an immediate stop being £50M more than electing to build on to Haymarket and then stop, seemed not to have occurred to anyone.

Although the operational losses purported to arise from 'Haymarket' were contrasted with 'operational contributions' pictured as arising from St Andrews Square which were obviously designed to 'speak against' the 'Haymarket' option when compared to both 'abandon' and 'St Andrews Square.

The issue of financing costs which now weighs heavily as no more free handouts are contemplated by the Scottish Government was left aside.

But the bigger problems emerged when it was revealed that the *maximum* price to build to Haymarket and stop, or pause there, was in fact *under £600M*, a figure that changed completely the balance of comparison between the two options.

<http://www.capitalfm.com/scotland/on-air/news-travel/local-news/edinburghs-trams-get-go-ahead/>

Now of course, with the financing costs added in (as they should have been in the report to councillors but weren't,) we know the *worst case* scenario for stopping at Haymarket, of £600 Million should have been compared to the *best case* scenario £1,150 Million, as indicated in this recent story below,

<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/2012/04/13/critics-blast-edinburgh-trams-scheme-as-figures-reveal-project-cost-could-top-1bn-86908-23822897/>

In addition key air pollution raw data which had formerly been made available to the public until December 2010, was suppressed and unavailable.

After a long battle by residents to have it made available, and by the council to prevent its release, and in light of the ongoing investigation by the United Nation's Aarhus Convention compliance commission hanging over the Council, the release of this data has suddenly resumed in the last few months.

But while suppressed in June and August last year it was unavailable to this resident's group AND unavailable to the councillors to councillors making the decision as the officers of the Council seem to have thought these poor dears too would have been unable to properly understand what it meant.

Happily the data is available and the resident's group, and presumably councillors, are able to interrogate it with great interest.

Unhappily the votes in which it could have been of consequence are history.

**THUS TWO KEY PIECES OF INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT were either completely absent, or hopelessly compromised. Given the information in**

**the report it was hardly surprising that the preferred option of the administration was waved through.**

Significantly when the true facts about the cash costs had emerged, and the fact made clear that 'St Andrews Square pollutes' while Haymarket creates zero pollution, just a few weeks later, two of the major parties did vote to pause at Haymarket.

The Council PR machine immediately swung into action presenting the reversal, far from neutrally, as a bad thing. Making briefings widely available, and with the help of threats made by the Holyrood Government's transport minister John Swinney the vote was retaken and the 'Haymarket' decision overturned.

This creates the feeling that there has not been a process of oversight in which fully informed councillors have arrived at decisions after straightforward debate, but one in which not only the debate is heavily stage managed but the actual information from the Council is often geared towards making then desired outcome appear the only logical one.

A situation that unravels, often right away, but by which time another vote taken by councillors with the information they have at the time has passed.

The project is not going to come good now however much cash is thrown after it, and the only prospect is of the budget escalating again and again, and each extra amount used to 'prove' that the only course of action is to spend even more.

Indeed it isn't just trouble making conjecture to assume that the work is being pressed forward on roadways after Haymarket, while proceeding less urgently on the off road sections because the priority is to have completion on the highly

visible sections when the extra £231 million runs out in order to present yet another argument that "one last push" and one final hundred million or two has to be found.

Were Airport to Haymarket completed and the road sections left undone it is easy to see how different the arguments and conclusions may be.

It also raises questions about where exactly the control and responsibility on these kinds of major projects with wide ramifications, lie, and where they ought to lie. At present the people who ought to have responsibility, the councillors; have no power while the people with the power to control the figures and data upon which responsible decision making relies, are able to evade responsibility for those subsequent decisions.

The system of control, responsibility and authority itself is compromised and 'unfit for purpose' and the Tram Project and its chaotic history is both the result and the proof of this.

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This is a Groundhog Day nightmare that has caused great damage to the city, and will cause more and more --- **This has to change, and this can change.**

The best way change can come about is through a re-energised City Chamber with a renewed determination and a resolve to really take hold of the project, and review it along with its whole governance and oversight system while time still remains to make changes for the better in respect of the Tram project in particular.

As all 4 major parties are implicated in the mess to date despite their various protestations, and even the hopelessly befuddled Greens, whose support for a pollution creating project simply because it has a label called 'Tram' on it, is the most difficult to understand of all; so the best method of ensuring the elected chamber can regain power to go with the enfeebled responsibility it still holds , will be the method that best gives the place a good shake-up.

**We believe this would be provided by people to voting for any Independent candidate, standing in any ward.**

Even independent councillors not specifically anti-tram or not specifically relating their candidacy to the project in any way would be preferable to more place-fillers, manacled to the whipped voting requirement and the set views of the major parties.

Many councillors in the present City Chamber privately have great reservations about lots of aspects of the project still being driven full speed ahead by the executives nominally there to execute the policies of the Chamber, but in reality now driving them.

They cannot properly express these views in votes because of the constant need to accept party discipline in the divided chamber--- and for this reason we believe only independent candidates can have the independence of mind to look at all the problems besetting the council and act to find solutions—not ways of making them worse.

While Labour and Conservatives *have* shown a willingness to tackle the problem and not least in their attempt last August to rescue the project despite the figures

and lack of data obscuring the real issues, in recent months that resolve seems to have evaporated and in recent utterances they have once again fallen back into line, otherwise it would be possible to actively advocate people worried about the tram project could support these parties with their vote.

Trust in politics has emerged as the major issue across Europe in the wake of the financial crisis and it is the one commodity difficult to build however much cash is spent trying to do so.

We believe the best way we can rebuild the necessary trust here in Edinburgh is if this time the electorate take an independent line in order to break the political straitjacket presently strangling the prospects of the change of approach for which the city is crying out.

Ends