

The fact is the facts have covered up by a Council that may not be fit for purpose....?.

Almost every week brings evidence not only of things not working out as the Council hope in the Tram project, but of things getting worse and worse around the City as the resident's group who have accurately predicted many of the developments, have feared.

Things are not getting worse by accident, and the major reason for is because of the state of denial that exists around the tram project within the Council.

This mindset is not solely a matter of inept councillors, or corrupt officials, but of a mindset born from crisis two years ago in which as the project teetered on the edge of complete collapse a feeling spread that any further criticism could be sufficient to tip it over the edge into the abyss.

As the feeling quite justifiably grew that almost anything was better than that the council went into a kind of State of Emergency where the normal democratic process of Council Business became an abnormal bureaucratic process of 'making sure something (anything) would get built, whatever it takes.'

Caught up in this has been the group of residents attempting to gain answers, for questions that arise from contradictions inside the Council's own official statistics that paint a very different picture from the one in official Council handouts and press releases.

Council: It is a Green project.

In their own major feasibility study in 2003 the Council were told that far from pollution falling in the city because of the Tram scheme it would rise steadily

for a number of years until 16 years after starting more homes would be worse off in terms of traffic numbers, noise, congestion and pollution than would see things improve.

Why do residents say this?

Because it is in the Council's own report perhaps.

<http://tinyurl.com/bo2ks46> to see the chart produced all those years ago.

The point isn't that this all happened a long time ago so what relevance does it have now, but that back then, the same Council, keen to push through the project, didn't feel that they needed to do anything--even to the extent of requesting an environmental and health impacts study to see what such an increase would mean.

Resident's QUESTION, one the council have never answered: **Why was nothing done?**

And why keep calling the Project a Green one down the years, when you know it is not Green?

(What in fact happened is the issue was allowed to be ignored.....by the discredited Tie Ltd company under a catch-all label 'Wider issues'. This was in effect a PFI-style sleight of hand that got the problem, and the blame for ignoring it, 'Off the Council's Balance Sheet'. But, of course, did nothing at all to actually address it.)

Council: Pollution, and everything else, has to be balanced against the most important need to get something, anything, built that will deliver the best possible value.

In June 2011 as the project teetered on the edge of total collapse, threatening to take many political and professional careers with it, the public servants within the Council's bureaucratic support departments produced this report <http://tinyurl.com/bwvb6em>

With abandonment ruled out, the report supposedly highlighted the real choices before Councillors, although as you can read for yourselves, the preferred option was never in doubt.

Indeed after reading the figures produced the preferred option was still never doubt:

Haymarket Option:

Cost £700 Million (see para 3.46 in the document on the link)

Operating Loss £4 Million a year **never getting better than £3.1 Million a year** (para 3.61)

Pollution effects: Zero

St Andrews Square Option:

Cost 'between' £725M and £773 Million (para 3.42)

Annual **operating 'contribution' £2M a year** after ramp up period (para 3.61)

Pollution effects: A major share of the ones originally feared in the 2003 report.

The Council Officers report therefore made the decision effectively the usual financial 'no brainer' in support of the scheme for councillors. But within days the advice had begun to unravel and has continued to do so in every major aspect ever since.

In effect, as a glance at the above figures showed councillors and anyone else for just £25M in extra costs the council could convert a projected £3.1 Million loss into a £2Million 'contribution',

(In some conversations officers talked of a 'profit' but with the official auditors finally beginning to realise the dangers of unthinkingly signing off everything to do with the project they discarded profit, in view of the reality that the extra borrowing would itself be costing over £15 million every year.)

Unravelling?

- Just days AFTER the vote this report was supposed to inform had been taken; a 'mistake' was discovered that meant the cost of Haymarket was found to be £100 Million LESS than thought at £600 Million.
- Shortly after that the price was St Andrews Square was found to be £776 Million, meaning the gap between the two options widened from a 'too close to matter' £25 Million to £176 Million and counting—with the extra borrowing adding further millions above and beyond that widening the total cost gap to somewhere far above £459 Million.
- Worse has followed almost two years later with the recent news (April 2013) that the operational ' contribution' of £2 Million from 'St Andrews square' has disappeared and the operational loss is now expected to be a £3.2 Million LOSS...for five years, which on past form more likely means forever.

The effects of the constant 'unravelling' is that the project was passed by councillors on a wildly false prospectus

The only thing about the original equation is that the pollution created by Haymarket remains zero and that created by St Andrews square remains huge.

Whether the flimsiness of the financial predictions in the report was through carelessness, ineptitude, negligence or even worse, should there not be an investigation or at least an acknowledgement that pollution and its effects ARE constant, and are serious.

The third example arises from the recent Annual Transport review presented to the Councillors of the Transport and Environment committee in January this year (2013).

Council: The tram project is almost delivered; we are moving on, things look fine.

The headline 'Summary and Recommendations' highlights two things, a decrease in traffic in the city and a fall in fatal, serious and slight injuries from road traffic accidents.

These are just two pieces of good news in a list of self-congratulatory targets reached and achievements ticked off.

However while on page 5 in paragraph 2.5 we see that phrase *fewer road traffic casualties killed, seriously and slightly injured* --- in the actual figures we see people killed in 2011 at 10, which is above the 2004-08 average and 3 above the 2011 target.

In respect of more deaths and serious injuries than targeted it is perfectly fine to position these figures against previously falling trends, but it is not acceptable to roll them into the falling figures for slight injuries in order to produce the headline statement above.

In respect of lower traffic levels the level of traffic is shown to have fallen 5% and this deemed another thing that credit can be taken for—even though it probably has more to do with the recession and the price of fuel than anything else.

But unmentioned in the report is the statistic that pollution from traffic has also risen an astonishing 15% in the year.

This is exactly what was predicted to happen as Edinburgh's road traffic network was systematically destroyed and the traffic flows 'fly-tipped' by stealth into residential streets.

Residents: Traffic down 5% and pollution up 15% is both a sign that the 2003 predictions are coming true—and the complete absence of any mention by council officers in their report a symptom of the rotten state of the levels of advice available to councillors.

The Council prefer their narrative of a successful 'rescue' at least, of a flawed project, and moving on, and things getting better..... But the facts are that they have 'rescued' a pollution creating machine, paying a fortune to do so, and far from being 'fine' things are getting worse rapidly—entirely as predicted----in their own Report.

In a final piece of evidence consider these two facts, the first this statement by the Council's Head of scientific Services Dr Andrew Mackie:

3 The RA will calculate the NO2 levels using the national bias factor to convert the diffusion tube value into the 'true' value. This is permissible, except that the national bias factor increases the NO2 value derived from the tubes, whereas we use a locally derived bias factor, which reduces the NO2 value derived from the tubes. Although use of either bias factor is allowed, I consider that the locally-derived bias factor is scientifically more valid as it is derived from local co-located data for tubes all analysed by one laboratory, thus minimising the effects of analytical and systematic errors. The national bias factor is derived from averaging of co-location studies throughout the UK with different labs being used and co-location in a variety of environments. Using the national bias factor will produce higher NO2 levels than I consider represents the true level of NO2 in the Street, and may tip the values above the 40mg/m3 limit.

He is saying that 'on the one hand on the other hand' but as can be seen, using the factor that can equally well be used as the factor he uses, will produce higher levels and may (already) tip the levels above the limit.

The decision on which factor to use (the one producing the lower results) isn't anything other than his choice.

He could choose the other basis.

The reason he gives; that one factor uses an average of many different labs while the one he prefers uses one lab, and this minimises the effects of analytical and systematic errors

It could easily be thought that using one lab would have the exactly opposite effect than the one he describes.

The point is that not only have these doubts and knowledge of the real basis of decision making been made clear to the people of Edinburgh, they have never been made clear to councillors, in order that they could question the Official on exactly why using one lab ensures 'safer' figures than using many.

The second and final fact will be of more force to anyone who knows Edinburgh, as assuredly the Council Officers and Councillors do.

In recent statistics some figures being produced in Great Stuart Street, which has become the de facto A1 main road across the city, are HIGHER than those from India street, the street used, because of it's quietness and lack of traffic as the 'background measurement' for streets in the area.

These measurements too, originate from Dr Mackie's Scientific Services Department.

The reason for this gap between the Council's *rhetoric* in public statements and the increasing *evidence* being provided by THEIR OWN statistics may be a toxic blend of political parties all compromised by previous enthusiasm for the project, untempered by either analysis of their own facts or provision of any moderating information by the officials.

Transport Convenor, Councillor Lesley Hinds, has spoken publically about the need for councillors to seize back political control of the tram scheme from 'faceless officials'.

She is right to point out this factor as being at the very bottom of the mountain of reasons as to why, even after all of the history, the project continues to create danger and harm in Edinburgh.

The politicians gave up their responsibility to a private company that they wrongly and naively thought would act differently from any other private company given carte blanche and a £545 Million handout., simply because it was 'their ' private company.

This was the moment they lost control of that enormous budget with effects that are now all too clear and beyond cover-up.

But it is also when the potentially far more serious issue of pollution, noise, disturbance and traffic congestion, was also lost to their control, after being left firstly with the hybrid Council-Company Board of TIE Ltd, and after that company's utter collapse, the officers and civil servants within the council bureaucracy.

Neither the businessmen nor the bureaucrats were fit agents to see what was happening or work to change the policy that was causing it to happen.

Only the politicians can do this.

But, as Lesley Hinds has indicated, to do so they need to seize back true control of the project from the bureaucrats continuing to run it on auto pilot as a matter of simply 'delivering' whatever they can.

If the politicians are to regain control from a professional corps blind to the fact that what they are delivering so determinedly is a pollution, congestion, a noise and disturbance creating engine that is already doing harm to the city, as their own statistics show, but which is never mentioned in the reports.

The first step for Cllr Hinds and any that feel the same way is not an easy one.

They have to start telling the truth, not as it is scripted for them by faceless officials, but the truth behind the written reports that they need to look for themselves.

There will have to be a Leveson style public enquiry into the last decade or so; you can't lose £500 Million from the public purse and simply shrug it off and put it down to bad luck.

But far more toxic, literally, is the effects of the blind eye being consistently turned to the problems that are direct results of the decisions about the tram made, sometimes years ago, sometimes more recently.

Determination to get something built is admirable but not when it is achieved at the cost of building something far, far worse.

And not when 'turning a blind eye to the odd problem, and accentuating the positives' ,so often requires suppressing inconvenient truths and mangling statistics in order to produce convenient untruths.

If left, this toxic mess within the Council will only get worse as each little cover up, each application of a little gloss to the facts, requires it's little cover up in turn.

Lesley Hinds has analysed the problem but she now needs to act on that analysis both from a practical perspective to prevent the enormous increases in pollution recorded that act as 'markers' for increases in noise, congestion and disturbance, as well as pollution, and for decreases in the quality and safety of life.

More importantly needs to act to prevent the Council's governance structure from falling deeper into the pit of relying on spin and the denial of facts to promote policy, especially denial of facts that can be seen by anyone who stands in the streets and looks around themselves.

The effects loss of faith in politics and politicians is being seen across Europe, as people cry out for politicians to drop the waffle, the vision, the big pictures and just pay attention to the basics.

If anywhere has had enough of seeing big visions turn to dust, along with those responsible building bigger and bigger advertising hoardings to obscure views of the true state of affairs, it is Edinburgh.

If anywhere needs politicians of true integrity, and no little courage, to step forward and bring to a close a dark period in the city's history it is Edinburgh.

This won't be achieved by a bit of a bunting and a band playing on the day the first tram rolls down Princes Street, it will be achieved by facing up to the facts of the problems that have been created, and solving them in so much as they have the resources to do so—and that cannot be achieved until those facts are faced up to and the first step in doing that, will be to stop covering them up.