

Maybe you CAN fool all of the people all of the time

Back in the day Edinburgh Council announced they would create an arms length company..they called it Transport Initiatives Edinburgh Ltd, later shortened to TIE Ltd.

The idea was this company owned by Edinburgh Council would manage the Tram project-commissioned by Edinburgh Council--and when it had made a great job of managing that project lots of people around the world would rush to use the company to manage THEIR civil engineering projects, and their civic transport projects.

IT would have 4 wise transport people on it's Board and 4 executives employed in the company to make it all happen..and 4 councillors to keep it on the straight and narrow.

But of course the professional executives there every day did what the pros always do, they did what *had* to be done, and then presented it all in a very helpful way those non-professional councillors could understand.

The result was the lead councillor, Gordon Mackenzie, a director of TIE Ltd and also Convenor of the Council's Transport, Infrastructure and Environment committee (also confusingly, but typically, called *TIE*) and his three councillor colleagues carried the can; coming out meeting after meeting as the project crashed disastrously off the rails to tell the people of Edinburgh the project was "On Time and On budget".

But we don't talk about TIE Ltd now.... not in polite company, not in the Council.

That's mainly because it's management of the project became a global byword for ***mis***management and near risible incompetence.

But it's also not really nice to dwell on past mistakes, is it? We have to move on, don't we, and nobody wants to play the blame game?

Alas! As this story shows however we may be in danger of heading back to the future, repeating the whole 'arms length company' (what a good idea!!) with senior councillors providing oversight of those self-centred execs (What could possibly go wrong?!):--

<http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/transport/lesley-hinds-joins-lothian-buses-as-chair-resigns-1-3603566>

Another head of the TIE committee, Councillor Lesley Hinds, sorry. I mean the TE Committee of Edinburgh Council; is to join the Board of Lothian Buses, the *arms length company* that is itself the larger part of the excitingly named *arms length company* *Transport for Edinburgh* (TfE), which also incorporates Edinburgh's Tram company.

A councillor parachuted in, to make sure the executives don't get up to anything the Council wouldn't want them to---another councillor with very little professional knowledge of business, or the details of the transport industry---- just like Gordon Mackenzie!

The Tram project has cost Edinburgh grievously in both hard cash, and perhaps even worse, in reputational cost.

The severance packages associated with people leaving TIE Ltd and other consultants and companies, packages that serve as gagging clauses, have no place in public sector companies, or indeed any companies, where they conflict with the public good and the public right to know.

It is depressing then to see already three senior executives probably set to join the former executive Chairman of Lothian Buses in leaving the company with enormous severance payments that will no doubt be founded on confidentiality clauses.

The commercial acumen in these companies is often woeful, in the case of TIE Ltd demonstrably so beyond any doubt, but the mechanism of the 'arms length company' is a tissue paper thin one that must not be allowed to confuse the real

issues beneath Edinburgh Council's policy of covering up what really happened in the tram project débâcle over the last 6 or more years.

Or starting *another* cover up of what is really going on inside Transport for Edinburgh, Lothian Buses and the Edinburgh Trams *today* and in the weeks, months and years to come.

It's about time the political mates club that Edinburgh Council has turned into remembered why they are there... and that is to represent the best interests of the people of the city and not the best interests of their own political careers, political parties, or pet vanity projects.

The tram is costing at least £20M a year for around thirty years now, possibly more as operational costs mount every day, and there is nothing they can do can change that.

But the mindset within the council that *created* that problem has not changed and shown by the same sort infighting now breaking out inside Lothian Buses as the tram exerts it's baleful influence there, with the Council wishing to hide the losses of the tram within the figures for the previously profitable bus company.

Things are starting to take on a feel of Groundhog Day in a city where the people are encouraged to feel it's all over and we can put it behind us ..but the insiders in the council know, we ain't seen nothing yet.