

TRAM WORKSHOP REPORT CONTROVERSY

- The 'Tram Workshops' process was proposed by Councillors as a way of bringing together in meaningful engagement the Council managers of the Edinburgh Traffic system and the residents unhappy at the effects of the Tram project on the City traffic flows.
- The 'Tram Workshops' process which was voted for at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) Transport, Infrastructure and Environment committee (TI&E) as a way to address repeated complaints from residents that they felt they had no way of making concerns to their own council.
- Having seen Councillors gagged by Legal advice that had the effect of silencing any real debate of issues, hopes were high in early 2011 that the Workshops Process would signal a new beginning.
- Sadly these hopes have not proved well founded.

People who have followed the ongoing saga of the 'Trams project' will understand that whatever the shortcomings of the Tram project itself, it is not that project that is the *actual* subject of worry and concern of residents.

The real problem is that the *effects* of the tram remain unrecognised to this day, sidelined under the label of 'wider issues' in the very beginning, and never acknowledged openly by successive City administrations since then.

In the case of the Tram Project, although a far smaller length of track is now being built at a far higher total cost, even with only 60% of the line the pollution related bad effects could be over 100% those predicted in the Council's own initial report in 2003.

The residents continue to believe that their own neighbourhood is the canary in the mine for up to 60% of the residential areas of the city faced with rising traffic volumes, bringing the air pollution to their doorsteps that creates the respiratory conditions, strokes and cardiac problems -This is why the demand by Councillors that their officers set up the Workshops process to provide meaningful engagement was welcomed by residents.

However problems arose from the beginning and promises of support, secretarial services (none of the residents have any resources other than their own personal time and equipment) and access to documents, evaporated.

Alongside the absence of real support Key council officers, like Andy Conway and Alan Bowen, have progressively distanced themselves from the process and increasingly ignored it.

Despite the increasing lack of meaningful engagement residents made a decision to try and make it work as a forum in which the issues could be clarified and communicated to the public, rather than allow it to collapse. For over a number of people devoted significant amounts of time and effort in trying to create something meaningful despite the corporate apathy and even hostility to the process, of the CEC on occasions.

However residents were shocked in November last year when a meeting organised by Andy Conway, an officer of the council, as the formal handover of their report at the Business Centre in the City Chambers went ahead with no council officers at all participating or even attending.

This state of affairs was compounded last week when the residents were handed the document purporting to be a report based on *their* work over the preceding year.

This document has been produced without *any* input from, or knowledge of, the same residents who worked for over a year in their spare time, to try and investigate potential remedies for the effects now being seen across the City in terms of increasing traffic pollution and more congestion in residential streets and areas.

The Director of Services for Communities Mark Turley, the author of the report was not present to hand it over, just as his colleagues have been absent for most of the evenings during which the work was being done. Because of this he was unable to hear for himself the immediate and vociferous complaints from members of the workshops presented with the document for the first time.

Every ordinary member of the workshops who gave many evenings up to try and make something of the process wishes to disassociate themselves completely from what they see as little more than a self serving restatement of the Council beaucrocracy's position *before* the process began.