

Edinburgh trams to Newhaven project recommences

June 1, 2020

Construction site preparation works for the Edinburgh's Trams to Newhaven project has started in line with the Scottish Government's Phase 1 pre-start site preparation.

Work on the project was stopped at the end of March to comply with Government guidance and to protect the safety of workers and residents during the coronavirus outbreak.

Following the First Minister's announcement on 21 May of a phased return for construction sites, plans have been drawn up in line with Scottish Government safety guidelines and industry best practice to ensure the safety of workers and the public. At the briefing on 28 May the First Minister confirmed that site preparation could begin.

In advance of the main works beginning, activities to prepare construction sites and project offices will include the introduction of infection control stations, additional water stations and toilet facilities for workers within the site and in the project office, and ensuring all office workspaces and facilities are set up appropriately. Other works will include the removal of the protective in-fill material that was used to ensure sites remained safe and protected during shutdown.

Measures to protect workers' health will include daily briefings, continuous on-site inspections and health and safety 'ambassadors'. The numbers of workers on-site will be kept to a minimum and the majority of project office staff will continue to work from home.

Adam McVey, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, said: "Following updated advice from the Scottish Government, we will be carrying out site preparatory works on the Trams to Newhaven project from Monday 1 June. The safety of workers and the public is of utmost importance during this time and all works will be undertaken in compliance with the Government's guidance on construction working and to allow physical distancing.

"The tram team have put in an enormous amount of hard work with our contractors to take us through this challenging period and it will take some time to fully remobilise sites. The implications of COVID-19 are unlikely to be understood for some time but we continue to work to mitigate the impact as we progress with the project."

Cammy Day, Deputy-Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, said "The Trams to Newhaven project is being delivered for the future of our City and is one of a number of schemes that are crucial to the sustainable, long-term development of the city, helping decarbonise the way we travel. It is exactly the kind of investment we need post-COVID-19 to ensure Edinburgh is a thriving, forward-looking place for people to live and work in and will help to encourage much needed affordable housing, jobs and investment into North Edinburgh."

Alejandro Mendoza Monfort, Director of Sacyr Farrans Neopul, the main infrastructure contractor, said: "SFN are delighted that we can restart our works on the Trams to Newhaven project. We understand the importance that this project will have for Edinburgh's future and are committed to ensuring that we continue to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus 19. During this pause period, concentrated efforts have continued behind the scenes to develop and test a series of robust systems and procedures, whilst ensuring the highest level of health, safety and wellbeing can be provided.

"We have used this time to adapt to our new working world and developed new operating procedures that provide information, guidance and site-specific measures that will be implemented when conducting works to mitigate the impact, so far as reasonably practicable, of the virus."

Mike Thomson, Director of Morrison Utility Services, said: "We are very pleased to be able to begin to prepare to restart this important project for Edinburgh. The safety of colleagues and the public is paramount and MUS has been working closely with the City of Edinburgh Council and SFN to ensure that our working practices are fully compliant with the guidance given by the Scottish Government while also looking at ways in which we can mitigate the impact of the recent enforced shutdown."

Once the construction industry is given the approval to move to Phase 2, works on the existing sites will recommence and the Leith Walk construction site will be established as planned prior to site shutdown.

Any commencement of main works will be subject to the Scottish Government giving approval to move to Phase 2 of their construction guidelines which states: 'soft start to site works (only where physical distancing can be maintained)'.

The project team has been working on plans to mitigate the impact of the enforced shutdown as a result of COVID 19 on the programme and budget. Despite the current circumstances the project continues to operate within its £207.3m budget. The project is paid for by borrowing monies that are repaid over a 30-year period through future revenues from customers.

Photo credit - Edinburgh Trams/ Ian Georgeson