

Exclusive

Why South Sub tram-trains are a 'no-brainer' for Edinburgh

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Exclusive by Josh Pizzuto-PomacoReporter



The Tram-Trains for Edinburgh Team at Newington Station. (Image: NQ)

“There was once a dream that was Rome; you could only whisper it ...”The words of Marcus Aurelius, as immortalised in glorious technicolour in the 2000

film *Gladiator*, provide an apt metaphor for events unfolding in the south of [Scotland's capital](#).

Here, in the neighbourhoods of [Morningside](#) and Newington and Craigmillar; the whispers of long-held dreams are rising into a cacophony.

“I used to be a freight guard on the railway at Miller Hill. And so we came round the South Suburban Line on freight trains,” Lawrence Marshall recollects, as we stand outside the shuttered remains of what was once [Newington Station](#).

“And I used to sit in the back cab of the diesel thinking, why is this line not being used to benefit the citizens of [Edinburgh](#) in terms of local passengers again?”

“I started campaigning on that probably almost 40 years ago now,” the retired Portobello councillor remarks.



Former councillor and longtime train worker Lawrence Marshall. (Image: NQ)

With Mr Marshall is Rob Falcon, another keen supporter of the [South Sub project](#), which he says will reduce congestion and connect underserved areas of the city.

Mr Falcon chairs the Tram Trains for Edinburgh (TTFE) campaign group.

The group wants to see passengers return to the South Sub (which is still used for freight) using tram-trains, which are sturdier and capable of going at higher speeds than normal trams but lighter than conventional trains.

He tells me: “We're campaigning to get the South Sub open with a tram-train technology that will be revolutionary for transport across Edinburgh. It's mainly the south but also will affect or reduce congestion in other parts of the city. So we think it's got a benefit that not only stretches across the south side, but also the centre of town and on a regional basis as well.”

The issue of congestion is one which many of the campaigners share.

Keen cyclist Marion Craig is another supporter of the project.

“I tend to go around Edinburgh on my bike, so anything that will relieve traffic congestion and make more space for bikes would be extremely welcome,” she remarks.

“It's fascinating to watch the campaign develop. It has some very dedicated members and hopefully it can find a way through what's a very complicated process of transport planning. But I think it can be done.

“As other people here have been saying, it's a no-brainer. The infrastructure is largely there, so let's put some trams on the line.”

Also present at the rendezvous close to the bones of Newington Station is Corey Boyle, who won acclaim for an award-winning civil engineering study focused on returning the South Sub to passenger use while a student at Heriot-Watt University.



Former Heriot-Watt student and campaigner Corey Boyle (Image: NQ)

Now graduated, Mr Boyle has continued the campaign, alongside his two dogs, neatly attired in pink and blue vests.

Mr Boyle says: “To be still part of it is really exciting, and hopefully me and the dogs can be on one of the first rides on the South Sub.

He adds: “Edinburgh is one of the most congested cities in the UK. It's got damaging economic and health costs as part of a car dominated society and any kind of mass transit options like the South Sub will help.”

Morningside Community Council member Moira Gibson agrees.

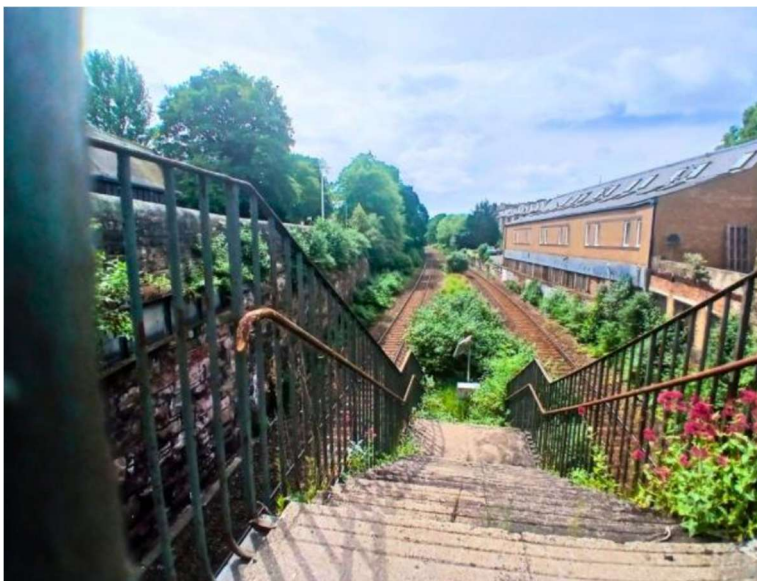
She tells me: “It's a no-brainer not to use [the existing infrastructure]. My husband used to commute to Glasgow every day and the longest part of his journey was getting down Lothian Road, round the corner and along to Haymarket Station. The actual journey between Edinburgh and Glasgow was quick, quick, quick.

“So I'm very keen that if I want to take my grandchildren to the beach in Portobello, I could get on a train; I wouldn't have to go into town and out again.

“It would be great to leave the congestion on the road, especially when it's going to be good value for money because the infrastructure is there already.”

The TTFE team tells me they are ecstatic about the decision by the **Scottish Government** to fund a study looking at the feasibility of reopening the line for light passenger rail.

The Herald reported last week that work on the study would begin “as soon as possible”, according to **Transport** Scotland officials. “You're probably talking about a few hundred million pounds; and it's a fairly shovel ready project,” Mr Falcon remarks.



A view of Newington Station from the top of the stairs. (Image: NQ)

“It would be very complementary to the north-south tram. There would be a transport hub at Cameron Toll.

“We basically think that the finance for this has to come from the [Scottish Government](#), [UK Government](#) and the private sector. Who would not want an investment in the city of Edinburgh? This is going to bring money into the city of Edinburgh to build infrastructure, investing in our city, which has got huge economic potential, but that economic potential really is a bit restrained by the lack of mass transit.

“We can have as many buses as we like, but that's not going to solve the congestion problem.

“We very much see this as a facility for people to travel around the South Sub, so from Craigmillar to Morningside or Craigmillar to Tynecastle or from Morningside to Fort Kinnaird, but it plays a big role in regional transport.”

If the use of tram-trains on the South Sub is deemed to be feasible; a business case will be drawn up for the construction of the network.

Existing stops at Craiglockhart, Morningside, Blackford Hill, Newington, Craigmillar, and Brunstane would be brought back into service, while new stations would be built at Gorgie, Cameron Toll, Bingham/Niddrie, [Fort Kinnaird](#), and Portobello.

However, campaigners say the network could be expanded into the Lothians in later phases of the project.

“Probably half of the people using this line will not start or finish on the line,” Mr Falcon notes.

“They will come from [Musselburgh](#), [East Lothian](#), where we're building lots of houses, Mid Lothian out there as well, and they will connect via the South Sub to other places.

“Most people driving into Edinburgh don't want to go to Princes Street. They want to go to other places. And this connects up the other places. It's not just for the city of Edinburgh.”

For now, the tram-train project remains a glint in the eye and a sketch on the pages of the mind.

Yet, hopes for change, once only whispered, are growing ever louder.

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