

Infra Dig – Nightmare on Edinburgh Tram

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Few projects have the capacity to reduce infrastructure veterans to tears of frustration to quite the extent that Edinburgh Tram can. It will challenge even the sturdiest of rail professionals to keep a bottom lip from wobbling.

This is a well-documented stinker of a project that was directly procured by the Scottish government through Transport Initiative Edinburgh and on which an inquiry was initiated in June 2014... and has yet to come to a resolution.

In today's Infra Dig podcast, IJGlobal editorial director Angus Leslie Melville talks to return guest Mike Flynn of Michael Flynn Associates – an itinerant builder of railways – who has some surprising involvement in this troubled deal.

Mike has particular exposure to tramways, metros, and other urban transport systems and is the former head of international consulting at Transport for London (TfL).

He has been involved in projects in Continental Europe, the Middle East, across Asia Pacific, Australia, as well as North and South America. While in the UK, there are few tramways or metros on which his fingerprints cannot be found.



Conversation starts with what went wrong with Edinburgh Tram and doesn't really move away from that point as there is so much to say, and Mike readily agrees after the podcast that it could have run for a further 45 minutes and still not have covered off all the issues!

Mike was involved in Edinburgh Tram for more than a decade, having started work on it in the late 1990s, at which time his team bid for the outline design contract and alignment selection for the tramway and was awarded one of the packages.

He then spearheaded a bid for the operations contract (coming second) with Transdev, but this fell down as they were not willing to accept the Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE) termination clause that involved too great a risk.

Mike runs through the Dutch auction process which is "borderline illegal", which led to the winning consortium – Bilfinger Berger, Siemens and CAF – eventually submitting claims to TIE to the point that the relationship broke down... and progress ground to a halt.

This process was widely reported in the Edinburgh and Scottish press, while also receiving more than its fair share of focus from IJGlobal as war raged between public and private sector and Edinburgh's city centre died a slow death as a building site.

As it turns out, Mike actually submitted a speculative offer to the City of Edinburgh Council – which was on the verge of

dissolving TIE – to acquire all the assets associated with the tramway and deliver the project.

Curiously, this was leaked to the press and it brought the Bilfinger-led team back to the table and the eventual conclusion of the project... which everyone now is so happy with, they are looking to extend it... to what they had originally planned to deliver... had it not all gone to hell in a handcart.

This podcast is a must-listen for all people who recall the project and for those who want to learn how not to procure a major tramway in an ancient city where nobody knows the location of the utilities, never mind how many Romany helmets they will unearth...



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