
TAY ROAD BRIDGE JOINT BOARD

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Cons539/23

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Our Ref AMS/FB
Your Ref
Date 23rd June, 2005

Dear Madam,

Tolled Bridges Review - Phase Two Consultation

I refer to your consultation document "Tolled Bridges Review - Phase Two Consultation, and would advise you that at its meeting on 20th June, 2005, the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board agreed that the attached report be submitted to the Executive as the Joint Board's response to the consultation document.

Yours faithfully,

Clerk to the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board

REPORT TO: TAY ROAD BRIDGE JOINT BOARD – 20 JUNE 2005
REPORT ON: TOLLED BRIDGES REVIEW – PHASE TWO CONSULTATION
REPORT BY: THE BRIDGE MANAGER
REPORT NO: TRB 18 -2005

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To propose a response to the Scottish Executive's consultation document "Tolled Bridges Review – Phase two Consultation".

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Joint Board approve this report being submitted to the Scottish Executive as the Board's response to the consultation document.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Not applicable

4. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Not applicable

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1 The Transport White Paper of 16 June 2004 explained the arrangements for bringing forward the Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement commitment to review all tolled bridges in Scotland. The first phase of that review was completed in November 2004. It examined the existing tolling structures, including the impact of tolls and the way in which potential changes to tolls could help achieve the Executive's environmental and economic objectives of reducing pollution and congestion.
- 6.2 On 15 April 2005 the Executive published a consultation document "Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two Consultation". Comments are requested by 8 July 2005. This second phase will look in more detail at the options for the future management and operation of the Forth Road Bridge, the Tay Road Bridge and the Erskine Bridge. It will also include an assessment on how the tolled bridges relate to the new regional and national transport arrangements.
- 6.3 The Board members were given a copy of the consultation document at the special meeting held on 27 April 2005 and it was noted that a report on the Board's response to the consultation paper would be prepared for the Board meeting to be held on 20 June 2005.

6.4 The consultation document requires the Joint Board's response on the following main items:

- Whether there is a case for applying a consistent set of tolling/charging principles on every tolled bridge in Scotland, and if so, what these principles might be. Issues to be considered include:
 - Vehicle classification types.
 - Exemptions for disabled drivers, emergency services vehicles and breakdown vehicles.
 - Exemptions or reduced tolls for public transport/high occupancy vehicles
 - Whether toll levels should have a direct relationship to the level of wear and tear caused by different vehicle types.
 - The use or otherwise of discount schemes.
- Whether the powers of the management body for each tolled bridge should cover investment in local transport infrastructure, including support for public transport and encouragement of modal shift from private cars
- Whether there is a need to amend the legislative and procedural arrangements for changing tolling or charging levels and periods, in a way that is transparent, flexible, justifiable, and responsive to changing circumstances.
- Whether existing management arrangements complement the development of regional transport partnerships and the national transport agency, and are responsive to the requirements of future transport priorities.

7. RESPONSE BY TAY ROAD BRIDGE JOINT BOARD

- 7.1 As presently constituted the Joint Board has responsibility purely for the administration, management maintenance and operation of the Tay Road Bridge, as confirmed in the Tay Road Bridge Confirmation Act 1991. Unlike FETA the Joint Board does not presently have a wider remit for improving local transport or contributing to other schemes to improve traffic flows and reduce congestion across the bridge although there are enabling powers for doing so in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001.
- 7.2 The options presently being considered by the Board to replace the existing tolling equipment and address congestion at the tolls at peak periods have to be considered in the light of current congestion being encountered in Dundee City centre along with pressures for space arising from the Dundee Waterfront Development and the opportunity to possibility site future tolling on the south side of the Tay in Fife. This highlights the need for the Joint Board to be involved therefore in issues other than just the repair and maintenance of the bridge and an administrative set up inline with the FETA model may be beneficial in this regard.
- 7.3 The Joint Board would support the objective to reduce future traffic growth in line with the Scottish Executive's aim of stabilising road traffic at 2001 levels by 2021 by encouraging modal shift from single occupancy vehicles (SOV's) to public transport and multiple occupancy vehicles (MOV's).

- 7.4 A transfer of powers to the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) level could create difficulties as the Tay Road Bridge is on the boundary between two RTP's. Until the RTP's are set up and successfully dealing with the wider high level powers and strategic policy it would be inappropriate at the outset to transfer the powers of the tolled bridges to the RTP's. Even in the longer term it is debatable whether the RTP's should be involved in day to day operation, management and maintenance of individual bridges. The FETA model at the Forth Bridge, created 3 years ago, seems to work successfully in partnership with the current voluntary RTP, SESTRANS and a similar arrangement may be successful at Tay Road Bridge.
- 7.5 The Tay Road Bridge Joint Board however is not in a position at present to fund complimentary transportation projects as was the case with F.E.T.A. when it was formed. It may therefore be more appropriate for the Board to remain in its current form for the time being and to reconsider its position as a transport authority at a later date when it is in a financial position to do so and once the new RTP's have more clearly evolved. In the meantime the Board should at the least be a statutory consultee for RTP's developing transport strategies and seek to work closely with the adjoining RTP's in developing joint initiatives.
- 7.6 With only three tolled bridges in Scotland it would be difficult to see any justification for a single tolled bridge authority other than some possible saving in administration costs. Neither would there be any advantage if Tay Bridge was to be managed by the Scottish Executive or the National Transport Agency. The majority of trips across the bridge are locally generated between Fife and Dundee. The bridge leads traffic directly into Dundee City centre and the impact of the bridge is heavily felt in the City. Local accountability is of paramount importance, the Tay Bridge has its own unique local issues and it would be more appropriate to retain the operation and management at a local level.
- 7.7 Responses to the specific questions outlined in the consultation document are outlined in Appendix 1.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Clerk, the Treasurer and the Engineer have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

John Crerar
Bridge Manager

Date : 9 June 2005

Appendix 1

Tay Road Bridge Joint Board response to The Scottish Executive's Consultation on Tolled bridges Review - Phase Two

Exemptions for Disabled Drivers/Blue Badge Holders

QUESTION 1 – Do you think that the system for verifying Blue Badge exemptions should be changed? If so, can you suggest what these changes should be?

Response: - The TRBJB would be happy to consider any system that provides a balance between the provision of exemptions and the administrative requirement to find ways to verify eligibility that are efficient and effective. The present system is used on all tolled facilities in the UK which give exemption to blue badge holders (some facilities do not give exemptions), it works fairly well and no one has come up with a better system to date. All vehicles passing through the tollbooth require to present either cash or a voucher to enable an audit check on the tollbooth transactions. At present all Blue Badge holders who use the Tay Road Bridge are encouraged to pre-register with Tay Road Bridge (or Forth) and receive a supply of vouchers. The voucher can be completed in advance of the journey and presented to the toll officer with a valid Blue Badge for verification. The vouchers are interchangeable with the Forth Road Bridge. Blue Badge holders who do not have vouchers (visitor or tourist) are required to complete a voucher at the booth. Recent reports in the press have intimated that research has shown that up to a third of Britain's disabled car badges are being used fraudulently. The current Blue Badge system is open to abuse and it is common knowledge that the badge can be downloaded from the World Wide Web and forged. Theft of Blue Badges and forgery is an accepted problem with the City of London road user charging scheme and will become more prevalent as charges rise. Emerging technologies may provide an answer to the verification issue in the near future.

QUESTION 2 – Do you consider that the exemptions for emergency service vehicles should remain limited to the Ambulance, Fire and Police Services, or should we consider extending this to cover other key services?

Response: - The present exemptions for emergency services have presumably been provided firstly to exempt publicly funded services from paying a toll and secondly in order that such services who are generally in a hurry do not have to stop at the toll booths. Their vehicles are generally well recognised and there is no doubt as to eligibility. There would be a case for extending such exemptions to any other key public funded service that has to attend an emergency as quickly as possible although these are probably few in number (if a doctor in a car has to attend at an emergency then there is already discretion to allow them free passage). The Road User Charging (Exemption for Charges) (Scotland) Regulations were made on 1 December 2004 and the following must be exempt from such schemes: fire service vehicles, police force vehicles, ambulances and coastguard vehicles, any vehicle displaying a blue badge and public service vehicles (generally taken to be buses). In addition the regulations allow charging authorities to set exemptions over and above these to reflect local circumstances. The TRBJB would generally support bringing exemptions on all tolled bridges in line with the road user charging scheme.

QUESTION 3 – Vehicles used by bridge authorities to respond to breakdowns on each bridge are exempt. Do you see a case for extending exemptions to the AA, RAC or other commercial breakdown services responding to breakdowns on the road network other than where this is the responsibility of the bridge authorities?

Response: - The TRBJB operates its own vehicles on the bridge to provide free breakdown cover for light vehicles to minimise delays for bridge users. TRBJB see no reason to exempt commercial breakdown services from paying tolls as they recover their costs from the motorist. They will not attend to the breakdown any quicker if they are exempt from paying a toll. The TRBJB provides a breakdown service to be able to quickly clear the bridge and prevent congestion. Ideally this should also be provided by other authorities at other sensitive traffic locations rather than leaving it in the hands of the motorist to call for assistance. .

QUESTION 4 - Should public transport vehicles and multiple occupancy vehicles be considered for exemption from bridge tolls?

Response: - There has to be a limit to how many vehicles can be exempt from paying the toll otherwise there may be fewer vehicles actually paying the toll and the necessary charges will be unsustainable. The TRBJB already offers discounts for public transport vehicles i.e. buses that carry more than 16 passengers pay £1.40 as opposed to HGV's who pay £2 and buses that carry less than 16 passengers pay only 80p.

TRBJB recognizes the need to reduce future traffic growth and to encourage a movement away from car use, public transport requires to be made more attractive and cheaper. TRBJB would therefore support exemptions for registered public transport vehicles.

Multiple occupancy vehicles (MOV's) could be defined as a driver plus one passenger and should receive a discount when compared to single occupancy vehicles (SOV's) as part of a differential tolling structure to help reduce traffic growth particularly at peak periods.

Discount Schemes

QUESTION 5 – Should tolled bridges offer multiple crossing discount vouchers to all bridge users, or particular classes of users such as buses or multiple occupancy vehicles? If so, why should this be?

Response: - At present the TRBJB offers no multiple crossing discount vouchers to any class of vehicle. Recently the Board made an application to the Scottish Executive that a 10% discount scheme be introduced.

Discount schemes for cars effectively rewards frequent users which is contrary to the aims of encouraging a movement away from car use. TRBJB recognizes the need to reduce future traffic growth particularly increased traffic flows at peak periods. The TRBJB would support policies for reduced tolls for buses and MOV's as compared to SOV's via a differential tolling structure. In future this would be paid electronically or manually without the use of vouchers. Vouchers will be phased out and be replaced with electronic toll collection transponders (tags). In future electronic tolling could offer the facility for differential tolling on several bases e.g. occupancy, vehicle classification, time of day and even number of trips outwith peak periods. Using electronic tolling discounts for frequent users traveling outwith peak periods may also offer advantages.

HGV's cause greater wear and tear and increased maintenance and it would not be appropriate to offer them discounts.

Classification of Vehicles

QUESTION 6 – What are your views on a common vehicle classification system for levying tolls at all Scotland's tolled bridges?

Response: - A common vehicle classification system is a must not only for Scotland's tolled bridges but also for all tolled bridges in the UK and in Europe.

Directive 2004/52/EC of the European Parliament on the Interoperability of Electronic Road Toll Systems in the Community will require all facilities with electronic tolling to be compatible throughout the European Union offering a 'seamless service' for travelers throughout Europe. Electronic vehicle classification technology cannot deal with the present variety of classification systems on every individual facility and one of the operational challenges will be a common vehicle classification system throughout Europe.

With the introduction of electronic tolling systems employing automatic vehicle classification it is essential that the vehicle is classified using parameters, which can be accurately measured electronically. This tends to favour a system based on height and number of axles. Since the new M6 toll has employed a system based on such parameters it may be appropriate that this precedent be adopted throughout the UK.

A common vehicle classification system will cause less confusion for users, it will be easier to compare and analyze traffic composition at different facilities, it will standardize signing for the benefit of users and make it easier to operate a common central toll administration back office system.

Promoting PSVs and MOVs

QUESTION 7 – Should we encourage modal shift from single occupancy cars to public transport and multiple occupancy vehicles on all tolled bridges? If so, how might this be achieved?

Response: - TRBJB recognizes the need to reduce future traffic growth and would support policies to encourage modal shift from single occupancy cars to public transport and multiple occupancy vehicles on all tolled bridges. This would best be achieved by a differential tolling structure that offers reduced tolls for buses and MOV's compared to SOV's. Another way would be to offer an enhanced service for buses and multiple occupancy vehicles by providing if practical a dedicated lane to allow them to pass through the tolls quicker than single occupancy vehicles. On the Tay Road Bridge the provision of such dedicated lanes may not be practical due to geographical constraints although this is the subject of an ongoing study.

QUESTION 8 – Do you think that raising tolls at peak times would result in less congestion at those times?

Response: - It would depend on how much the tolls were raised at peak time as to whether there would be less congestion at those times. It has been demonstrated in London and elsewhere that charging tolls at a certain level can result in a reduction in traffic. As there is always a limit to what people will pay raising tolls at peak period will deter some commuters from traveling at that time and lead to less congestion. The question is how much do the tolls have to be raised to eliminate congestion or to reduce it to acceptable levels.

In raising toll levels at peak periods, consideration must be given to members of the public who have little choice in adjusting their time of travel. High quality public transport together with other alternatives should be provided before congestion charging at peak periods is introduced

Tolls Reflecting Cost of Wear and Tear

QUESTION 9 - Should tolls reflect the impacts of different vehicle types on the need for maintenance, repair and strengthening programmes? If so, do you have suggestions for how this might be done?

Response: - Tolls are generally charged to meet the cost of repair, maintenance and strengthening programmes so the tolls should reflect the impact of different vehicle types on these programmes. TRBJB recently had to spend £3.5m to strengthen the bridge to carry the European 40 tonne lorry. This money would not have had to be spent if these heavy vehicles were not allowed to use the bridge. TRBJB already charges a higher toll for vehicles weighing greater than 3.5 tonnes and a similar arrangement should continue to apply. A graduated toll for the heavier vehicles based on their gross carrying capacity could possibly be introduced. As in response to Question 6, the classification could be related to the height of the vehicle above its first axle and the number of axles.

Procedure for Changing Tolls

QUESTION 10 – Do you think the current process involving Public Local Inquiries (PLIs) is appropriate for making changes to tolls or charges to meet the costs of managing, maintaining and operating a bridge?

Response: - TRBJB considers that a much quicker and flexible approach is required so that tolls can be easily changed to meet changing circumstances but all still within a regulatory framework. Tolls are generally raised only to meet the cost of increased repair and maintenance and it should be sufficient for this to be agreed by Scottish Ministers without the need and expense of a Public Local Enquiry.

QUESTION 11 – Do you consider that final approval by Scottish Ministers is an essential safeguard for toll/charge payers or do you think the final decision is a matter for the management authority for the bridge?

Response: - TRBJB consider that the responsibility for deciding tolls levels should rest with the management authority of the bridge but recognize that final approval by Scottish Ministers is an essential safeguard for toll/charge payers.

QUESTION 12 – Do you consider all tolls should be subject to increases linked to an inflation index?

Response: - TRBJB believe that the tolls should not be subject to increase linked to an inflation index. This is borne out by the fact that expenditure on the bridge is not necessarily evenly spread out year by year, and if inflation had been applied since 1966 to the original toll, the toll today would be much higher than what is actually required to fund the Bridge Board. A further factor is that traffic growth over the years has meant that increases in tolls have been delayed for fairly lengthy periods. Toll increases need only be applied when the funding requires, and at an appropriate level, and that inflation indices have no role whatsoever in that process. Furthermore index linked tolls could lead to cumbersome tolling levels producing difficulties and delays with cash collection at tollbooths.

Executive/Transport Agency

QUESTION 13 – What advantages and disadvantages do you see if any or all of the tolled bridges were to be managed by the Scottish Executive or the national transport agency?

Response: - TRBJB see no major advantages if the Tay Road Bridge were to be managed by the Scottish Executive or the national transport agency.

There could be a case for the Forth Road Bridge to be managed at national level as part of the trunk road network as it is on a strategic national route and the majority of users are through traffic. The Tay Road Bridge, however, delivers traffic directly into Dundee City center, the majority of trips over the bridge are locally generated between Fife and Dundee and the bridge is not on a strategic national route.

Local accountability is of paramount importance as the impact of the bridge is heavily felt in the City and this would be lost if managed at national level. The Tay Bridge has its own unique local issues and should continue to be administered at a local level.

Authority is still required from The Scottish Executive on major issues.

Regional Transport Partnerships

QUESTION 14 – Should we consider transferring some or all of the powers and functions of current bridge authorities to Regional Transport Partnerships in future?

Response: - Under the current proposals for RTP's the Tay Bridge would lie on the boundary between the South and East RTP and Central and Tay RTP so it could prove difficult transferring powers to two RTP's. The new RTP's will initially be concerned with high level policy and strategic powers and taking on the powers and functions of the tolled bridge authorities at the outset would prove to be a difficult challenge. Even in the longer term it is debatable whether the RTP's should be involved in the day to day operation, management and maintenance of an individual bridge. It would depend on the success or otherwise of the RTP's in the longer term as to whether it would be beneficial to transfer the powers of the tolled bridges to the RTP's. In the meantime the TRBJB should at the least be a statutory consultee for RTP's developing transport strategies and seek to work closely with the adjoining RTP's in developing joint initiatives.

QUESTION 15 – As the Erskine Bridge functions both as a key national and strategic link for the West of Scotland as well as an important local link for communities north and south of the River Clyde, do you see any argument for de-trunking it so that it could become the responsibility of the RTP for the West of Scotland?

Response: - No comment

Joint Board (FETA Model)

QUESTION 16 – Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the FETA model, for any or all of the bridges?

Response: - The FETA Model adopted 3 years ago for the Forth Bridge seems to have worked successful in partnership with the voluntary RTP SESTRANS and there are enabling powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 to do the same at the Tay Road Bridge. Options are currently being considered by the TRBJB for upgrading the tolling equipment and relocating the toll plaza. This has to be considered in the light of the Dundee Waterfront Development and the need to relieve congestion in the city center arising from the current toll plaza. One option would be to move the tolls to the Fife side of the bridge providing measures such as differential tolling and MOV priority lanes combined with a Park & Choose facility upstream of the tolls. The TRBJB does not presently have a wider remit for exploring such options and a set up in line with FETA model may more easily allow it to do so. The TRBJB however is not in a position at present to fund complimentary transportation projects as was the case with F.E.T.A when it was formed. It may therefore be more appropriate for the Board to remain in its current form for the time being and to reconsider its position as a transport authority at a later date when it is in a financial position to do so.

Joint Board (TRBJB)

QUESTION 17 – Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the TRBJB model, for any or all of the bridges?

Response: - As presently constituted the Joint Board has responsibility purely for the administration, management maintenance and operation of the Tay Road Bridge, as confirmed in the Tay Road Bridge Confirmation Act 1991. Unlike FETA the Joint Board does not presently have a wider remit for improving local transport or contributing to other schemes to improve traffic flows and reduce congestion across the bridge although there are enabling powers for doing so in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. The TRBJB model has worked successfully for the past 40 years. Due to the need for more strategic planning of local and national transportation issues and the significant growth in bridge traffic over the years there is now a need for the TRBJB to be involved in issues other than just the repair and maintenance of the bridge. A key determinant of the Board's capital funding position is the fact that the current Bridge Order requires all capital borrowing to be repaid by 2016. This type of limitation is thought to be unique in Scottish local government and the Bridge Board should seek to have it removed, as this would significantly improve the Board's financial capability.

General Management Options

QUESTION 18 – Do you think there would be any merit in having a single body responsible for operating and managing all tolled bridges in Scotland?

Response: - With only three tolled bridges in Scotland TRBJB see no great merit in having a single body responsible for all three bridges. Each bridge has its own unique local issues and should be managed separately. See also answer to question 13.

QUESTION 19 – If you think all bridges should be run by one body what form, powers and functions should this body have?

Response: - See answer to question 18.

QUESTION 20 – Are there any other management options that you would like to suggest?

Response: - None