

Response from Fife Council

Rebecca Daddow
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If calling or telephoning please ask
for

Alistair Clyne Ext 3631

Your Ref:

Our Ref: AJC/TS/TP/6/C

5 July 2005

Dear Ms Daddow,

Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two Consultation
Response from Fife Council

I refer to the consultation document on the Tolled Bridges Review, which was published in April 2005, and enclosed Fife Council's response for your attention.

As I am sure you will appreciate, the future management and operation of Scotland's tolled bridges is of significant interest to Fife Council, with 2 of the 3 remaining tolled bridges linking Fife to the Central Belt and the North. The Council should therefore continue to be involved in decisions concerning the future management and operation of both the Forth and Tay Road Bridges.

Fife Council has reaffirmed its principled opposition to bridge tolls, a situation which has been exacerbated by the recent decision to end tolling of the Skye Bridge, and the possibility that Fife could find itself being the only local authority in Scotland which has tolled bridges at both entrances.

However, as a responsible local authority, the Council recognises that it has a responsibility to work within the existing negotiating mechanisms - particularly FETA - and appreciates their continued support for Fife, as illustrated by the recent announcements of funding for the A8000, the spur road into the ferry port, and their decision to support an additional multi-modal Forth crossing.

Nonetheless, the Council is concerned at the impact road user charges on the Forth Bridge and increased tolls on the Tay Bridge will have on the economy of Fife. Not only could it deter or restrict inward investment, especially when so much progress is being made through the Central Fife Action Plan and the works in the Levenmouth area, it will obviously have a serious effect on the finances of people who choose to live and work in Fife.

In order to compensate for these additional burdens on Fifers and the Fife economy, the Council is seeking significant contributions to the maintenance costs of the existing bridges, thus lessening the burden on the people who need to use it for business or pleasure.

I understand that a meeting is planned for late summer to outline the draft findings of the Phase 2 Review, prior to final consideration by the Minister. I should therefore be grateful if you would advise me of the details of the meeting, at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Bob McLellan
Head of Transportation Services

Copies to: Cllr. Mike Rumney, Chair of Environment & Development Committee
Cllr. Jim Philp, Transportation Spokesperson
Cllr. Tony Martin, Opposition Spokesperson

FIFE COUNCIL

TOLLED BRIDGES REVIEW – PHASE TWO CONSULTATION

RESPONSE FROM FIFE COUNCIL

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 On 15 April 2005 the Scottish Executive published a consultation document on the second phase of their Tolled Bridges Review. Comments are invited by 8 July 2005 and the Minister for Transport is expected to consider the Phase 2 Report by late Summer 2005. This response is based on a report to the Council's Environment & Development Committee on 2 June 2005, amended to include greater emphasis on the need for improved public transport links, regardless of any changes to the management of the tolled bridges. It also includes comments from the full meeting of Fife Council on 30 June 2005.
- 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement made a commitment to carry out a review of all tolled bridges in Scotland, and this was further outlined in the Transport White Paper published on 16 June 2004. Phase 1 of the review examined the existing tolling structures, including the impact of tolls and the way in which potential changes to tolls could help achieve the Scottish Executive's environmental and economic objectives of reducing pollution and congestion. The conclusions from Phase 1 were considered by Ministers in November 2004 and helped identify a range of issues to be examined in Phase 2.
- 2.2 Phase 2 of the review will include an examination of the broader issues, relating to the management, operation and maintenance of the tolled bridges. In particular, this will include an assessment of how tolled bridges will relate to the new statutory Regional Transport Partnerships and the new National Transport Agency, and whether the powers of the management body for each bridge should include investment in measures to encourage more sustainable travel. Phase 2 is not about specifying the actual level of the tolls collected at each bridge.
- 3.0 Response from Fife Council
- 3.1 Potential changes to tolls could help to achieve the Scottish Executive's environmental and economic objectives of reducing pollution and congestion. Fife Council has a good track record of supporting these objectives by improving public transport infrastructure and working with operators to improve services across the Forth. Such efforts must continue at the local, regional and national levels, if we are to deal with the ever-increasing demands for travel. The Council is currently working with partners to carry out further feasibility work on the Cross Forth Passenger Ferry. Fife is also acting as lead authority on the SESTRAN Integrated Transport Corridors Study, which recommends a series of short to medium term measures for further improvements to bus and rail services across the Forth. Early action will be required to ensure delivery of these sustainable transport projects as soon as possible. Discussions are also under way with the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board regarding the possibility of introducing improvements to encourage more sustainable travel across the Tay. It would therefore be helpful if the powers of the management body for each bridge could include, or improve, investment in measures to encourage more sustainable travel, as suggested in the consultation document.
- 3.2 It is important to stress that the tolled bridges alone cannot achieve the Scottish Executive's environmental and economic objectives of reducing pollution and congestion, and stabilising road traffic at 2001 levels by 2021. Significant additional and continued investment in more sustainable travel choices will be required from all public and private organisations with a responsibility for transport. This will support the provision of new bus and rail links, car sharing, walking & cycling facilities, and must include strong marketing & publicity to achieve the necessary changes in the way we travel.
- 3.3 Tolls are only collected at 3 bridges in Scotland, namely the Forth, Tay and Erskine Road Bridges. Tolls were removed from the Skye Bridge at the end of 2004, following completion of Phase 1 of the Tolled Bridges Review, which concluded that this could be done with no adverse economic, environmental or

traffic effects. With Fife's Community Plan and supporting documents all stressing the importance of good transport links between Fife and the major Scottish Cities, and 2 of the tolled bridges linking Fife to the north, the south and the south west, the issue is clearly of particular importance for Fife, in terms of levels of congestion, the economy and the environment. This response therefore focuses on the future management of the Forth and Tay Road Bridges, and leaves matters concerning the Erskine Bridge to the relevant authorities in the West of Scotland.

- 3.4 Consequently, the key issue for Fife is that the Council should continue to be involved in decisions concerning the future management and operation of both the Forth and Tay Road Bridges.
- 3.5 This should preferably be through Joint Boards with "FETA" powers, although a transfer of the FETA powers to SESTRAN may also be considered. However, with the new South East Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) starting off with only high level policy and strategy powers (level 1) as currently suggested, then taking over the significant assets of the bridges, the operational responsibilities and the staff from the current organisations at the outset could be a huge challenge. Depending on the success of the new RTP and the extent to which they take on operational powers in the future, it may be more appropriate to consider transferring responsibility for the bridge to the RTP only as a medium term option.
- 3.6 In the case of the Tay Road Bridge, a transfer of responsibility to the RTP level could create difficulties for Fife since the RTP boundary is likely to be mid way across the bridge itself. Consequently, and in view of the higher proportion of local trips crossing the Tay it would be more appropriate for the future management and operation of the Tay Road Bridge to continue as a Joint Board of relevant local authorities, but critically to include "FETA" powers.
- 3.7 With only 3 tolled bridges currently in Scotland it would be difficult to see how any transfer of responsibility to a Single Tolled Bridges Authority could be justified. Apart from small management savings, the majority of the staff employed at the Forth (total 100 staff) and Tay (total 50 staff) Road Bridges have operational roles and therefore require to be based at the bridges. Furthermore, with the Forth serving a more strategic function than the Tay, (the Forth is of national strategic importance linking the North to the South of Scotland, and the Tay links part of Fife to Dundee and the North of Scotland) it would be more appropriate for the management of each bridge to remain separate.
- 3.8 The Council recognises that it will be important to build in appropriate regional/national involvement in the future management of the Forth and Tay Road Bridges, and would welcome discussions with the Scottish Executive on this matter.
- 3.9 On 30 June 2005 the following motion was approved at the meeting of the full Fife Council, for inclusion in the Council's response:-

"That Fife Council reaffirms its principled opposition to bridge tolls, a situation which has been exacerbated by the recent decision to end tolling of the Skye Bridge, and the possibility that Fife could find itself being the only local authority in Scotland which has tolled bridges at both entrances.

However, as a responsible local authority, we recognise that we have a responsibility to work within the existing negotiating mechanisms - particularly FETA - and appreciate their continued support for Fife, as illustrated by the recent announcements of funding for the A8000, the spur road into the ferry port, and their decision to support an additional multi-modal Forth crossing.

Nonetheless, we must express our concern at the impact road user charges on the Forth Bridge and increased tolls on the Tay Bridge will have on the economy of Fife. Not only could it deter or restrict inward investment, especially when so much progress is being made through the Central Fife Action Plan and the works in the Levenmouth area, it will obviously have a serious effect on the pockets of people who choose to live and work in Fife.

We therefore call upon the Scottish Executive to acknowledge these additional burdens on Fifers and the Fife economy, by ensuring that they contribute significantly to the maintenance costs of the existing bridges, thus lessening the burden on the people who need to use it for business or pleasure."

3.10 Responses to the specific questions outlined in the consultation document are outlined in Appendix 1.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 The tolled bridges alone cannot achieve the Scottish Executive's objectives of stabilising road traffic at 2001 levels by 2021. Significant additional investment in more sustainable travel choices will be required from all the relevant public and private transport organisations to support the provision of new bus and rail links, etc, and must include strong marketing & publicity to achieve the necessary changes in the way we travel.
- 4.2 The key issue for Fife is that the Council should continue to be involved in decisions concerning the future management and operation of both the Forth and Tay Road Bridges in light of the relationship between these key transport links and the Fife economy and environment.
- 4.3 In recognition of the additional burdens placed on Fifers and the Fife economy, the Scottish Executive should contribute significantly to the maintenance costs of the existing Forth and Tay road bridges.
- 4.4 FETA should remain as at present for the time being, but future consideration could be given to the possible role of SESTRAN.
- 4.5 Fife also supports the move towards the "FETA" powers for other tolled bridges, in support of policies to manage congestion and improve the environment and support the economy.

4.6 The Council sees no advantage in setting up a Single Tolloed Bridges Authority.

Dr Bob McLellan
HEAD OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

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4 July 2005
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APPENDIX 1

Fife Council's Response To The Scottish Executive's Consultation On Phase 2 of The Tolling Strategy Review

List of Questions from the Consultation Document

Exemptions for Disabled Drivers/Blue Badge Holders/Emergency Vehicles

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 1 – This is an administrative matter for the various bodies responsible for the management of the bridges, and they are presumably best placed to comment on this matter. Nevertheless, vouchers should be easily accessible by all genuine Blue Badge holders and efforts should be made to streamline the process at the toll booths for those who have not been able to pre-register. Perhaps a smartcard or tag device could be used to reduce delays instead of issuing vouchers?

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 2 - In addition to the 3 core emergency services, it would appear logical to extend the exemptions to include other vehicles which could be involved in matters affecting life and limb, such as those used by the coastguard or anti-terrorist/bomb disposal vehicles.

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 3 - FETA (and presumably also the other 2 bridges) already operates its own fleet of recovery vehicles to provide free breakdown recovery for incidents on the bridge, in order to minimise delays for bridge users. Commercial breakdown companies such as the AA and RAC are profit making organisations whose customers largely use SOV's so the case for introducing exemptions for commercial breakdown services dealing with breakdowns on the wider road network is should not be supported.

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

Response 4 - Public transport vehicles on registered services should be exempt from tolls in view of the level of their contribution to more sustainable travel, when compared with other vehicles. An exemption for public transport vehicles would send a clear policy

message to the travelling public that more sustainable travel is being encouraged by the authorities.

Multiple occupancy vehicles (MOV's) could legitimately be considered as being a driver and just one passenger, and as such will not make as significant a contribution to more sustainable travel across the bridges as public transport vehicles. Consequently, it would be more appropriate for MOV's to pay a reduced toll, as part of a differential tolling structure, rather than being totally exempt.

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 5 – The majority of the vehicles using the tolled bridges only carry the driver. For example, on the Forth Road Bridge, more than 70% of vehicles are single occupancy vehicles (SOV's). This inefficient use of space exacerbates congestion levels, which in turn has adverse impacts on the economy and the environment. The tolled bridges therefore require tolling structures that encourage greater use of MOV's and less use of SOV's.

Care therefore has to be taken in offering multiple crossing discounts to each classification of vehicle using the bridge, whilst still reflecting wider policy issues. For example, in view of the disproportionate impact on bridge maintenance from HGV's (see response to Q9), and the national and local policies which support increased transfer of freight from road to rail and sea, it would not be appropriate to offer discounts for HGV's.

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 6 – Whilst the number of tolled bridges in Scotland is low, there could be merit in a common vehicle classification system for levying tolls. This would simplify the system for travellers, particularly those travelling north and south along the east coast who use 2 of the 3 bridges, and would improve the analysis and comparison of traffic composition, etc, by the authorities. If a decision is taken to create a common vehicle classification system, it would be worth considering what systems are in place elsewhere in the UK.

Reducing Traffic and Congestion on Tolled Bridges

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 7 – The Scottish Executive has set a target of stabilising road traffic at 2001 levels by 2021. Since 2001, traffic has continued to increase on most parts of the road network, including the tolled bridges, despite the best efforts of all involved at a local,

regional and national level. Clearly a more significant lead will be required if the Scottish Executive's target is to be realised.

It must be appreciated that any measures introduced at the tolled bridges to tackle traffic growth will only be able to contribute a very small part to the overall national target, and levels of congestion vary from bridge to bridge. Nevertheless, in light of current and likely future levels of congestion at the bridges, particularly the Forth Road Bridge, and to a lesser extent on the Tay Road Bridge, it is imperative that we encourage modal shift from SOV's to public transport and MOV's.

One of the key issues facing the tolled crossings is the generally dispersed nature of the destinations of SOV's. In order to tackle this, FETA and SESTRAN are developing proposals for Park & Choose sites and a regional car sharing scheme. The idea makes more efficient use of private transport and combines the ability of private transport to access public transport, in order to offer greater travel choices for individuals. Basically, SOV drivers would congregate at Park & Choose sites upstream from the bridge, and then choose whether to car share with others, for example to their place of work, on the other side of the bridge. Generally they would car share back to the Park & Choose site in the evening, but should any of them wish to work late, they would use the bus or train to return to the Park & Choose site before driving home. Continued investment in improvements to public transport will be essential to achieve this, and wider "FETA" type powers would assist the delivery of the necessary projects.

Park & Choose sites would need to be combined with differential tolling in favour of MOV's and measures to give MOV's priority over SOV's to avoid areas of congestion on the network.

Consideration should also be given to two way differential tolling in order to maximise the potential for modal shift during the congested peak periods.

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

Response 8 – Differential tolls in the form of higher tolls at peak times would be likely to reduce congestion at those times. However, the extent of any reduction will vary from bridge to bridge, and transport modelling would be required to predict the various impacts. Nevertheless, where a bridge is operating at full capacity during peak periods, there is a strong argument for increasing the tolls during that period and reinvesting the revenue in other more sustainable travel choices.

Consideration should also be given to two way differential tolling in order to maximise the potential for modal shift during the congested peak periods.

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 9 – The tolls should certainly reflect the impacts of different vehicle types on the need for maintenance, repair and strengthening programmes, since the core objective of all the bridges is to maintain them.

FETA has concluded that the increase in the permitted weight of HGV's to 44 tonnes, and increasingly the use of super single high pressure tyres on the back axle, has had a detrimental impact on the wearing surface. This has directly brought about the need for resurfacing on a more regular basis, in addition to the need to strengthen the bridge to cater for such loads.

Fife relies on a good level of access across the Forth and any increase in the frequency of roadworks is believed to be harmful to the Fife economy. Consequently it would be wholly appropriate for those causing greater maintenance problems for FETA, or any other tolled bridge, to pay higher tolls in light of their greater impacts on maintenance and the wider economy.

Procedure for Changing Tolls or Charges

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 10 – The current process offers the public an opportunity to challenge changes to tolls or charges and therefore would, on the face of it, appear to be appropriate. However, the recent experience of FETA in attempting to raise tolls from 80p to £1, where only 1 objection was received, but a Public Inquiry was required and significant potential revenues were lost due to the timescales involved, suggests that this process might not offer Best Value. Perhaps consideration should be given to new statutory instruments, similar to the Local Authorities' Variation of Charges at Off street and Designated Parking Places (Notice Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which enable increases in parking charges by means of a Public Notice. Perhaps to satisfy any public concerns about such an approach, final approval over any proposals regarding the level of tolls or charges could be left with Scottish Ministers.

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 11 – See response to Q10 above.

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

Response 12 – The primary aim of tolls is to cover the capital charges of each bridge, and their ongoing maintenance costs. Ideally, they should also provide funds to support measures to increase modal shift, thereby reducing the maintenance impacts on the bridge and improving access for people to health, education and employment opportunities on either side.

In managing the demand for travel by alternative modes, maintaining a link to the inflation index could be problematic. It could also lead to cumbersome tolling levels, producing difficulties with cash collection at toll booths.

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 13 – There is an argument for tolled bridges to be managed at the national level. Indeed the Scottish Executive acknowledges that “these bridges provide nationally important links” (ref para 73 in the document) and that “all the tolled bridges connect strategically important routes” (ref para 76).

However, in view of the relatively large proportions of traffic currently crossing the Forth and Tay Road Bridges that only travel between Fife and its neighbouring authorities, there is a counter argument that suggests that they should be managed at a lower level, particularly where revenues could be invested in more sustainable travel choices. With Fife’s Community Plan and supporting documents all stressing the importance of good transport links between Fife and the major Scottish Cities to the local economy it will be important for Fife to continue to be involved in decisions concerning the management of the Forth and Tay Road Bridges.

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 14 – See responses to Q13 and Q16.

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 15 – Authorities in the West of Scotland are best placed to comment on this matter.

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 16 – The FETA model has been very successful since it was created just 3 years ago in 2002, providing or committing partnership funding for the Ferrytoll Park & Ride Expansion and A90 Slip Road, the Rosyth Port Access Road, the Cross Forth Passenger Ferry Feasibility Study, the SESTRAN Integrated Transport Corridors Study and the M9 Spur (A8000 Improvement). In doing so, FETA has been a member of the

current voluntary SESTRAN partnership, but under the emerging arrangements for the new Regional Transport Partnerships, FETA will not be a member of the statutory RTP.

Options are currently being considered by the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board for upgrading the tolling equipment and possibly relocating the toll plaza to the Fife side of the bridge in light of the pressures for space arising from the Dundee Waterfront Development and congestion in the city arising from the current toll plaza. An opportunity therefore exists to combine a reversal of the direction of the tolls (to those entering the city) with measures such as differential tolling, MOV priority lanes and a Park & Choose facility upstream of the tolls. Whilst congestion levels are much less pronounced than those at the Forth, the opportunity exists to “lock in” spare road capacity for MOV priority lanes, etc, now before it is taken up with traffic growth.

In light of FETA’s successes over such a short period, there is a strong argument to extend the FETA model to the Tay Road Bridge.

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 17 – See response to Q16.

Single Tolloed Bridges Authority

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

Response 18 – The issues relating to any form of national body are outlined in the response to Q13. There could, however, be small management savings from the creation of a Single Tolloed Bridges Authority. However, the majority of the staff employed at the Forth (total 100 staff) and Tay (total 50 staff) Road Bridges have operational roles and require to be based at the bridges.

Furthermore, with so few tolloed bridges in Scotland, and with different local/regional issues affecting each one, the case for a Single Authority is not a strong one.

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

Response 19 – See response to Q18.

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

Response 20 – No.

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May 2005