

Response from Freight Transport Association

**Hermes House
Melville Terrace
Stirling
FK8 2ND**

Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two Consultation

The Freight Transport Association (FTA) represents the freight transport interests of businesses throughout the United Kingdom. Its membership includes large blue chip multi-nationals, major third party logistics providers, own account operators who carry their own goods, and small hauliers. FTA has in excess of 11,000 members who between them operate over 200,000 heavy goods vehicles, which account for approximately half of the UK fleet. In addition, FTA members consign 90% of freight moved by rail and 70% of goods shipped by sea and air. This unique multi-modal mandate enables FTA to speak authoritatively on all aspects of freight based on the broader transport needs of industry.

FTA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Tolled Bridges Review consultation. Although many of the questions posed are of little relevance to FTA members we will address only those where we feel a response would be useful or where we feel a particular point needs to be made.

Q1 N/A

Q2 Exemptions for emergency services should remain as they are with no extension.

Q3 No

Q4 Not unless goods vehicles would be regarded as multiple occupancy or high priority vehicles.

Q5 It is normal practice for high users of any commodity to benefit from a discount. FTA feels that, particularly in the case of goods vehicle operators this should apply.

Q6 It seems reasonable that a common classification system be applied on all bridges but this must not be seen as an excuse to increase tolls for any particular class.

Q7 Modal shift could be encouraged by the provision of high priority vehicle lanes. If such lanes were introduced FTA would expect goods vehicles to be considered high priority.

Q8 It is unlikely that raising tolls at peak time would significantly reduce congestion at these times. The vast majority of travel is in response to a demand that is relatively inflexible. This may be the car driver who needs to be at the office or an appointment at a certain time or it could be the lorry driver who has a timed delivery to make at the behest of his customer.

Q9 To a degree in some cases the tolls for goods vehicles are significantly higher than those for cars. However it must be

remembered that, in the vast majority of cases, there is no alternative to goods vehicles for the delivery of merchandise. If charges for goods vehicles were to be raised by large percentages the result would be increased costs to the economy as a whole which is not in the interests of fragile economies.

Q10 Yes

Q11 Ministers must have the final say in the level of charges for bridge tolls.

Q12 Linking tolls to an index such as RPI would mean that users would be assured of the level of tolls in real terms. The inevitable result would be tolls set at odd amounts. There is no sense in a toll of 80p being increased by RPI of 3.2% to 82.5p. It may be that levels could be rounded to the nearest 5p but always referred to the original datum when being reassessed.

Q13 If all bridges were controlled by the Executive or National Transport Agency, presumably there would be consistency in the application of policy regarding them.

Q14 The FETA model seems to work reasonably well. FTA hopes that the regional authorities would continue to operate the bridges in what they see as the best interests of users.

Q15 See above

Q16 See above

Q17 See above

Q18 FTA would prefer to see all bridges to be toll free particularly for goods vehicles since the UK Government is currently proposing the introduction of Lorry Road User Charging. Unless Bridges were to be removed from the charging database operators would incur both a charge for using the bridge as a road and also paying a fee for crossing. There must be agreement and a common approach applied to all bridges when these charges are introduced. Scotland already suffers the costs of peripherality. Double charging for the use of bridges must not be allowed to happen.

Q19 Any powers given to a body running any tolled crossing must, be subject to the final authority of the Executive. All classes of traffic must be able to use the crossing at a reasonable cost. Although it is unlikely there is always a danger that a bridge authority could decide to raise the charges for a class of vehicle that it felt it did not want to levels that would price such vehicles off the crossing. Recently the M6 Toll management increased the charge for goods vehicles by 17%. Because they have a fifty year concession there is no power for the government to moderate this. Whatever management system is in place such actions must not be available to crossing operators.

Q20 As mentioned above FTA would prefer to see all crossings toll free and funded from the general block grant. If this is not to happen there must be provisions in place to ensure that goods vehicle operators are not unfairly treated in terms of toll levels or access to facilities such as priority lanes. Goods vehicles use the road system including bridges in response to demands for the movement of goods. Although much work has been done in Scotland

to move goods to other modes the vast majority of goods will continue
to travel by road and should be allowed to as economically as
possible.

Gavin Scott
4 July 2005