

Response from the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation

c/o Planning & Transportation Department
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John Paul Liddle
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Dear Paul

Tolled Bridges Review – Phase 2

On behalf of the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland I enclose a copy of the answers requested under the Tolled Bridges Review Phase Two consultation document.

I would like to state that this return should be considered not as direct answers to the questions posed, but more as comments that should be considered and debated in the deliberation process.

What is perfectly clear is that there is really no one "solution" to the three bridges. Each plays a differing role with its own unique problems and or opportunities. These "answers" are also given in a political vacuum which from the pure transportation view is ideal but with the knowledge that Political and political influences will have to be included in your deliberations. Thank you again for the opportunity given and should you require any further details please contact me on 01382 433116.

Yours sincerely



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Chairman of Integrated Transport Group
SCOTS

Response 1 – Yes. It seems overly complicated to require blue badge holders to fill in forms or apply for vouchers. It should be enough for the blue badge holder to display the blue badge as this has pictorial identification of the holder. This is similar to the system of identification operating in concession schemes on public transport which works well.

The Blue Badge system has run in to some difficulties with relation to car parking as the car may well not be occupied when it is checked by the Parking Warden and they are therefore unable to verify if the badge holder is indeed the driver or passenger. This has brought the system into some disrepute which local authorities and the police are moving to rectify. However, this does not apply to Blue Badges at tolls on bridges as it is immediately apparent to the toll booth operator if the person shown on the card is in the vehicle.

Ultimately it is expected that a smartcard system and or electronic tolling may provide an answer.

Response 2 – Ambulance, Fire and Police Services should continue to be exempt. Exemption should be extended to Coastguard vehicles. This gives consistency with Road User Charging (Exemption of Charges) (Scotland) Regulations.

Response 3 – There is no case for extending exemptions to AA, RAC or other commercial breakdown services.

Response 4 – Public transport vehicles on registered services should be exempt from tolls.

The issue of MOV brings up the fundamental question - what is the purpose of a bridge toll? The purpose of the Tay Road and Erskine Bridges toll is to cover the cost of maintaining the bridge, it is not congestion charging. If exemption of MOV is to be considered as a way of reducing congestion it must be as part of an overall congestion charging scheme for the area or indeed a national congestion charging scheme.

As FETA has a wider remit to develop support and fund measures which it considers appropriate to reduce traffic congestion MOV is an obvious consideration for them.

The relevant policy document for a bridge should make the case for MOV exemptions based on the transport aspirations and targets for that area i.e. Regional Transport Strategy, Local Transport Strategy and FETA's strategy.

Response 5 – Multiple crossing discount vouchers should not be offered to bridge users. Multiple users are contributing to the wear and tear of the bridge and should be making a full contribution to the bridges maintenance. Reducing tolls for regular users will encourage/induce more frequent trips thus increasing vehicle use and the maintenance burden.

As stated in response 4 above, public transport vehicles on registered services should be exempt from tolls.

For MOV see response 4. Also a discount voucher scheme seems unnecessary for MOV, surely if a vehicle has more than one person in it the toll booth operative will be able to see this and apply the appropriate toll.

Response 6 – It is agreed that a common vehicle classification system for vehicles should be sought not only within Scotland, but throughout the UK.

Response 7 – Again the question of the purpose of the tolling is appropriate. The encouragement of Public Transport and MOV and a reduction in SOV is an overall aspiration

for sustainable travel in Scotland, not just on tolled bridges. This question really ought to be considered in the context of National Road User Charging and what the Scottish Executive's aspirations are for this.

The need to reduce traffic on the bridge is understandable for Forth Road Bridge where the level of traffic using the bridge is greater than the link capacity and therefore is an immediate issue for the bridge itself. However, an analysis of Tay Road Bridge traffic indicates that the link capacity of the bridge is currently not exceeded and is unlikely to be in future. The Tay Road Bridge has 2 lanes in each direction, therefore the theoretical capacity is 3600 vehicles/hour (1800 vehicles/lane/hour), whilst recent traffic count data (period 1/5/2004 – 30/4/2005) indicates that on an average weekday the maximum flow in either direction is only approximately 1600 vehicles/hour.

Thus the issue in Dundee is not how to reduce traffic on the bridge, but how to manage it better as it enters and leaves the bridge and reduce its impact on the surrounding area, the city centre in particular. Dundee City Council and Fife Council are promoting a number of policies to promote public transport, MOV and discourage SOV and the Tay Road Bridge should be considered in this context.

Indeed the level of congestion caused within Dundee may warrant a detailed look at the cost collecting tolls has in terms of economic, environmental or traffic effects.

A modelling exercise to determine the cost of delays on the network against cost of collecting and maintaining the bridge has been undertaken. Early indications are that removal of the tolls could be "cost neutral" similar to the Skye Bridge scenario. Such a scenario would require traffic management solutions as opposed to the tolls acting or contributing to a "transportation solution". It is recommended that further investigation of this is undertaken by the Scottish Executive.

Erskine Bridge is also well under capacity and is closely tied-in in regional transport terms to the Clyde Tunnel and Kingston Bridge in Glasgow where all are being considered as part of a transport strategy.

Response 8 – Again purpose of tolling needs to be considered. The purpose of the Tay and Erskine Road Bridges Tolling is to ensure there is adequate funding to maintain the bridges and repay any capital borrowing. There could in this case however be mutual benefits in raising tolls at peak times in terms of reducing congestion and reducing tolling operating costs.

For example, recent traffic count data shows that 46% of traffic using the Tay Road Bridge does so during the morning and evening peak between 07:00 – 10:00 and 16:00 – 19:00 on a weekday. Consideration should be given as to whether there may be an opportunity to increase tolls during these periods and remove tolls altogether outside these times. This would be likely to reduce traffic at peak times and reduce toll collection costs.

Response 9 – Tolls are generally charged to meet the cost of repair, maintenance and strengthening programmes and as such tolls should reflect the impact of different vehicle types on these programmes. The common vehicle classification system as suggested in Question 6 should be used for this.

Response 10 – Where tolls are raised only to meet the cost of increased repair and maintenance, it should be sufficient for this to be agreed by Scottish Ministers without the need and expense of a Public Local Inquiry. The same may not hold true for the FETA model given the "congestion charging" element which may be interpreted.

Response 11 – The responsibility for setting toll levels should rest with the management authority of the bridge with final approval given by the Scottish Ministers.

Response 12 – Increases should relate to the cost of maintenance and repair programmes, (also in the case of FETA any transportation initiatives) and be subject to regular review (Annual/Biannual) and take account of several factors including traffic growth, inflation index and likely cost of future maintenance. Any increases must be practical in terms of coinage.

Response 13 – The Tay Road Bridge connects into the trunk road network at either end and taken at face value it would make sense for the Scottish Executive or National Transport Authority to manage the Tay Road Bridge. However, the majority of traffic that travels on the Tay Road Bridge is local in nature and has a disproportionate effect on Dundee city centre. Therefore, it is considered that the Scottish Executive should not have a transportation role with the Tay Road Bridge, however possibly a management role (see response to question 18). Perhaps the question here is should the A92 in Dundee be a trunk road?

At the Erskine Bridge there could be a role for the Scottish Executive to administer, manage and maintain the bridge, however, traffic on the Erskine Bridge is closely tied-in in Regional Transport terms with the Kingston Bridge and the Clyde Tunnel. Therefore the appropriate transportation authority could promote the transportation policy with maintenance functions resting with the trunk road authority.

The same logic could apply for the Forth Road Bridge where the trunk road authority could be responsible for maintenance with the RTP/FETA promoting the transportation policy initiatives.

Response 14 – Yes with regard to transportation strategy and implementation of transportation initiatives with maintenance functions resting with the trunk road authority.

Response 15 – As Response 14 above.

Responses 16 and 17 – It appears that FETA has been successful in operating and maintaining the Forth Road Bridge and promoting associated transportation projects in the surrounding area. However, it must be recognised that there are significant differences between the Forth Road Bridge, Tay Road Bridge and Erskine Bridge.

In the main at the Forth Bridge, the traffic that is delayed by the congestion caused at the bridge is traffic that is also using the bridge. Furthermore the link capacity on the bridge is exceeded so the bridge itself has a transport problem. Although the Forth Road Bridge plays an important part in neighbouring authorities' Local Transport Strategies and SESTRAN Regional Transport Strategy, and the likely South & East RTP statutory Regional Transport Strategy, it can clearly be seen that there is a benefit for a FETA Transport Strategy which looks in detail at the bridge, its immediate approaches and the surrounding area.

This does not run true at the Tay Bridge. In the main the traffic that gets caught up in the congestion is not bridge traffic, but traffic in Dundee city centre and the greater Dundee area. The level of delays for traffic (and buses) which has no intention of using the bridge is way in excess of the delay caused by traffic using the bridge. As stated earlier the link capacity of the bridge is not exceeded and is unlikely to be exceeded in future. It is not the bridge that has traffic problems, it is the management of traffic entering and leaving the bridge that causes problems.

There is therefore already a Local Transport Strategy that looks at this in detail and it is expected that it will also form a significant part of the Central & Tay RTPs Regional

Transport Strategy. It would not be appropriate for a FETA model to be used at the Tay Road Bridge as the issues are already given appropriate consideration in detail. The FETA model would provide a transport strategy for an area which the Dundee Local Transport Strategy covers in great detail. This is likely to cause more confusion rather than resolve congestion problems.

If additional FETA powers for local transport responsibilities are desired in future years, these should be conferred upon the Regional Transport Partnerships.

With the Erskine Bridge operating under capacity it is therefore apparent that it is the tolling operation that causes congestion, not the traffic demand. As such, the FETA model is unlikely to be appropriate and neither is TRBJB model for Erskine.

Response 18 – There could be merit for all 3 bridges to come under Scottish Executive or National Transport Authority with the remit of administration, management, maintenance and operation (ie the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board function) with the wider transportation powers being transferred to the relevant Regional Transport Partnership or FETA.

Response 19 – See response to question 18

Response 20 – No, just on observation that there is another substantial trunk road bridge across the River Tay near Perth, namely the Friarton Bridge, which carries significantly more traffic than the Tay Road Bridge, without the need for tolls, joint boards or dedicated transport strategies.