

PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

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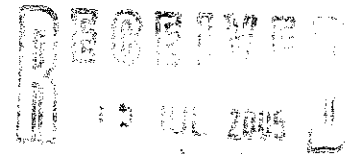


Falkirk Council
Development Services

Rebecca Daddow
Scottish Executive
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Our Ref: TP 2/18
Your Ref:
Date: 12th July 2005

Dear Rebecca,



Tolled Bridges Review, Phase 2 Consultation

I refer to the consultation document on the tolled bridges review and offer the following responses to the questions raised.

Question 1 - Consideration may be given to scrapping the independent verification of blue badge schemes. These have been subject to verification by the issuing authority and it is unclear why a tolled bridge authority should feel the need to check this, especially given the delays incurred by the driver involved.

Question 2 - There is no obvious justification for extending the exemptions for emergency vehicles to other classes of vehicles.

Question 3 - There is no justification in extending the exemptions for breakdown vehicles on tolled bridges.

Question 4 - Public transport vehicles and HOV's should be subject to exemptions, especially where this supports moves towards modal split or traffic management. Public transport and HOV approaches would be most usefully employed in conjunction with other demand management measures e.g. park and ride facilities and fiscal approaches, e.g. fairs initiatives.

Question 5 - the use of multiple crossing discount vouchers should be considered in light of the objectives set for tolling in the first place. It would be useful in this respect to complete a STAG appraisal of different tolling regimes. This would necessitate the establishment of clear objectives for the tolling regime and provide an effective framework against which different tolling regimes could be assessed. If tolling is intended or part intended to limit the amount of travel, then the provision of multi-crossing discounts is counterproductive. If tolling is intended to raise revenue for appropriate uses, any structure that maximises the revenue stream is the most appropriate. Multi-crossing tickets would only be useful if they encouraged traffic that generated greater income to that which would exist if such tickets were not issued.

The links to Question 4 are important as public transport and HOV's will only play a successful role in managing use if they are supported by action on single occupancy vehicles. In conclusion multi-crossing discounts should favour public transport or HOV's.

Question 6 - It is unclear why a common classification system should be employed, particularly when tolls operate at different levels between each bridge.

Question 7 - Yes, HOV's and public transport should be encouraged. Capacity management on the bridges, supported by park and ride and fiscal initiatives may achieve results in this area.

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Question 8 - Raising tolls at peak times may only serve to spread the peak, by re timing some journeys to the fringes of the peak period. It is unclear that this, in itself, would reduce congestion, particularly as it may serve only to release suppressed demand within the peak.

Question 9 - The relative impacts of different types of vehicles on the carriageway surface are such that accurately reflecting the differential costs of their impacts on the bridge would mean charging HGV's many tens of times the toll for a car. Given that this is unreasonable, any differential tolling system is to some extent arbitrary.

Again, the use of differential tolling should be seen in light of the objectives set for the tolling regime itself. If the tolling is intended to cover bridge maintenance costs, high charges for vehicles with high infrastructure impacts are acceptable. If tolling is intended to manage overall demand for the bridge, a system addressing the high numbers of single occupancy cars and the congestion they create is more appropriate. If the tolled bridges are key elements in the national road system, their role as strategic freight routes must be considered in any tolling regime.

Question 10 - The use of PLI's is cumbersome and time consuming where tolling levels are being adjusted. The Scottish Executive should play a direct role, most practically with any proposals for toll variations being determined by the Minister.

The variation of tolls in future years should also be seen in the context of any future national road tolling system. Each of the current toll bridges could be expected to operate as part of a wider tolled network. Should such a system be introduced in the next 10-12 years, the role of separate bridge tolls would have to be considered, both legally and financially, before any system is put in place. The recent example of the conflicts between City of Edinburgh's proposed congestion charge and the existing Forth Bridge tolls illustrates the difficulties that can arise if these issues are not dealt with at an appropriate level.

Question 11 - the final decision should lie with Ministers. Decisions taken locally on changing tolls may conflict with the wider management of the strategic road network.

Question 12 - increases in toll levels should be policy driven, not simply linked to inflation. Cost increases in public transport are considerably greater than general inflationary increases. If this trend is continued, car travel across the bridges becomes relatively cheaper. Once again, the levels of toll should be seen in terms of the overall objectives set for the tolling regime.

Question 13 - The National Transport Agency may be an effective source of bridge management, if such management is taking place in the context of a wider consideration of future management of the Trunk Road network. This relates to the answer given for question 10 above.

Question 14 - The proposed regional partnerships are the least appropriate forum for future management of the existing bridges. At present, the Forth and Tay bridges are operated by local authorities with direct interest. Transferring this to the RTP's means that authorities such as Scottish Borders, East Lothian and Falkirk would be required to participate in the management of the Forth Bridge. If the proposed SESTRAN RTP goes ahead with 8 members, only 3 of them are currently on FETA. Perth and Kinross are FETA members, but not likely to be in SESTRAN in future.

In the WESTRANS area, only those authorities around the Clyde Estuary have a direct interest in the Erskine Bridge. Authorities such as North and South Lanarkshire should not be burdened with administrative or financial responsibilities for the Erskine Bridge in which they have no direct transport interest.

Similarly, the Tay Bridge lies between SESTRAN and the proposed Tay partnership. Transferring this bridge to that partnership would mean that Stirling Council, as members of the Tay partnership, would have a locus in decisions on the Tay Bridge, which does not affect them, and no say in the Forth Bridge, which affects their trips to Edinburgh on the M9. Perth

and Kinross meanwhile, as existing members of FETA, would have a direct input to the Forth Bridge, presuming they retain their TEFA role, while they currently have no input on the Tay!

The management of the bridges should be a national or local issue. It should not be a regional issue. Bodies such as FETA may be useful observer members of SESTRAN or other regional partnerships.

Question 15 - the response to question 14 covers this.

Question 16 - the FETA model retains an element of accountability for decisions made about the bridge. It also allows effective links to the policies being developed by relevant local authorities.

Question 17 - no comment.

Question 18 - a single tolled bridge body would offer advantages if it operated the bridges as part of a clearly defined national strategy for managing the strategic road network. Any such strategy might include delivery of national road tolling, ramp metering or capacity management using HOV lanes etc.

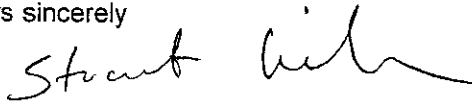
A national body that does not bring added value to the management of the bridges would serve little purpose.

Question 19 - again, the powers of any national body should support national objectives.

Question 20 - no other model is proposed.

I hope this response is of value. If you need any clarification, please contact me at the number above.

Yours sincerely



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