

RESEARCH ON SCOTLAND'S TOLLED BRIDGES

Evidence Report

Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

Project Background

- 1.1 In 2003, the Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement included a commitment to "improve access for our rural communities by reviewing existing bridge tolls in Scotland and entering into negotiations with a view to ending the discredited toll regime for the Skye Bridge". Phase One of the Tolled Bridges Review included an examination of the impact of the existing tolling structures, 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.
- 1.2 Phase Two included an examination of the broader issues relating to the management, operation and maintenance of the remaining tolled bridges, culminating on 1 March 2006 when the Minister for Transport, Tavish Scott, announced (amongst other things) that tolling would end at the Erskine Bridge from 31 March 2006.
- 1.3 Ministers took the decision that tolling should continue at the remaining two bridges – the Tay and the Forth. At the Tay Bridge, the primary reason for retaining the tolls was to meet the loan debt associated with the construction costs of the Bridge, which have not yet been fully recovered. This amounts to approximately £13 million. In addition, traffic modelling indicated that the removal of tolls would cause increased traffic and congestion in Dundee city centre, exacerbating the air quality problems in the Air Quality Management Area.
- 1.4 At the Forth Road Bridge, the primary reason for retaining the tolls is to manage traffic demand. The bridge runs at capacity at peak times, peaks are spreading, and there are severe congestion problems associated with the bridge. In both cases toll income funds the maintenance and upkeep of the bridges, and thus their availability to users.
- 1.5 Since the announcement on 1 March the Scottish Parliament has sought to consider the impact of tolls further. While Ministers remain committed to the outcomes of the Review, they understand the concerns expressed by Parliament. On 30 March 2006, following a debate on bridge tolls, the Parliament agreed to recommend:
- "...an examination of the economic, social and environmental impact and cost of retaining or removing the tolls from the Tay and Forth bridges, on Fife and Dundee, the proposals for which will be reported on as soon as possible..."*
- 1.6 The Minister for Transport has since confirmed that the study will have two main strands. The first is to engage independent consultants to carry out a detailed study of the economic, social and environmental costs and impacts of retaining or removing the Tay and Forth tolls. This study will be informed by earlier work on the Tolled Bridges Review, and will follow the principles set out in the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) for conducting economic, environmental and social impact assessments.
- 1.7 In advance of this study, interested parties were invited to submit to the Scottish Executive any factual evidence in support of the retention or removal of tolls from the

bridges. While this was an open invitation, letters were sent to around 180 individuals and organisations on 1 June 2006. Recipients included all MSPs, relevant local authorities, regional transport partnerships, bridge authorities, non government organisations, motoring organisations and public transport representatives. The closing date for these submissions was 17 August 2006.

1.8 The purpose of this commission is to fulfil the requirements of the Parliament in respect to the commitments described above, and as articulated in the project brief. The objectives are to:

- Provide an assessment, in relation to the aim of the Study, of the submissions received by the Scottish Executive in response to the Minister for Transport's call for evidence on 17 May; and
- Provide an assessment, in relation to the aim of the Study, of the traffic, economic, environmental and social impacts of retaining and removing the bridge tolls from one or both bridges.

1.9 The study will address the immediate, short to medium term and, where possible, long term impacts of each of the tolling scenarios.

This Report

1.10 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the responses and to present an evaluation and analysis of the factual evidence. This is designed to provide a greater understanding of particular aspects of bridge use and route selection.

1.11 All responses (in support of the retention or removal of tolls from the bridges) have been individually reviewed and those containing factual evidence (as opposed to subjective opinion) have been identified.

2. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

2.1 Eighty nine responses to the consultation were received from a wide variety of individuals and organisations, from both the public and private sectors. Despite the call for factual evidence, the majority (75%) of responses, particularly from individuals, provided subjective opinions without any factual evidence. Only 25% of responses contained facts to support the retention or removal of the tolls.

2.2 Table 2.1 (below) shows a summary of all of the responses submitted:

TABLE 2.1 RESPONSE SUMMARY TABLE

Sector	Number of Responses	Number of Factual Responses	Agree with retaining tolls	Disagree with retaining tolls	Indifferent
Personal	63	1	2	61	0
Business	2	1	1	1	0
Organisation	9	7	2	5	2
MSP	8	7	0	8	0
Local Government	4	4	0	2	2
Tolled bridge authority	2	2	1	1	0
Other	1	0	0	0	1

2.3 Of the total number of responses (both factual and otherwise) around 88% expressed objections to the retention of tolls and less than 7% are in agreement that the tolls should be retained.

2.4 Of those respondents who provided only opinion (75%), a number of common themes were identified. A number of the business responses commented that the tolls place their businesses at an unfair disadvantage as they incur higher costs. Of the individual respondents, the most common point expressed was that it is unfair and illogical to keep the tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges when tolls have been removed from all other bridges in Scotland. Table 2.2 shows that a number of individuals also felt that the tolls caused congestion and air pollution both around the bridge and in Dundee City Centre, and that they were an unfair extra tax on those people who use the bridge.

2.5 Of the respondents who provided only opinion Table 2.2 lists the most common statements and the frequency with which they were made.

TABLE 2.2 INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS WITH REGARD TO TOLLS ON THE TAY AND FORTH ROAD BRIDGES

Opinion	Number of Comments
It is unfair/illogical that the tolls remain when they have been removed from other bridges in Scotland	25
The tolls cause congestion	23
The tolls place an unfair additional tax on the people who use the bridges i.e. tolls should be included in Road Tax.	21
The tolls cause air pollution	14
The bridges have already been paid for	13
The cost of moving the tolls (at Tay Bridge) cannot be justified	9
There are no valid reasons for keeping the tolls	7
Moving tolls would only relocate congestion and not remove it	6
The tolls contribute to congestion in Dundee City Centre	6
The tolls are an injustice to the people of Fife and other regions served by the bridges	6
There was no congestion during the industrial action when the tolls were not in operation	5
Public Transport is poor and inadequate	4
The tolls have a negative impact on tourists	3
Removing the tolls would attract more businesses	2
We have no choice but to travel at peak times	2
Debt, maintenance and improvement to the bridges should be funded by the Scottish Executive	2
There should be a solution to the tolls which does not involve stopping and starting e.g. electronic tolling.	2

3. FACTUAL EVIDENCE

3.1 Responses which include factual evidence include:

- One private individual
- Stagecoach Scotland
- National Alliance Against Tolls - Scotland
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Friends of the Earth Scotland & Transform Scotland
- Fife Chamber of Commerce – Future Alliance
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Federation of Small Businesses – East of Scotland Region
- Scott Barrie MSP
- Helen Eadie MSP
- Christine May MSP
- Marilyn Livingston MSP
- Marlyn Glen MSP
- Kate Maclean MSP
- Shona Robison MSP
- North East Fife Liberal Democrat Group
- Fife Council
- Dundee City Council
- West Lothian Council
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Tay Road Bridge Joint Board
- Forth Estuary Transport Authority

3.2 For analysis these can be usefully divided into groups as follow:

- Responses from Individuals (1 response.)
- Responses from Businesses (1 response.)
- Responses from Organisation (7 responses.)
- Responses from MSPs (7 responses.)
- Responses from Local Government (4 responses.)
- Responses from Tolled Bridge Authorities (2 responses.)

3.3 The key messages from the responses in each group will be described in turn.

Response from an Individual

3.4 The single factual response from an individual was specifically in relation to the Tay Road Bridge and was against the continuation of tolls. This evidence was based on five key issues:

- **Finance.** He states that the financial debt of the bridge relates to maintenance and not construction, and that other non-toll bridges also incur maintenance costs but

these are not recovered by tolls.

- **Toll Upgrading.** He states that removing the tolls would avoid the estimated £15 million cost of relocating the toll booths to the south side of the bridge, and he states that this is the same amount as the outstanding loan.
- **Congestion.** He states that an increase in traffic flow over the bridge does not necessarily equate to a corresponding increase in congestion, and adds that the removal of the toll may eliminate a bottleneck and therefore reduce congestion.
- **Key Stakeholders.** He states that since the removal of the tolls has been an issue for recent debate, Dundee City Council and the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board (TRJB) do not support the tolls.
- **A92.** He suggests the A92 should be a trunk road on the bridge itself as this would be consistent with the bridges at Skye, Kessock, Kingston, Friarton and Erskine.

Response from a Business

3.5 The single factual response from the business community is from Stagecoach Scotland. This contains evidence relating to each bridge. The main point made by Stagecoach is that busses are part of the solution to congestion and not the problem, and Stagecoach's view is that buses should therefore be exempt from paying bridge tolls.

3.6 In relation to the Tay bridge, to combat congestion in Dundee Stagecoach support the relocation of tolls to the south side of the bridge for southbound vehicles only. Stagecoach currently operate nine buses per hour over the Tay bridge and wishes to establish a park & ride facility to the south of the bridge, similar to the operation at Ferrytoll.

3.7 In relation to the Forth bridge, Stagecoach currently operates 12 buses per hour at peak times over the bridge and is heavily committed to the Ferrytoll park & ride scheme. Stagecoach supports differentiated tolling for vehicles other than PSVs, and road user charging.

Responses from Organisations

3.8 Seven responses from organisations contained evidence. The organisations are:

- National Alliance Against Tolls - Scotland
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Transform Scotland
- Fife Chamber of Commerce – Future Alliance
- Federation of Small Businesses - Scotland
- Federation of Small Businesses – East of Scotland Region
- North East Fife Liberal Democrat Group

Organisations Against Tolls

3.9 The organisations against tolls on both bridges include the National Alliance Against Tolls -Scotland, Fife Chamber of Commerce Future Alliance, North East Fife Liberal Democrat Group and the Federation of Small Businesses . Key points made in these

responses include:

- The majority of people and businesses who pay bridge tolls (for both bridges) are based in Fife.
- Businesses in Fife make 27,500 return journeys per week over the Forth Road Bridge and pay £1.4 million per year. The indirect cost of deliveries represents an additional £2million.
- Construction costs have been paid. The remaining debt (for the Tay bridge) is for costs incurred subsequent to the construction of the bridge.
- Previous reports have highlighted the negative economic impact caused by tolls on the Skye and Erskine bridges. It is stated that this causes a knock-on negative social impact.
- The environmental cost of tolls. It is stated that tolls cause a traffic bottleneck, that this causes congestion and congestion causes pollution.

3.10 The Federation of Small Businesses' East of Scotland Region submitted the results of a recent survey of members. This survey states that 95% of its 5,000 Small to Medium Enterprise members would like the Bridges to form part of the trunk road network to be paid for and maintained by centrally collected taxes.

3.11 In relation to several issues connected to the economic impact of tolls, the respondent's survey results are inconclusive. The Federation of Small Businesses' East of Scotland Region states that this will only be known once/if the tolls are removed.

3.12 The Federation of Small Businesses' East of Scotland Region also states that its members are strongly in favour of a second crossing of the Forth and that they favour a tunnel to be paid for out of "general road related taxes."

3.13 North East Fife Liberal Democrat Group is against tolls on the Tay Bridge, and in principle against tolls on the Forth Bridge. However, it should be noted that they do not consider that the removal of tolls on the Forth Bridge should be implemented at the present time "in the uncertainty about the long term future of the bridge and the need for a replacement."

Organisations In Favour of Tolls

3.14 Submissions from organisations in favour tolls on both bridges include a joint submission from Friends of the Earth Scotland & Transform Scotland, and one from the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK. Key issues are listed below:

- Bridge tolls can be used on both the Tay and Forth bridges to manage traffic demand.
- If the removal of bridge tolls were to increase congestion, this would increase pollution.
- The removal of bridge tolls would represent a financial transfer from the general tax payer to car commuters.
- The removal of bridge tolls would represent a further reduction of private transport prices.
- The response from the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK mirrors

accurately the issues raised in the evidence submitted by Stagecoach Scotland.

Responses from MSPs

3.15 Seven responses containing evidence were received from MSPs. These are from:

- Scott Barrie MSP
- Helen Eadie MSP
- Christine May MSP
- Marilyn Livingston MSP
- Marlyn Glen MSP
- Kate Maclean MSP
- Shona Robison MSP

3.16 Of these, the same evidence was submitted by the first four. This consists of a report on the outcomes of Phase 2 of the Scottish Executive's Tolled Bridges Review which was submitted to Fife Council's Policy & Resources Committee on 14th August 2006, and a consultation document relating to a Bill (proposed by Helen Eadie MSP) for the Abolition of Forth and Tay Bridge Tolls dated June 2006.

3.17 All of the MSPs who have provided evidence would strongly like to see the tolls on both bridges removed. The contents of the Phase 2 report are not restated in this paper because they are already very well understood by the Scottish Executive. Key issues from the Bill consultation document and those who submitted it are listed below:

- "The Fife Labour MSPs strongly support the case that the tolls be removed from the Forth and Tay Bridges and that many of the arguments which led to the removal of tolls at the Skye and Erskine bridges apply equally to the Forth and Tay."
- Over the last 40 years business in Fife have become more reliant on trade with markets outwith Fife and upon the supply of raw materials from outwith Fife.
- Fife businesses are therefore more dependent on road transport than they were historically.
- "Consistently industry in Fife has been almost unanimous in seeking the abolition of bridge tolls on both the Tay and Forth Bridges, maintaining that it is an unnecessary penalty on Fife industry and commerce."
- "...tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges has increasingly been perceived as a negative factor to investment in Fife."
- "In recent years tolls have frequently been identified by companies as a block to inward investment, and company representatives have shown concern at the existence of tolls: the delays associated with toll collection and the administrative arrangements that companies are required to establish."
- Issues are raised in relation to the bureaucracy/administration required of disabled people claiming exemption of payment of tolls to cross the bridges.
- An issue for freight is raised in relation to the Superfast Ferry operating from Rosyth. It is stated that congestion caused by the tolls combined with a lack of investment in the A8000 are critical pinch-points for the port of Rosyth. In this vein it is also stated that this may work against the Government's policy of moving freight from road to sea or rail.

- Excerpts relating to commitments made in the Liberal/Labour coalition agreement are quoted. These include regeneration, economic and transport issues.

3.18 Key points made in the submissions from Marilyn Glenn MSP, Kate Maclean MSP and Shona Robison MSP are described below:

- With tolls having been removed from other bridges in Scotland, the remaining tolls on the Tay and Forth bridges cannot be justified on the grounds of fairness.
- Tolls were removed from the Erskine Bridge to relieve congestion in Glasgow city centre.
- The debt remaining on the Skye Bridge was £27 million and this has been met by the Executive. The debt remaining on the Tay bridge is £13 million.
- “Bridge tolls ... seen as an “East of Scotland tax” will have a decidedly negative social impact upon the local communities that are thus affected.”
- “The plans to move the toll plaza (on the Tay Bridge) from the north to the south end of the bridge are estimated to cost around £13 million. This will double the current deficit to £26 million. This is arguably not the best use of the available money.”
- “The Scottish Executive pays for all maintenance on all other bridges in Scotland apart from the Tay and Forth. However, since maintenance grants are needed from the Executive they are already indirectly contributing to the Tay Bridge.”
- “... local businesses ... see the best way to improve the economy of Dundee and Fife is to create a level playing field for them and to remove the tolls.”
- A social inclusion issue in relation to tolls on the Tay Bridge is raised in relation to staff, patients and visitors travelling to Ninewells hospital.
- A congestion issue in relation to tolls on the Tay Bridge is raised; that the tolls create additional congestion and therefore additional pollution.
- The concept of tolls preventing unnecessary journeys is challenged and it is suggested that the best way to influence a modal shift towards public transport is to lower fares rather than add cost to car travel. First Scotrail has recently increased the cost of some train ticket prices from Dundee to Scotland’s other major cities.

Responses from Local Government

3.19 All four responses from Local Government included factual evidence. The Local Government submissions are:

- Fife Council
- Dundee City Council
- West Lothian Council
- City of Edinburgh Council

3.20 Of the four Councils, two are in favour of the tolls being abolished and two are neutral or have reserved from stating a position.

Local Authorities Against Tolls

3.21 The following Councils are in favour of the tolls being abolished:

- Fife Council
- Dundee City Council

3.22 Key points made are predominantly in relation to the Tay Bridge and include the following:

- Issues relating to fairness and equity between the South East of Scotland (Fife in particular) and the rest of Scotland.
- “The public perception is that it is both illogical and unfair that the only two bridges with tolls remaining in Scotland are the Tay and the Forth.”
- It is inconsistent with other parts of the road network and perceived by motorists as unfair that bridge tolls fund maintenance and operational costs (of the Tay and Forth Bridges.)

3.23 Specifically in relation to the Tay Bridge:

- It is stated that the Tay Bridge tolls cause congestion and therefore pollution. It is further stated that this was proven “when the staff on the tolls took industrial action recently, traffic moved freely across the bridge and there were no queues.”
- “...It can be concluded that the tolls at current levels do not play a role in demand management...”
- Traffic modelling undertaken in Dundee using a Paramics model shows that the bridge tolls cause queues to develop causing congestion throughout Dundee city centre and beyond.
- “The Paramics modelling work ... shows that for the Central (Dundee) Waterfront Development road network to operate, there must be no queues related to the Tay Road Bridge tolls.” This can be achieved by renewing the toll plaza, relocating it to the south of the bridge or removing the toll.

Local Authorities “Neutral” about Tolls

3.24 The following Councils are “neutral” about tolls:

- City of Edinburgh Council
- West Lothian Council

3.25 The City of Edinburgh Council’s submission took the form of a report prepared for Council discussion on 24 August 2006. In broad terms the report was a restatement of the recent history of tolling at the Forth Road Bridge, and the case for a second crossing. It noted the potential for increased congestion if the tolls were to be removed. While it made no recommendation, the report noted the Executive’s study, and that “on overall balance, it is considered that the removal of tolls from the Forth Road Bridge would not be in the interests of motorists and other travellers”.

3.26 West Lothian Council submitted a report which was approved on 29th August 2006 by their Environment and Development Committee. The Committee “reserved its position on the retention or removal of the tolls on the Tay and Forth Bridges pending the outcome of the study, but to monitor developments through its involvement on the Forth Estuary Transport Authority Board.”

Responses from Tolled Bridge Authorities

- 3.27 Two responses containing evidence were received from the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board and the Forth Estuary Transport Authority.
- 3.28 Key points made by the Lord Provost of the City of Dundee, on behalf of the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board include:
- Collection of the toll causes congestion in Dundee.
 - Proposals for the redevelopment of the Dundee Central Waterfront area require congestion caused by the collection of tolls to be removed.
 - The point in relation to the Tay Bridge tolls causing congestion and therefore pollution was repeated, as was the assertion that this was proved when the staff on the tolls took industrial action and traffic moved freely across the bridge with no queues.
- 3.29 Key points from the submission from Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA) include:
- Traffic using the Forth Bridge continues to grow at a rate almost twice the Scottish average.
 - At the current rate of traffic growth, the bridge will be handling almost 30 million vehicles by 2010. This is close to three times the original, designed, practical capacity of 11 million vehicles per year.
 - The LTS identified that FETA alone could not reduce the demand for cross-Forth travel. Instead, it concluded that traffic may be managed by implementing an alternative tolling regime coupled with supporting a range of public transport alternatives and committing to feasibility studies to provide a business case for a new multi-modal crossing in the Forth Estuary.

4. SUMMARY & ANALYSIS OF FACTUAL EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The majority of evidence submitted was from respondents who object to the continuation of tolls on one or both the Tay and Forth Bridges. This was particularly prevalent in material submitted by individuals, organisations representing the business community, and MSPs. Some of this evidence can be applied equally to both bridges. Examples include:
- The issues of “fairness” and “equality” of people in the East of Scotland, particularly in Fife (which is affected by both bridges), paying bridge tolls whilst similar tolls have been discontinued on other structures such as the Skye and Erskine Bridges.
 - The toll revenue being used to pay for maintenance rather than the original construction costs. (This is cited as an anomaly because the Scottish Executive pays for the maintenance of other trunk road bridges throughout Scotland.)
- 4.2 Other evidence against the tolls relates specifically to one bridge only, in most cases the Tay Bridge. Examples include:
- The Paramics model of traffic flow in Dundee; and...
 - The social implication of patients and visitors travelling from Fife to receive health care at Ninewells Hospital.
- 4.3 One issue which was repeated in the evidence in relation to the Tay Bridge was not specifically about the tolls themselves, but about the decision making process to determine whether they should remain or be abolished. The respondents which cited this issue raised doubts about the wisdom of virtually doubling the amount of debt (from £13 million to an estimated £26 million) to move the toll collection plaza when the £13 million of “new” investment could be used instead to cancel the existing debt and remove the tolls.
- 4.4 Of the two bridges, the factual evidence against tolls is stronger in relation to the Tay Bridge. There are two consistent pieces of evidence which suggest the tolls here cause road traffic congestion and consequently environmental implications in Dundee. This evidence includes:
- Dundee’s Paramics model of traffic flow; and
 - Recent industrial action by bridge staff during which vehicles crossed the bridge without paying the toll.
- 4.5 Relative to that for the Tay Bridge there was a smaller body of evidence pointing to the removal of tolls on the Forth Bridge, and some respondents withheld from stating a preference with regards to tolls on the Forth Bridge until more information is available regarding the potential requirement for a new crossing.
- 4.6 The evidence submitted in favour of tolls can generally be applied equally to the tolls on both bridges. Such evidence was submitted by environmental organisations and a passenger transport operator. Most of this evidence does not simply point to the need for the tolls to be retained in their current form. Rather, the respondents state the tolls should be retained but modified. Examples of the modifications proposed include:

- Varying or increasing the tolls to manage demand more effectively.
 - Making public transport vehicles (in this case buses) exempt from paying tolls.
- 4.7 Some of the evidence from some respondents conflicts with that submitted by other parties. For example, most of the responses in favour of retaining the tolls suggest that tolls are (or can be) an effective means of managing traffic demand on and around the bridges. This is directly at odds with some of the evidence in favour of abolishing the tolls - such as the evidence in favour of abolishing the Tay Bridge toll which states that traffic on the bridge has increased disproportionately compared to other routes into Dundee, despite the toll. It is in areas such as this where the research and modelling elements of this study will clarify matters.
- 4.8 All of the evidence described in this report is rational and reasonable. However, it is not possible to scientifically analyse, validate or discount any of it because we need to know more detail about various sensitivities in relation to the tolls at each bridge. Specifically we need to know:
- The extent to which the volume of traffic crossing each bridge is sensitive to congestion,
 - The extent to which traffic congestion is related to how the toll is collected, and...
 - The extent to which the volume of traffic crossing each bridge is sensitive to the financial cost of the toll.
- 4.9 The primary research element of this study will provide a guide in relation to these sensitivity issues and to the social impact of the tolls. On this basis the modelling phase will provide more scientific evidence in relation to whether removing or retaining the tolls would prompt greater or less congestion. Further analysis will then indicate the likely environmental and economic impact of the tolls.