TRANS*form* Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

Response to Petition PE921

Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee
Parliamentary evidence paper - 14th June 2006

1. Introduction

TRANS*form* Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and more socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators, local authorities, national environment and conservation groups, consultancies and local transport campaigns.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Petition PE921:

> *"Petition by Rev. Ross Brown calling for the Scottish parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge."*

TRANS*form* Scotland takes the view that, as there has been no increase in the price of road use in recent years, there is no sound case for reducing or removing bridge tolls.

At the same time, climate change emissions from the transport sector continue to rise. There is no prospect of Scottish governance addressing Scotland's disastrous environmental record if action is not taken to increase, not decrease, the price of road transport.

2. Transport prices and costs

The pressing economic, social and environmental problems of traffic congestion, air pollution and climate change are to a large extent caused by over-dependence on the private car. This situation has come about for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which is the failure of motoring to reflect the costs it imposes on the environment.

Contrary to the frequent statements by motoring organisations of the "hard-pressed motorist", the simple fact is that over recent decades the real price of motoring has not increased.

Private motoring is more affordable today than it was 20 years ago, while the price of public transport has risen: since 1980, bus and rail fares have risen by 37% in real terms.[i] Future projections suggest that without action being taken, that the price of private motoring will fall by 29% between 2000 and 2010 and a further 24% by 2025.[ii]

There have been no increases in taxes on petrol over the last two years. Increases in fuel duty planned by the Treasury have been scrapped in response to rising oil prices and pressure from motoring and road haulage groups. In Scotland the percentage of fuel price that is taken up by taxes is lower today than it was in 1996.[iii]

Furthermore, and crucially, the transport sector does not cover its external costs. It is estimated that road taxation covers only one-third to one-half of the costs private car

users and haulage companies currently impose on society and the environment. The University of Leeds' Institute for Transport Studies report, commissioned by the UK Department for Transport, *Surface Transport Costs & Charges*,[iv] in what remains the most comprehensive report of its kind in the UK, reported that:

> *"For the British road sector as a whole, taxes and charges in 1998 covered between one third to a half of their relevant marginal social and environmental costs, depending on the range of the cost estimates examined. Congestion costs, making up some two-thirds of overall costs, are the most important cost category, followed by environmental costs, accident costs and infrastructure maintenance."*

The authors were subsequently quoted as saying that *"far from being over-taxed, motorists pay only a third to a half of the costs they impose on society... [The report] claims the cost of congestion, pollution, infrastructure maintenance and accidents far outweighs the £32 billion fuel and car taxes collected each year"*.[v]

3. Climate Change Programme

The transport sector is one of the principal contributors to climate change. There is now widespread acceptance that climate change is real, that it is already having damaging impacts across the planet, and that these impacts will worsen.

Yet despite a now high level of awareness of this issue, there is however little evidence that the Scottish transport sector is taking measures to reduce emissions: car use and road freight levels continue to increase, while progress on vehicle efficiency is limited at best.

Action to reduce the price of car commuting across the Forth Road Bridge could only be read as a specific encouragement towards long-distance car commuting – the very policy that the sustainable transport policies espoused by the Scottish Executive (in its Climate Change Programme and its draft National Transport Strategy) seeks to deter.

3. Tolled Bridges Review

TRANS*form* Scotland remains critical of the Scottish Executive's failure to support FETA's road charging proposals for the Forth Road Bridge, and its ultimate decision to reject FETA's Application in Principle for a road user charge.

TRANS*form* Scotland holds that if the Scottish Executive is not prepared to support local plans for tackling traffic congestion, and having also failed to support The City of Edinburgh Council's 2005 congestion charging proposal, it is its responsibility to come forward with a national road pricing scheme for reducing traffic levels and pollution. It has so far failed to come forward with any such scheme.

4. Summary of views on Petition PE921

Existing levels of road traffic are a major problem for the environment, for public health, and for the economy. Road traffic, through air and noise pollution, is a major factor in adversely affecting public health. Traffic levels also have a major damaging impact on the global environment, and in particular as a major contributor to climate change. More locally, road traffic levels adversely affect the economy through the imposition of congestion costs. The forecasts for traffic growth must not, for the environmental and economic health of the country, be allowed to come to fruition.

For progress to be made in reducing traffic congestion, and for tackling emissions from transport, it is imperative that the price of road use rises so that it more closely reflects the costs it imposes on the economy, society and the environment.

Whilst it may be very tempting to support populist demands for reducing the price of road use, such a policy can only lead to an intensification of the problems of the transport sector, and the worsening of the sector's external impacts. For these reasons, we can find no compelling case why the Scottish Parliament should take action to restrict the opportunities for the Scottish Executive to take action to tackle these problems.

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[i] Department for Transport (2005) *Transport Trends* 2005 Edition, Trend 2.6 - <http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/page/dft_transstats_026281.hcsp>

[ii] Department for Transport (2005) *The Future of Transport: Modelling and Analysis* - <http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_about/documents/downloadable/dft_about_036814.pdf>

[iii] Scottish Executive (2005) *Scottish Transport Statistics: no 24* 2005 Edition, table 11.9 - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/25100154/01557>

[iv] University of Leeds Institute of Transport Studies (2001): *Surface Transport Costs and Charges: Great Britain 1998* - <http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/STCC/surface_transport.html>

[v] Quoted in Financial Times, 07/08/01.

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