

TRANSform Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

Executive Debate on Abolition of Bridge Tolls

Thursday 31st May 2007, 15:00-17:00

Briefing from TRANSform Scotland

1. Introduction

- 1.1 TRANSform Scotland urges MSPs to **oppose proposals for the removal of tolls from the Forth and Tay Road Bridges**. Any proposals of this kind would, firstly, represent a financial subsidy from the general taxpayer to car commuters and the road haulage industry, and secondly, worsen traffic and environmental conditions in South-East Scotland.
- 1.2 There has been *no increase* in the overall price of road use in recent years: *this is recorded, statistical, fact*. As such, we see no sound reasons for the removal of road charges such as bridge tolls.
- 1.3 At the same time, climate change emissions from transport continue to rise unchecked. 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. Reductions in the price of road use can only further damage the future prospects for public transport and the environment.
- 1.4 TRANSform Scotland supports the decision of the then transport minister, in the *Tolled Bridges Review* statement of 01/03/06, that tolls should remain on the Bridges because of the role of toll charges in road traffic demand management.
- 1.5 TRANSform Scotland considers that the removal of bridge tolls would worsen Scotland's environmental record and undermine the nation's attempts to reduce climate change emissions.

2. Arguments against removing bridge tolls

2.1 It would have a regressive impact in tax terms

- 2.1.1 Removing bridge tolls would require the general taxpayer to pay for bridge maintenance: this would represent a transfer of funds from non-road users to road users. This would represent a transfer from the less affluent (i.e. non-car owners) to the more affluent (i.e. car owners).

2.2 It would worsen congestion

- 2.2.1 Removing bridge tolls would act as encouragement to increase road use: this will increase levels of traffic and congestion on the bridges.
- 2.2.2 The Scottish Executive-commissioned *Tolled Bridges Study: Phase One TMfS Model runs final report* found that removing bridge tolls would increase traffic levels on the Forth Road Bridge by 15% southbound and by 20% northbound,ⁱ while FETA's response to the Scottish Executive tolled bridges review indicated that the removal of Forth Bridge tolls would increase traffic levels by 21%.ⁱⁱ This would have a severe negative impact on congestion levels.
- 2.2.3 It is understood that part of this forecast increase in traffic levels would be as a result of trips being made via the Forth Road Bridge rather than via the Kincardine Bridge. This would be a perverse response, especially in the context of the Scottish Executive's action to increase road capacity at the Kincardine Bridge by the construction of a second road bridge. Action should be taken to remove traffic flows from the Forth Road Bridge, not to increase them.
- 2.2.4 In the case of the Tay, the Executive's *Tolled Bridges Review: Phase Two Report* states:

“Modelling indicates that the existing congestion problems on [the] Tay [Bridge] would be exacerbated without tolls, and that increased tolls could help to ease congestion problems.”ⁱⁱⁱ

2.2.5 It is very clear from the available evidence that removal of tolls on either bridge would lead to increased congestion, with resultant negative economic impacts.

2.3 It would reduce the transport sector’s coverage of its external costs

2.3.1 Road users do not cover their external costs. Road taxation covers only one-third to one-half of road users’ external costs.^{iv}

2.3.2 Removing bridge tolls would further reduce the contribution of the road sector to meeting its external (environmental, social and economic) impacts.

2.3.3 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.

2.3.4 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.^v 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.^{vi}

2.3.5 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.^{vii}

2.4 It would worsen Scotland’s ability to meet existing Scottish Climate Change Programme commitments

2.4.1 The transport sector is one of the main 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. 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.

3. About TRANSform Scotland

3.1 TRANSform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and 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 campaign for a more sensible transport system, less dependent on unsustainable modes such as the car, the plane and road freight, and more reliant on sustainable modes such as walking, cycling, public transport and freight by rail or sea.

ⁱ Scottish Executive (2004) *Tolled Bridges Study: Phase One TMFS Model runs Final Report* p.27
<http://www.tmfs.org.uk/Model_data/Documents/TMFS%20Bridges%20Report%20Phase%201_Model%20runs.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Forth Estuary Transport Authority (2006) *Tolled Bridges Review: Consultation Response*, p.4 -
<http://cpol.edinburgh.gov.uk/getdoc_ext.asp?DocId=86510>

ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Executive (2006) *Tolled Bridges Review: Phase Two Report*, p.25 - <<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/95522/0023115.pdf>>

^{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 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>

^{vi} 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>

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

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Lamb’s House, Burgess Street, Leith, Edinburgh, EH6 6RD
Tel: 0131 467 7714 Fax: 0131 554 8656
Email: info@transformscotland.org.uk
Web: www.transformscotland.org.uk