Scottish Environment LINK

The voice of Scotland's environment movement

Scottish Environment LINK is the umbrella body for the environment movement in Scotland. Involving 34 member bodies representing a spectrum of environment and associated culture heritage interests, we have a cumulative individual membership of around 500,000 people across Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to coordinate a panel of environment organisations to give evidence on the environmental impact of the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Bill. Our panel brings together representatives with expertise on climate change, sustainable development, and sustainable transport from LINK member bodies and a closely affiliated organisation – TRANSform Scotland.

LINK believes that our current patterns of transport are unsustainable. Between 1993 and 2003, traffic volumes on Scotland's roads increased by 18%. Last year, according to government figures, they rose again by 3%, reaching their highest ever levels. Carbon dioxide emissions from transport represent 23% of the UK's total emissions, and rose by 8% between 1990 and 2004. Last month saw the publication of the government's toll impact study, commissioned by the previous administration. It concluded that removal of tolls from the Forth road bridge would cause the number of vehicles using the bridge to increase by 10%, and similarly on the Tay bridge vehicle numbers would increase by 40%. This would have serious implication for the Scottish government's commitment to carbon emissions reductions, as well as the traffic stabilisation targets.

You may be aware of a briefing paper published earlier this year by TRANSform Scotland, stating the case against the removal of tolls from the Forth and Tay Road Bridges. The briefing paper is included as part of this written evidence. Areas of particular concern to LINK and Transform Scotland are:

- the likelihood of increased greenhouse gas emission due to abolition of the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges and the implications for the proposed carbon emissions budgets in the forthcoming climate change bill
- the alternative sustainable transport opportunities which could be delivered for the same cost as abolishing the tolls
- the traffic mitigation measures which will be needed if bridge tolls are abolished, to ensure traffic stabilisation targets are met and emissions are reduced

We intend to cover these issues in more detail during our oral evidence session on the 18th September.

Scottish Environment LINK Transport Sub Group and Transform Scotland
September 2007

TRANS*form* Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

Bridge Tolls

Parliamentary Briefing - Wednesday 23rd May 2007

Briefing from TRANS*form* Scotland

1. Introduction

1.1 TRANS*form* 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 TRANS*form* 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 TRANS*form* 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 TRANS*form* Scotland

3.1 TRANS*form* 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.

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[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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