



West Lothian

Development & Regulatory Services

Our Ref: Tolled Bridges Review – Phase 2

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CON539/25
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Rebecca Daddow
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27 June 2005

Dear Rebecca

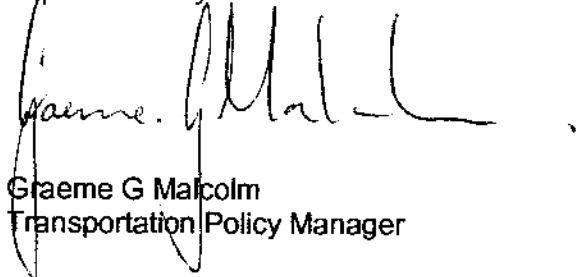
TOLLED BRIDGES REVIEW - PHASE 2 CONSULTATION

With reference to the above consultation, West Lothian Council's Policy, Partnership and Resources Committee approved its response on the 21 June 2005.

The full report is attached for your information and Appendix 1 should be considered as the council's formal response to the twenty questions asked.

The council welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation exercise and hopes this response will be of value to the executive.

Yours sincerely



Graeme G Malcolm
Transportation Policy Manager





POLICY PARTNERSHIP AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**TOLLED BRIDGES REVIEW PHASE TWO – RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH
EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION**

REPORT BY TRANSPORTATION MANAGER

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform committee of the proposed response to the Scottish Executive's consultation document *Tolled Bridges Review - Phase Two Consultation*.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the committee approves Appendix 1 as the council's response to the consultation by the Scottish Executive on the *Tolled Bridges Review*.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs and working in partnership.
II Policy and Legal	Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 creates the legal framework. The Road User Charging (Exemption from Charges) (Scotland) Regulations stipulate the statutory minimum level of exemptions made under the Act.
III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	None.
IV Consultations	None.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

The Scottish Executive's Transport White Paper, published on 16 June 2004, outlined the approach for the review of existing bridge tolls in Scotland.

The first phase of the review, completed in November 2004, examined the existing tolling structure, including the impact on tolls 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.

Phase two examines broader issues relating to the management, operation and maintenance of the tolled bridges, including how tolled bridges may relate to the proposed new regional and national transport arrangements.

As a board member of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA), this review is of particular interest to the council.

Responses to the phase two consultation document require to be submitted by Friday 8 July 2005.

The consultation deals with the following main issues:

- Exemptions;
- Discount Schemes;
- Classification of Vehicles;
- Reducing Traffic and Congestion on Tolled Bridges;
- Tolls Reflecting Wear and Tear;
- Procedure for Changing Tolls or Charges;
- Executive / Transport Agency and Regional Transport Partnerships;
- Joint Boards; and
- Single Tolled Bridges Authority.

The specific questions and proposed responses are given in Appendix 1.

E. CONCLUSION

The key issue arising from this consultation is the effective management of vehicles crossing the Forth Road Bridge, particularly during the congested morning and evening peak periods, whilst maintaining and improving accessibility for people across the Forth

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Copy of the consultation document *Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two* consultation is available in the members' lounge or via www.scotland.gov.uk/publications.

Appendices/Attachments: Appendix 1 - Response to Scottish Executive consultation.

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21 June 2005

RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE ON THE TOLLED BRIDGES REVIEW – PHASE TWO

Question 1 - Do you think that the system for verifying Blue Badge exemptions should be changed? If so, can you suggest what these changes should be?

WLC Response 1 – The council supports the continuation of exemptions for blue badge holders. However, the serious issue of Blue Badge misuse and fraud requires to be reviewed.

With advances in new technology and improvement of toll collection, issuing smartcards or tag devices should automatically give the verification that is required for Blue Badge holders.

Question 2 - Do you consider that the exemptions for emergency service vehicles should remain limited to the Ambulance, Fire and Police Services, or should we consider extending this to cover other key services?

WLC Response 2 - The number of exemptions should be kept to a minimum and not extended beyond those listed in the Road User Charging (Exemption from Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Vehicles exempt under the regulations are Fire Services, Police, Ambulance, Coastguard, Blue Badge holders, and public service vehicles.

Question 3 - Vehicles used by bridge authorities to respond to breakdowns on each bridge are exempt. Do you see a case for extending exemptions to the AA, RAC or other commercial breakdown services responding to breakdown on the road network other than where this is the responsibility of the bridge authorities?

WLC Response 3 – In the case of the Forth Road Bridge, Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA) recovers breakdowns on the bridge. To ensure that breakdowns are removed quickly and efficiently FETA has included performance indicators in the draft Local Transport Strategy. Therefore, the council cannot see a case for private, for-profit, recovery services to be exempt from tolls.

Question 4 - Should public transport vehicles and multiple occupancy vehicles be considered for exemption from bridge tolls?

WLC Response 4 - To encourage a movement away from car use, public transport requires to be made more attractive and cheaper. The council believes that registered public service vehicles should be exempt from tolls. Private hire or tourist buses should pay.

The council also considers that there is a case for discounts to be given to multi-occupant vehicles (MOVs) e.g. vehicles with driver plus one passenger or more. Discounts could operate all day for these vehicles but could receive a greater financial remuneration or discount in the peak hours. MOVs would not be exempt from tolls.

Question 5 - Should tolled bridges offer multiple crossing discount vouchers to all bridge users, or particular classes of users such as buses or multiple occupancy vehicles? If so, why should this be?

WLC Response 5 – The existing discount voucher scheme on the Forth Road Bridge effectively rewards frequent users and encourages them to use vouchers over cash at the tollbooth.

If the national policy is to restrain road traffic then to offer discount vouchers is counter intuitive.

Similarly, to give discounts to heavy goods vehicles which arguably cause the most damage to the bridge's road surface seems at odds with the overall object of traffic restraint, minimising environmental and structural damage.

Discount/voucher schemes do have administrative and operational benefits for the bridge operators. Consideration could be given to giving tag equipped vehicles some incentives in the future in recognition that through their use there will be operational benefits, for example, less delays through tollbooths.

Question 6 - What are your views on a common vehicle classification system for levying tolls at all Scotland's tolled bridges?

WLC Response 6 – Vehicle classifications should be consistent across Scotland's tolled bridges.

With the introduction of electronic tolling systems, employing automatic vehicle classification, it is essential that vehicles are classified using parameters which can be accurately measured. This tends to favour systems based on number of axles and height of vehicle.

The most recent toll road in the UK, the M6 toll, has employed a system based on the Spanish standard, based on the number of wheels and number of axles and the height above the first axle, and it is considered appropriate that this precedent be adopted throughout the UK. This would allow inter-operability of tolling facilities within the UK and could lead to single billing for cross-boundary journeys.

Question 7 - Should we encourage modal shift from single occupancy cars to public transport and multiple occupancy vehicles on all tolled bridges? If so, how might this be achieved?

WLC Response 7 – Encouraging modal shift is a national and regional objective. The only target in the current SESTRAN Regional Transport Strategy reflects this:

By 2022, to reduce the percentage of people commuting to Edinburgh by single occupant car from each local authority area in South-East Scotland by 10%, compared to a 2001 base. For Edinburgh residents working outwith the City Council area, to reduce their reliance on the single occupant car for commuting by 10% also over the same period.

To encourage movement away from single occupancy car use in the Forth Bridge area there should be a strong emphasis on targeting public transport enhancement on key corridors both north and south of the bridgehead. It is important to note that:

- a significant number of journeys crossing the bridgehead (southbound) do not travel into central Edinburgh but to West Lothian, Midlothian, Falkirk and North Lanarkshire; and
- many West Lothian origin / destination trips using the Forth Road Bridge are not currently well served by bus and rail.

Public transport improvements must therefore be strengthened before modal shift can be secured. Opportunities for mode change to public transport for cross-Forth travellers are vital as these can encourage modal shift. Although currently focusing on southbound trips (e.g. Ferrytoll, A90 bus lanes etc.) provision will also be required in the longer-term in the northbound direction. This is reflected in FETA's recently approved Local Transport Strategy.

Car sharing schemes can also assist in reducing single occupancy for some users.

Differential charging can help achieve a reduction in single occupancy vehicles and at the same time contribute to funding improvements.

The experience and lessons of the Edinburgh congestion charging scheme require to be learned if the public is to be convinced that differential charging will benefit all in the long-term.

Question 8 - Do you think that raising tolls at peak times would result in less congestion at those times?

WLC Response 8 – Raising tolls at peak times may reduce congestion or spread travel into off-peak hours because non-essential trips are less likely to be made during the peak times if they have to pay a premium toll.

The main issue here is how congestion is to be defined and monitored. Commuter traffic is willing to sit in slowly moving traffic over the Forth bridge because the situation is stable, e.g., they will take 10 to 20 minutes to get over the bridge. Much of the delays / congestion southbound can be attributed to the hold-ups on the A8000 / Queensferry Echline link. The construction of the proposed A8000 link to the motorway network will significantly reduce delays on the bridge.

The ability to have differential tolling is an essential tool in managing the demand over the bridge, but to achieve significant reduction in congestion, the tolling levels would have to be raised substantially.

Question 9 - Should tolls reflect the impacts of different vehicle types on the need for maintenance, repair and strengthening programmes? If so, do you have suggestions for how this might be done?

WLC Response 9 – In line with FETA's draft Local Transport Strategy, the council believes that the charging regime for bridges should more fairly reflect the impacts of different users on the fabric of the bridge and the consequential maintenance and strengthening programmes. The introduction of a graduated toll for heavier vehicles based on their gross carrying capacity is easy to set-up if related to the classification systems noted in response 6.

Question 10 - Do you think the current process involving Public Local Inquiries (PLIs) is appropriate for making changes to tolls or charges to meet the costs of managing, maintaining and operating a bridge?

WLC Response 10 – To ensure transparency and local accountability, changes to tolls or charges require to be scrutinised. An alternative streamlined system which can do this without the burdens of a full PLI system would be beneficial and requires to be fully examined.

If future road user charging orders incorporate a built-in inflation index this would reduce the need to consult on the majority of future increases. This may not remove the need to consult when significant increases to the road user charges are proposed to control demand.

Question 11 - Do you consider that final approval by Scottish Ministers is an essential safeguard for toll/charge payers or do you think the final decision is a matter for the management authority for the bridge?

WLC Response 11 – Relates to question 10. Scottish Ministers should continue to have the final approval to safeguard toll/charge payers. In doing so, Ministers can act as arbiter between users and the management authority.

Question 12 - Do you consider all tolls should be subject to increases linked to an inflation index?

WLC Response 12 –Tolls should be index linked. Examples already exist in England of index linked tolls; these include the Humber and Severn bridges.

Question 13 - What advantages and disadvantages do you see if any or all of the tolled bridges were to be managed by the Scottish Executive or the national transport agency?

WLC Response 13 – The council believes, FETA is in a better position than a national body to ensure that bridge maintenance and transport improvements are best matched to local need and requirement.

Question 14 - Should we consider transferring some or all of the powers and functions of current bridge authorities to Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) in future?

WLC Response 14 – The council's view is that the FETA Board has successfully managed the Forth Road Bridge over the years. The planned statutory regional transport partnerships may be of some assistance to bridge authorities in the future, for example, in promoting public transport projects funded from road user charging. However, at this time it is difficult to see what advantages there could be in the partnerships being responsible for all or some bridge authority powers. As SESTRAN matures as a statutory regional transport partnership, there may be interest in moving towards incorporating FETAs' responsibilities in the future, but at this time it is considered premature.

Question 15 - As the Erskine Bridge functions both as a key national and strategic link for the West of Scotland as well as an important local link for communities north and south of the River Clyde, do you see any argument for de-trunking it so that it could become the responsibility of the RTP for the West of Scotland?

WLC Response 15 – The council has no comment to make on the issues facing the Erskine bridge.

Question 16 - Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the FETA model, for any or all of the bridges?

WLC Response 16 – Linked to WLC 14 response. The 2002 FETA Order ensures that bridge maintenance is a statutory responsibility and that FETA can have a wider remit in terms of additional discretionary powers to invest in cross-Forth transport improvements.

This has already resulted in the issue of tenders for the £36m A8000 reconstruction. FETA has also made contributions to Ferrytoll park and ride, a cross-Forth ferry study, SESTRAN's corridor study and commitment to the Rosyth link road. These projects are welcomed by the council.

Question 17 - Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board model, for any or all of the bridges?

WLC Response 17 – The council has no comment on the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board model.

Question 18 - Do you think there would be any merit in having a single body responsible for operating and managing all tolled bridges in Scotland?

WLC Response 18 – The council believes that the existing FETA model is successful and therefore advocates the need for local management of the bridges. The care and management of the bridges covered by this review is successful because of the experience gained over time by committed staff. Centralisation of management would lose this critical ingredient of ownership.

Question 19 - If you think all bridges should be run by one body what form, powers and functions should this body have?

WLC Response 19 - Not applicable.

Question 20 - Are there any other management options that you would like to suggest?

WLC Response 20 – No.