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Dear Sir

HUMBER BRIDGE ACT 1971 - SECTION 10
HUMBER BRIDGE – PROPOSED REVISION OF TOLLS

I am directed by the Secretary of State for Transport to refer to the report of the Inspector, Mr D Christopher Millns MSc CEng FICE, who held a public inquiry on 7 February 2006 into a representation by the Humber Bridge Board (the Bridge Board) under section 10 of the Humber Bridge Act 1971 (the 1971 Act) to revise the maximum tolls payable for the use of the Humber Bridge.

2. The existing and proposed maximum tolls are shown on the table below:

	Class of Traffic	Existing Toll	Proposed Toll
1.	Motorcycle (with or without sidecar)	£1.10	£1.20
2.	Motor car Motor caravan Goods vehicles having a maximum weight not exceeding 3.5 tonnes	£2.50	£2.70
3.	Goods vehicles having a maximum weight exceeding 3.5 tonnes but not exceeding 7.5 tonnes Vehicle in class 2 above with trailer Small bus (up to 16 passengers excluding driver)	£4.50	£4.90
4.	Goods vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum weight with two axles Large buses	£10.00	£10.90
5.	Goods vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum weight with three axles	£13.40	£14.60
6.	Goods vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes with four or more axles	£16.70	£18.30

7.	Any other vehicle using the Bridge and not specifically identified in the above Classification shall be charged a toll by reference to the vehicle's maximum gross vehicle weight and number of axles.		The maximum toll charged shall not exceed the toll specified at 2 to 6 for a vehicle with the same maximum vehicle weight and number of axles
8.	Pedestrians	Nil	Nil
9.	Pedal cycles	Nil	Nil

3. The Secretary of State has considered the Inspector's report and his obligations under the 1971 Act that he should have regard to the financial position and future prospects of the undertaking and that any Order made by him under section 10 of this Act shall prescribe such tolls as in his opinion are reasonably required to be demanded, taken and recovered so as to produce an annual revenue not substantially less, nor substantially more, than is adequate to meet the first eight purposes set out in section 75 of the Humber Bridge Act 1959 (as amended by the 1971 Act).

4. The Secretary of State has also considered representations against the Bridge Board's proposals received during the statutory objection period made by three bus and coach companies and one private individual. The Secretary of State has also taken account of representations from local Members Parliament, lobby groups, a local authority, local newspapers and other private individuals made after the statutory period to him and to the Inspector at the Inquiry. In general, the objections with respect to the Board's proposed toll increases can be summarised under three main headings as follows:

- Total abolition of the tolls.
- Reduced toll for local bus services.
- Concessions for journeys across the Bridge for reasons related to healthcare.

5. In general, the Inspector's views with respect to these three main headings are:

Total abolition of the tolls

6. The Inspector could not support the view that tolls should be completely removed as the legal framework which dictates the operation of the Bridge and the responsibilities of the Board requires the imposition of tolls on users of the Bridge. Abolition of tolls is inconsistent with this legal framework and, thus, would require a change in the law.

Reduced toll for local bus services

7. The Inspector's view is that positive consideration should be given by the Bridge Board to providing a greater discount for local service buses using the Bridge. He notes that there has been a very significant fall in crossings – of 44% - by service buses between 1996 and 2005. He also notes that toll income from service buses has also

significantly reduced over the same period despite the toll increasing from £6.50 to £10. Both the number of service bus crossings and consequently toll revenue was set to reduce further with the proposed termination of the Hull to Grimsby service from 19 February 2006. Taking this into account, the number of service bus crossings will have reduced by 61% over the last 10 years.

8. The previous practice of increasing tolls for service buses in line with inflation has not produced an increase in revenue. In fact, revenue has fallen substantially and is set to fall further. The Inspector suggests that the Board consider a new way forward based on reducing the cost for service buses to see if the trend could be reversed. He believes that this is a low risk strategy, even if it were to prove unsuccessful. The current income from service buses represents less than 1.3% of toll revenue. There is therefore little to lose and potentially there could be a positive outcome if the approach encourages new services or at least retains services which might otherwise be withdrawn.

9. The Inspector also notes a point made by the bus operators that they had sought financial support from local authorities without success; the main reason being that the authorities were unwilling to give priority to services which cross their boundary into another local authority area. The Inspector's view is that this lack of a coordinated approach to the promotion and support for public transport is unhelpful to the travelling public as well as the bus operators providing the service. His view is that financial support for the services crossing the Bridge could provide a real boost to transport links between the two banks of the Humber to the benefit of communities on both sides of the river.

Concessions for journeys across the Bridge for reasons related to healthcare

10. The Inspector acknowledges that, based on the submissions to the Inquiry from members of the public, the local media, the local authority and MPs, there is a substantial body of opinion which supports the view that journeys by patients and their visitors to hospitals in Hull should be made toll free or at least the toll reduced for such journeys.

11. The Inspector found that there is agreement between all parties (including the Humber Bridge Board) that there should be more help to those making healthcare related journeys across the Bridge, in addition to the financial assistance which is already available to certain groups of people who are on low income and receiving particular benefits.

12. The difficulty is in reaching a consensus on who should be responsible for meeting the cost of this extra assistance. The Inspector believes that the Bridge Board has the powers to make concessions of this nature; in fact the Bridge Board has already exercised this in the past with respect to those receiving the higher rate of mobility allowance. However, he does not consider that the Bridge Board has any obligation to grant concessions on health grounds nor is it the appropriate body to do so. Limited assistance is already available for some health related journeys and this is funded by the Health Authority. If further assistance were to be provided this is a matter primarily for that body to consider.

13. The Inspector's conclusions on this issue are based on the current legal framework governing the Board's constitution and responsibilities. He acknowledges that the position could change if the Private Members' Bill being promoted by the Member of Parliament

