

# MSPs rail against £4 bridge toll plans

MSPs HIT out yesterday at proposals to increase charges on the Forth Road Bridge to up to £4. One branded it congestion charging by the back door.

The operators of the bridge, the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA), last month agreed to ask ministers to bring in a new range of tolling options—including the £4 charge for crossings at peak periods.

MSPs who represent the surrounding area, however, voiced concern about the impact of such a large price rise, with one calling for a referendum of bridge users before any decision is made.

Marilyn Livingstone, Labour MSP for Kirkcaldy, asked transport minister Tavish Scott if he agreed that it would have "a catastrophic effect on both the social and economic well-being of Fife, Dundee and the north of Scotland."

She asked him if he would oppose the proposal by FETA.

Mr Scott said ministers had not made a decision on the matter. But he agreed it was a serious issue for politicians in both Fife and Edinburgh, as any changes to the tolls could affect traffic congestion in the city.

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# MSP demands poll of bridge users

£4 FORTH TOLLS PLAN:  
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MR SCOTT said that the proposals by FETA had to be considered alongside the recent findings that there was corrosion in the bridge's main cables and the Scottish Executive's continuing review of toll bridges.

He said, "Should ministers approve the application there will be further opportunities for comment, including a three-month strategy consultation period, a one-month objection period and a likely inquiry as well."

"There will be considerable opportunities in that regard and ministers at this stage have not made any decision on the proposal that has been made."

However, Tricia Marwick, Nationalist MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, told him, "This is a back door congestion charge."

She called on him to stage a special poll for bridge users before making a final decision on the issue. "Before he takes the decision on whether to approve this increased toll charge he should consult by referendum the businesses and commuters who actually use the bridge."

Mr Scott repeated his answer that there would be ample opportunities for comment should ministers decide to approve the plans.

Marilyn Glen, Labour member for North East Scotland, also urged the minister to take into account the effect of any increase in the tolls on Dundee and the north east.

Mr Scott accepted her observation on the potential impact and said, "I'm sure that that she and many others will make representations on this matter, both in terms of the responsibility ministers have and also in the ongoing consultation I mentioned earlier."



## FORTH ROAD BRIDGE

# Knee-jerk reaction

THE proposed toll increases on the Forth Road Bridge are another knee-jerk reaction by mainly Edinburgh-based (and biased) councillors.

I have been commuting to the Lothians for over 15 years, during which time there has been an increase in the amount of commuter traffic as a direct result of the housing boom in Fife.

Due to my profession having irregular hours, I do not have the option of using public transport but even if this was an option the logistics of travelling to West Lothian by this method directly from Fife proves almost impossible.

I do, on occasions, finish work within the proposed 'peak-time' window and therefore will be penalised for travelling alone in my car. As this is my only option, I am being persecuted along with many other commuters whose profession negates car sharing - medical staff, police officers, etc.

Probably the biggest cause of congestion on the bridge are the tailbacks caused by the inadequate A8000. While I am pleased that work on a new link is in progress, it will be two to three years before it is completed. But should the already over-taxed travelling public be made to pay for a road that has been neglected by the roads authority for many years and one which is integral to the Scottish economy? The answer is no!

There is, it seems, a problem with long-term viability of the existing bridge. The proposed toll increases are not the answer. I for one will be opposing them rigourously.

**David Hynd,**

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## MSPs' change of attitude

AFTER the meeting of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (Beta) board on 25th November, at which it passed a motion approving the proposed £4 toll on the bridge, it was noticeable that the following day four Fife Labour MSPs were quoted in the press as being totally opposed to the toll.

None of these politicians has been active in opposing tolls in the past and one, Christine May, was a vociferous supporter of "punitive" tolls in 2000

when she gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament.

Whatever the reason for the change of attitude of our elected representatives, we should welcome them as converts to the cause of opposing the unfair and possibly illegal tolls on the Forth Road Bridge from which the poorest of their constituents suffer most.

It is a pity that none of these MSPs managed to give evidence in support of the lone protestor, George Campbell, when he opposed the last toll increase on the bridge at a public inquiry last year.

The test will come for these MSPs' mettle when they face the whips in the Scottish Parliament when the Executive pushes the £4 toll legislation through. I say when and not if because the Executive appears to have made its mind up already by granting Beta £750,000 for compiling their integrated transport initiative (ITI) conditional in terms that the ITI remains as drafted. The draft ITI contains in detail the proposed £4 punitive toll charges.

**Tom Minogue,**

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