Consultation Document

Proposal for a Member’s Bill Abolition of the Bridge Tolls on the Forth and Tay Road Bridges
Foreword

I intend to introduce a Bill in the Scottish Parliament that would make provision for the abolition of the road tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges.

This consultation paper sets out the background to the issue, makes the case for change and explains the mechanism that is to be utilised. I realise that a lot of the evidence that is presented in this consultation is focused on Fife and the Forth Bridge, however: the wider arguments that this evidence makes is just as applicable to the economic and social needs of the people of Tayside and the impact that tolls on the Tay Bridge have.

The purpose of this Bill is to ensure the Forth and Tay Bridges become toll free bridges in line with both the Skye and Erskine bridges. The purpose of my consultation is to seek policy feedback from interested organisations and members of the public to assist in the thinking behind my proposal and the eventual framing of a Bill. I very much look forward to reading your response.

Helen S. Eadie
MSP Dunfermline East
Contents

Foreword .............................................................................................................. 2
Contents ........................................................................................................... 3
Proposal .......................................................................................................... 4
Introduction ..................................................................................................... 4
The Economic and Social Case for the abolition of the tolls ....................... 6
Closing the opportunity gap ........................................................................... 9
A Fit with the Partnership Agreement? ............................................................. 9
Business Base in Fife – The challenges that arise as a consequence of Forth and Tay Bridge Tolls ......................................................................................... 12
Commuting together with some of the reasons why it takes place ................................................................. 14
Unfairness from the Outset ........................................................................... 15
The European Dimension ............................................................................. 17
Support for the Abolition of Bridge Tolls ....................................................... 18
Conclusion and how to respond ................................................................... 19
Questions ....................................................................................................... 20
Proposal

Helen Eadie MSP
Dunfermline East Constituency:

Proposed Abolition of Tay and Forth Road Bridge Tolls(Scotland)Bill – Draft proposal for a Bill to abolish the tolls on the Tay and Forth Road Bridges.

Introduction

Currently there are eleven main estuary crossings in Scotland: there have been tolls at four of these crossings – the Skye Bridge, the Erskine Bridge, the Tay Bridge and the Forth Road Bridge. Those main esturial crossings that have never had tolls imposed are the Kingston Bridge, (the busiest bridge in Europe), the Clyde Tunnel, the Friarton Bridge, the Kessock Bridge, the Kincardine Bridge, the Dornoch Bridge and the Ballachullish bridge. Different tolling structures have operated on each bridge in Scotland. Erskine had a single year-round rate, charged in both directions. The Skye Bridge had twelve different rates which applied according to vehicle type and season charged in both directions. Forth and Tay both have the same three basic year-round charges based on vehicle type, ForthBridge tolling only northbound traffic and Tay only southbound.

Forth Road Bridge

The Forth Road Bridge spans the River Forth between North Queensferry, Fife and South Queensferry, Lothian and its southern exit enables traffic to fan out in three main directions – towards Glasgow, towards West Lothian, Falkirk and Stirling and towards Edinburgh City Centre and the City Bypass. The original cost of the project to build the Forth Road Bridge was £19.5m when opened in 1964 and was repaid in 1993. The Forth Road Bridge Order Confirmation Act 1958 set an initial period for the levying of tolls until 28 May 1995 to service and repay loans, including those in respect of the capital costs of the bridge, and to pay for its operation, maintenance and repair. Within this initial tolling period, loans associated with the Bridge’s construction were repaid. Tolling extensions have since been granted on three occasions to finance major structural upgrading and ongoing operation and maintenance costs. The order that was due to expire on 31 March 2006 has been extended by the Minister for Transport, Tavish Scott MSP.
The cost of one way tolling is: £1 for a car, £1.40 for a bus, £2 for a heavy goods vehicle and £26 for an escorted vehicle, disabled drivers are not charged.

**Tay Road Bridge**

The Tay Road Bridge spans the estuary of the River Tay between Dundee City and Newport on Tay in Fife, its northern exit leads traffic directly into the city centre of Dundee. It was opened to traffic on 18th August 1966 having cost £5 million to build. The Tay Road Bridge Joint Bridge Board’s (TRBJB’s), loan debt at 31st March 2004 amounted to approximately £16.6m representing sums owed to Angus Council (£0.7m), Dundee City Council (£7.8m), Fife Council (£5.6m) and the Scottish Executive (£2.5m) in connection with bridge construction and other capital works.

The Tolls on the Tay Bridge are:- one way tolling – 80p for a car, Buses where there are more than 14 passengers £1.40p, £2 for heavy goods vehicles.

**The principal sources of congestion at the Forth Crossing:**

There are 60,000 vehicles a day crossing the Forth Road Bridge. This number increases almost every. Housing development policies of Edinburgh City Council have created a situation where house developers have located in Fife causing an explosion in house building. The principal source of congestion for the road bridge is currently the A8000. The A8000 the principal route to Edinburgh Airport and the M8 is accessed by the slip road immediately as you come off the Forth Road Bridge travelling southwards. At the top of the slip road is the Echline roundabout and you turn left to go onto the A8000. This is a section of road that is two way and is neither motorway nor dual carriageway standard. However: works have started to widen the A8000 to a dual carriageway thereby linking for the first time the M8 and the M9 with a dual carriageway. This dual carriageway is being financed by the Forth Estuary Transport Authority with grant support from the Lib-Dem Transport Minister, the grant being conditional that FETA introduces increased toll charges on the bridge (source the Courier April 2006 FOI – Steve Bargeton).

The tollbooths are now on the south side of the river where only travellers going north will pay a toll. Until the mid 90’s there were tolls on both the northwards route and the southwards route over the bridge. The reason for this change is that the Bridge Board determined that it placed less strain on the bridge for cars queuing to pay tolls to form on the land rather than on the bridge. There are, therefore, two sets of queues. There is a queue of angry car drivers travelling north who are delayed by waiting to pay tolls. The combination of waiting to pay tolls, construction work on new toll booths and bridge maintenance has in the past
two years caused very ugly scenes of road rage of exasperated drivers just before the bridge toll booths. These particular queues are often further exacerbated by those drivers who have to sign their paperwork at the toll booths e.g. drivers without the toll money on them or disabled drivers where a special exemption form is signed.

There is a secondary reason as to why the Forth Road Bridge is so badly congested. This second queue forms on the bridge itself and comprises those waiting to access the slip road to the A8000. The A8000 is the road that takes those drivers who are travelling south to a number of possible destinations, e.g. to Edinburgh Airport, an alternative route to the City Bypass, the M8, Livingstone, Linlithgow, Stirling, Falkirk, Grangemouth and an alternative route to Glasgow or the M74. This congestion is as equally serious since vehicles that are standing still on the bridge can place more of a strain on the bridge.

**Principal source of congestion at the Tay Bridge Crossing:**

The City of Dundee suffers from excessive and unacceptable levels of congestion owing to the traffic on the Tay Bridge travelling south at peak commuter times and drivers waiting to pay the bridge tolls and causing major queuing back into Dundee City centre.

**The Economic and Social Case for the abolition of the tolls**

The restructuring of the Fife economy over the last 40 years has resulted in new industries and changes in existing industries that are much more dependent on markets outwith Fife, and upon the supply of raw materials from outwith the region. Accordingly, companies in Fife are much more dependent upon road transport. The tolls have added to the burden for companies in East and Central Scotland. Consistently industry in Fife has been almost unanimous in seeking the abolition of bridge tolls on both the Tay and Forth Bridges maintaining that it is an unnecessary penalty on Fife industry and commerce. The existence of tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges has increasingly been perceived as a negative factor to investment in Fife.

In recent years tolls have frequently been identified by companies as a block to inward investment, and company representatives have shown concern at the existence of tolls: the delays associated with toll collection and the administrative arrangements that companies are required to establish. For example if a company seeks vouchers for crossing the bridge then they have to complete the forms either online or in paper form. If they wish to move unusually heavy loads...
there is further bureaucracy with a toll charge of £26 for an escort across the bridge.

Disabled people too must sign paper work as they pass through the tolls. (Source Mobility Access Committee Scotland (MACS).)

An extract from MACS in the Scottish Executive Phase One Report on the Review of Bridge Tolls in Scotland illustrates this point further. “For Disabled people claiming the exemption is not always a straightforward matter. For some travellers it is simply a matter of presenting the Blue Badge to the toll collector, but for others who have not pre-registered, it involves completing a form before crossing. This can disrupt the smooth passage of vehicles through the toll booths and prolong the overall journey time for the disabled traveller and other vehicles in his or her wake. MACS informed the Project Team that this sometimes results in people foregoing their exemption rights to avoid causing a delay. Although Forth Road Bridge users can download the relevant form from the FETA website for pre-completion and can apply for books of exemption vouchers to minimise the transaction process at the toll booths, many Blue Badge travellers are unaware of these options or how to access them.” (Source Scottish Executive Phase One report.)

It is considered that tolls have proved to be a disincentive to intending inward investors in the past, and that current toll levels and prospective toll levels in the future are a negative factor and a major disadvantage to Fife and Tayside.

Forth Ports advise me that there is a major problem for those freight operators who are working to very tight timescales. The freight industry operating on the Superfast ferry is heavily dependent on having return loads from any area to which they are delivering. A six hour turn around period is critical to them from the time of arrival at Rosyth at 10am to a departure time of 4pm when they need to be back at Rosyth. Delays on the Forth Bridge is critical for them and the tolls and the decades of lack of investment in the A8000 are critical pinch points for the Port of Rosyth. Government both at a UK and a Scottish level have a clear policy of moving freight traffic from road to either sea or rail and it can be argued that the above issues work directly against that policy since these delays are acting a disincentive for HGV operators to use the Port of Rosyth. Equally, there is an impact for tour bus operators and other tourists who leave or arrive from Rosyth and have to wait in these lengthy queues on both sides of the Forth Bridge.

In discussions with me United Freight Distributors - Kirkcaldy and other haulage companies across Fife and Tayside echo these concerns. Amongst other sectors there has been a massive run down in the electronics industry too that have chosen to relocate elsewhere again because they have to compete on very tight margins of profit.
The policies of Fife Council for creating new employment have been relatively successful and have attracted private sector advance factory developments to the Dunfermline Bridgehead area, and to the Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes areas. In recent times, the level of new industrial space provided by the private sector has declined and the letting record of private sector industrial space has worsened. I am advised by the Chamber of Commerce that industrialists in Fife report that they pay thousands of pounds a year on tolls and as profit margins become tighter and tighter in the face of competition elsewhere the continuance of tolls has never in their eyes been less acceptable.

Fife Council officials have had dealings with investors in advance factory accommodation in Fife and have expressed the view that bridge tolls are likely to have a deterrent effect upon potential tenants that is out of all proportion to the financial burden of the tolls. The investors concerned have noted that similar developments undertaken by them in Edinburgh have been fully let even although the tenants, from a geographical point of view, could just as conveniently have located in Fife at a lower cost in respect of rents and rates.

During the late 1950’s and early 1960’s there were upwards of 30000 job losses in Fife. This led to the area being designated as an “Assisted Area” and therefore could attain government grants.

Between 1974 and 1978 unemployment levels in Fife rose at a rate of 11.4%, as compared to a rate of 1.3% in Scotland and 3.2% in Great Britain. Since 1979 in Fife, changes in to the Special Development Area status has had serious adverse effects on Fife’s ability to attract new employment opportunities through inward investment and local company expansions. In 1985, unemployment rose from 7.1% to 15.4% an increase of some 120%.

Although the construction of Shell and Exxom Mobil plants helped to address some of this unemployment, generational unemployment is still rife in all areas of Fife and bridge tolls continue to act as a block to addressing this situation.

The records of the former North East Fife District Council show that the Council has consistently opposed the imposition of tolls on both the Tay and Forth Bridges. The then North East Fife District Council also recorded views on the social effects which tolls have on residents of that area, and the effects on industry and commerce. The view stated was that the impact on North East Fife makes it a more seriously disadvantaged area than any other in the United Kingdom because the people who live and companies located there are subject to the levy of tolls on both the Forth and Tay Bridges.
Since its inception Fife Regional Council and subsequently Fife Council have also consistently opposed the principle of the imposition of tolls having particular regard to various constructed estuarial crossings where no tolls were levied and maintained that the levy of tolls is an outmoded method of financing structures which form part of the normal road system.

A further important issue for all of Fife is the impact on tourism and the effects that tolls have had over the years in efforts to promote tourism in Fife. Owners of caravan sites have reported reduced occupancy, occasioned by caravan owners being unwilling to pay tolls and incur delays when crossing the bridges and so as a consequence going elsewhere.

**Closing the Opportunity Gap**

Encouraging economic growth and tackling poverty and disadvantage is a major challenge for Fife agencies. In particular, worklessness has been identified as a key issue in Fife. High levels of economic inactivity contribute to social exclusion and act as a barrier to growth. Fife’s population has increased by 1% and the working age population is 2% higher now than in 1994.

A study of comparative areas looked at the period from 1995 – 2002 involving Fife, Ayrshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Durham, Wakefield and The Wirral

The study showed:-
- Fife’s Gross Value Added per employee is among the lowest of the comparator areas at £29,600, with only The Wirral lower
- growth in Fife over the time period has been the slowest of all seven areas (12% in Fife compared with 37% in Wakefield) [Source: ONS / SLIMS]
- workplace earnings in Fife are, at £350 per week, among the lowest of the comparator areas
- growth has also been slower than most – a 19% rise from 1998-2004 with only The Wirral and Durham experiencing the same or lower growth [Source: ASHE]
- Looking at household income after taking account of all taxes and benefits, again Fife is among the lowest of all the areas
- Fife’s position compared to the UK and many of the other areas is worsening [Source: ONS]

**Benefits Claimants**

There is evidence of hardship and deprivation. Many people across Fife find it hard to pay the tolls and they have no other option than to claim benefit either because there are not the companies there to employ them arising from the disincentive for
companies to locate in Fife mentioned earlier, or they have no direct access to suitable public transport or the costs per annum of bridge tolls makes it marginal for them to seek employment anywhere other than in Fife. Fife rail fares are the highest per kilometre in Scotland and so there is an added disincentive to use public transport. There are no late night trains for shift workers or for social events thereby forcing more car users to cross the bridge. A person commuting on the Forth Bridge has an annual cost at current toll levels of £260 per annum. The Liberal Democrats in Fife have made it clear that they will seek to impose a single occupancy premium on all tolls raising the possibility that annual cost could increase to £500 or more per year minimum.

- In 2004 there were 7,800 Jobseekers Allowance claimants in Fife and 22,000 claimants of sick or disabled benefits.
- 16% of school leavers were unemployed in Fife in the same year – 3 percentage points more than across Scotland.
- Fife’s unemployment rates, whilst at historically low levels, remain higher than the Scottish average and there are continuing disparities within Fife.
- Workplace earnings are lower in Fife than in Scotland with little sign of the gap closing. In most occupations, especially at professional and managerial level. Fife has a lower proportion of managers and professionals, resident than in Scotland or Great Britain and a higher proportion in the ‘lower’ occupational groups who tend to be less well paid.
- Overall household income, which takes account of taxes and benefits, is well below average and moving further away.
- Fife has seen a significant rise of 19% in sick and disabled claimants. Overall, the level of claimants in Fife is not falling as much as Scotland or Great Britain.
- The increase in the number of Incapacity Benefits claimants has been faster than the Scottish average.
- 82 out of 1,000 Mid Fife adults claim Disability Living Allowance and 78 out of 1,000 claim Incapacity Benefit - there has been significant increase in the numbers claiming the main out of work and sickness benefits in the three years from 2001 to 2004.

[Source: Fife Council Economic Profile]

A Fit with the Partnership Agreement?

The Partnership Agreement formed the basis upon which the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats formed a coalition government. In the Partnership Agreement key commitments were made to address regeneration, economic and transport issues that brought hope to some of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. It has become apparent that both of the recent Transport Ministers have ignored that part of the Partnership Agreement.
and if they had not, these particular economic and the social policy considerations would have been a primary focus of the recent bridge reviews.

Two Reviews on the Bridge Tolls in Scotland have taken place. Phase one examined existing tolls, including the way in which potential changes to tolls could help achieve the environmental and economic objectives of reducing pollution and congestion. In reality the review was much more about finding a mechanism so that one aspect of the Partnership agreement could be delivered. Namely, the removal of the tolls on the Skye Bridge. This was the start of a fragmented and very divisive policy on tolls for the whole of Scotland. Phase Two of the Review examined issues surrounding the management, maintenance and operation of the remaining three tolled bridges in Scotland, and how they relate to the new regional and national transport arrangements. Neither Phase One nor Phase Two examined the wider economic and social impacts apart from the Phase One Review concerning the Skye Bridge where the socio-economic issues were addressed only for Skye but no other part of Scotland.

Neither phase of this review, had any regard for the need to make policy in a broader context and examined only transport implications devoid of any economic or social considerations relating particularly to deprivation, regeneration or economic development in the areas these bridges serve. Neither phase of the review spoke about the issues of deprivation, regeneration, economic or social impact of Fife and Dundee which outside of Glasgow form the most deprived areas in Scotland. Policy was made under the heading of transport with no regard for people who have businesses, need employment, or the social connections that impact on life across our communities. Instead policy has been made within the narrow view of congestion problems, traffic modelling and environmental impacts.

Instead we have had reviews which have spoken about tolls in a way that is, in reality, a proxy for a congestion charge serving only the perceived needs of Edinburgh City Council. Other parts of the Partnership Agreement were ignored and as a consequence no “joined up thinking” followed. Congestion charging should not be imposed unilaterally on Fife and Tayside either openly or by stealth. Any proposal of that sort should be subject to a referendum just as it was in the debate on the City of Edinburgh proposals for congestion charging.

RELEVANT EXTRACT FROM PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT:

The following are extracts from the Partnership agreement upon which I base my argument :-

" TRANSPORT   Introduction

Helen Eadie MSP Dunfermline East Constituency       June 2006
We must connect the whole country and be connected to the rest of the world. Our aim is an accessible Scotland, with a modern, safe, efficient and sustainable transport system

"Sharing the Benefits of Economic Growth
We will regenerate those communities where there are persistently high levels of unemployment."

I contend that these are twin commitments and neither should be taken in isolation to the other

**Business base in Fife – the challenges that arise as a consequence of Forth and Tay Bridge Tolls**

- Fife has 24 VAT registered businesses per 1,000 adults, significantly lower than the Scottish figure of 31. This equates to a gap of around 2,000 businesses (Source: Small Business Service/SLIMS calculations).
- On current trends Fife is not narrowing the gap with Scotland. That said, the per-head count in Dundee is worse than Fife (20 in Dundee compared to 24 in Fife)
- There were 2.4 VAT starts per 1,000 adults in Fife in 2003 compared with 2.9 in Scotland. In Fife there were 42,000 people economically inactive in 2005, with slightly more females than males inactive.

**Productivity is affected by the issue of the bridge tolls**

- Gross Value Added (GVA), per employee in Fife is significantly below the Scottish average, or that of most of the comparators. The issue appears particularly acute in the production sectors. Looking at GVA per employee over time with the UK figure as an index, it is clear that Fife’s comparative position is declining and on current trends, Fife will not catch up with Scotland GVA per employee is, at just under £30,000 in Fife, significantly lower than in Scotland which is £32,800
- Fife’s GVA per head in the production sector significantly trails that of Scotland, despite Fife having a strong manufacturing sector in terms of employment.
- This would suggest either that Fife’s manufacturing firms are in low GVA sectors, or that firms in Fife are not productive in comparison with others across Scotland.

**Exports are also affected**

- Total exports from Fife are equal to £5.5million per head of the production sector, lower than the £5.9million per head across Scotland in 2004
between 2003 and 2004 there was a 10% decline in total exports from Fife, a much more severe drop than recorded across Scotland (-2%) for the same period overall, there is forecast to be a loss of around 700 jobs, or change of less than 1% in Fife between 2005 and 2015 which is in contrast to the 7% growth predicted across the UK. Source: Regional Forecasts / SLIMS In the two years for which consistent data was available, exports per head have fallen in both Scotland and Fife, but a bigger fall occurred in Fife.

This may be because Fife’s export market relies on only a few companies and therefore performance is more erratic.

Fife accounts for 6% of all Scottish exports, perhaps lower than expected given the population and the size of the manufacturing sector.

Fife exports in ‘Chemicals and mineral products, rubber and plastic’ and ‘other manufacturing’ accounts for above average proportions of the Scottish exports in these sectors. Fife is heavily dependent on these and can be increasingly vulnerable where profit margins are tight. In recognition of this the Fife Chamber of Commerce has strongly supported the campaign to abolish the bridge tolls.

Manufacturing employment is set to decline more steeply in Fife than in Scotland or the UK. This may reflect both the higher starting point and the low productivity reported above.

Skilled trades and plant and machine operative positions are projected to decline.

**Property - Commercial property and land – the situation in Fife is further evidence of the challenges faced by Fife business**

There were 804 hectares of vacant and derelict land in Fife in 2004 which accounted for 8% of all such land in Scotland. This has grown from 6% in 1998, as a result of large former mining sites becoming vacant and available for development.

Most of the property units currently available in Fife are for industrial (33%), office (26%) and retail (16%) use.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a good number of prime sites are available due to recent closures or mothballing of sites.

**Transport Implications for the whole of the North East Scotland**

There is a recognition that the cross Forth and Tay transport problems are an issue primarily for Fife and Tayside., For these economies to function efficiently they also need access to Edinburgh and the transport hubs and routes around the Forth and Tay corridors.
Commuting together with some of the reasons why it takes place

In and out commuting is a feature of the Fife economy. This reflects it being bounded to the north by Dundee and by Edinburgh to the south. It also reflects the recent commuter housing developments in Fife communities. The majority, (82%), of people live and work in Fife.

Levels of out commuting are highest in East Fife (29%) and West Fife (24%), reflecting the proximity of Dundee and Edinburgh respectively.

There has been a significant increase in numbers travelling on the Forth Road Bridge (up by 1.5 million crossings between 1998 and 2003). Once over the Forth Road Bridge 88% of the traffic heads to the Echline roundabout with the majority to the A8000 heading for Edinburgh Airport, the M8 to Glasgow or the M74 to England, East and West Lothian, Stirling, Falkirk or Grangemouth.

Only 12% of traffic crossing the bridge is traveling to Edinburgh City Centre. Of the 12% of traffic heading for the city centre there is a significant volume of traffic that takes the turn at the Barnton roundabout to go to the Gyle, the City Bypass and the A1.

The greatest congestion on the Forth Bridge has to do with the fact that the A8000 has not until now been developed into a dual carriageway linking the M8 and the M9

• in total there are 17,000 workers who leave Fife each day to find jobs outside Fife with a cost for them of £5 per week or £260 per year which impacts as I have said earlier especially heavily on low income workers
• Only 63% of the local resident working age population remain in West Fife to work
• 24% of the West Fife working age population commute outside of Fife altogether – mostly these commuters travel to Edinburgh
• 29% of the East Fife working age resident population work outside of Fife – only 5% of East Fife’s working age population commute to elsewhere in Fife. This means that the majority of commuters are forced to travel outside of Fife regularly using the Forth and Tay Bridges.
• the number of commuters who work in each area outwith Fife is greater than the reciprocal movement of people from these areas into Fife
• Dundee is the destination for 4600 Fife residents (or 16% of all Fife commuters)
Unfairness from the outset

In his precognition statement to a Public Inquiry in 1984: Mr W. Taylor, the then Director of Planning for Fife Regional Council gave evidence which is as relevant today as it was then. The thrust of what he said has been repeated below.

From the very outset the people of East Central Scotland were never treated equitably when the initial legislation was negotiated for the Forth Bridge. The financial bargain in 1956 was clearly inequitable. The Government’s grant contribution to the estimated cost of the bridge was to be fixed at the same level of £4.65m as agreed in 1947. However, whereas this represented 75% of the original estimate, the proportion in 1956 was only 32.5%. By the time the bridge was completed, this contribution had fallen to 24%.

This is apparently, a unique situation in that 8 miles of approach roads were included in the agreement and the cost of these have had to be financed from tolls. This must be regarded as totally inequitable. The Reporter’s conclusions following the 1985 Inquiry said that the approach roads to the bridge should be funded by the taxpayers and not from users only of the bridge. The Reporter cited the example of the Severn Bridge to support this view. Had the approach roads not been included in the debt to be repaid the debt would have been discharged some seven years earlier. In effect once more bridge users in Central and East Scotland were to have imposed on them the inequitable burden that should have been the responsibility of the general taxpayer. It has never been understood why part of the main access roads which are clearly part of the trunk road system should have been funded by local authorities when this is a responsibility of the general taxpayer elsewhere.

The second inequity was that the Forth Road Bridge was required to be repaid in 30 years when, in fact, the Humber Bridge was 60 years, the Mersey Tunnel was 60 years, the Dartford Tunnel 60 years and the Severn Bridge was 40 years.

The third inequity arose when the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA) was created in 2002. FETA was charged with the task of collecting and raising tolls, not just to maintain the bridge because payment had already been achieved in full, but to raise money to build a dual carriageway to replace the A8000 and to help contribute to other public transport improvements. Again this should have been the responsibility of the general taxpayer.

The fourth inequity has arisen in that the Forth Road Bridge debt was repaid in full by 1996 and yet the Skye Bridge carried a repayment debt in excess of £15 million
when its tolls were scrapped. To continue to charge tolls beyond repayment of that debt is a major injustice. In evidence to an Inquiry in 1985 it was stated clearly that for some tolled bridges there is no prospect of repaying the debt over any period, however long that period is. That was the statement of the Scottish Department for Development and Industry in its evidence. Professor Mackay at that time cited the Erskine and the Humber Bridges as two examples of tolled bridges where the outstanding debt continued to accumulate over time. In the case of the Erskine Bridge, Mr. Fairbairn QC, then Solicitor General for Scotland, admitted “that it was recognised by the Government that the level of traffic using the bridge is never likely to repay the capital debt over the period mentioned in the statute. The situation was much worse than that described by Mr. Fairbairn in that the capital debt had grown to £42m as compared to the initial debt (in 1971) of £10m. For the Humber Bridge the same argument applied. Since then as we now know the debt on the Erskine Bridge was written off.

Fifthly, in effect, it is becoming a congestion charge by stealth and it is clear from the Liberal Democrat Transport Spokesperson, Cllr. Tony Martin, of Fife Council that the policy of the Liberal Democrat Party is that rather than remove tolls that instead variable toll charges will be imposed on Forth Bridge users in due course – the punitive levels of which are not yet clear although it does seem likely based on current knowledge that these levels will be at least double the existing charge for single occupancy car users.

A referendum took place in Edinburgh in 2005 when congestion charges were massively rejected. The imposition of variable tolls which are set to be a congestion charge by proxy will be imposed without the agreement of the people of Scotland.

Sixthly, the treatment of the users of the Tay and Forth Road Bridges is inconsistent and unfair when compared with that of users of other tolled estuarial crossings. The Skye Bridge and the Erskine Bridge have recently had the tolls revoked. There are eleven other main estuarial crossings, seven of which until now have been supported from general taxation. Now tolls remain on only two estuarial crossings – the Forth and Tay Bridges. Government policy has never been consistent or fair regarding estuarial crossings.

Seventhly, the unjust treatment of bridge users is exemplified by the fact that they effectively pay several times over for the facilities they use – as Tax-payers, council tax/business rate payers, road-tax payers and as toll payers. This iniquity of the tolls on both bridges should be abolished.
Historically the income generated from Fife and Lothians through taxation on motorists was nearly four times the expenditure and tolls have simply added a further imposition on motorists.

The European Dimension

The European Council has recognised the importance of Trans-European infrastructure networks (TENs) for economic recovery in Europe. The TENs are seen as essential for achieving economic and social cohesion in the Community and to be beneficial for economic growth and employment.
The TEN in the United Kingdom is comprised mainly of motorways, trunk roads and major strategic routes which already form part of the National Road Network. The intention is to direct and encourage long distance strategic European traffic to use these routes, rather than other, less suitable roads.

The designated TEN is intended to recognise the importance of the national road networks of individual Member States to Community trade. The Forth Road Bridge is an integral part of that network providing highways for commerce and industry into the highly competitive markets of Europe.

The Super Fast ferry mentioned earlier is a major new highway of the sea from Scotland into the mainland EU and the tourists and HGV drivers have been very seriously affected by the tolls on the bridges. This is highlighted more thoroughly in an early section of this consultation document.

**Support for the Abolition of Bridge Tolls**

**Scottish Chambers of Commerce Support the abolition of Tolls:**

Scottish Chambers of Commerce support the removal of tolls from the Forth and Tay Road Bridges. Fife Chamber of Commerce and Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce are also actively campaigning to have the tolls scrapped. For Fife in particular, the cost of tolls is felt particularly acutely. Those most directly affected include residents of Fife who commute to work outwith the Kingdom, businesses whose road freight routes run north and south of Fife via the bridges, and tourist related businesses who rely on a steady flow of visitors into Fife.

Clearly if tolls are abolished then this would mean incorporating the maintenance costs of these bridges into the general Scottish transport budget, where they would compete for priority among other road infrastructure projects. Nevertheless given the strategic importance of these bridges to Scotland and given the situation which now exists with the Skye and Erskine bridges, the argument that travellers to Fife should bear the brunt of this cost is not equitable.

**Political Support for Abolition of Bridge Tolls:**

- There is cross party support for the abolition of the tolls as evidenced in recent debates in the Scottish Parliament.
Politicians who have declared support for this proposal to abolish tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges include – Marilyn Livingstone MSP – Kirkcaldy, Christine May MSP – Central Fife, Scott Barrie MSP Dunfermline West, Kate Maclean MSP Dundee (West), Richard Baker MSP – North East Scotland, Marilyn Glen MSP North East Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon SNP, Bruce Crawford SNP, Tory Fife Councillor Stewart Randall, Murdo Fraser, Conservative, John Swinney SNP, Tricia Marwick

Catherine Stiher MEP supports the campaign to abolish the tolls

The Labour, Conservative and SNP candidates in the Dunfermline West by-election all declared their support for abolition of the tolls

Political parties who have declared strong support for abolition of Bridge Tolls have included the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish National Party and The Conservative Party.

Fife and Tayside Councils are both strongly in support of proposals for the abolition of the tolls on both the Tay and Forth bridges.

Academic Support:-

Professor D. Mackay, Professorial Fellow at Heriot Watt University and Chairman of PEIDA (Planning and Economic Consultants recorded his view that the case for abolition of tolls remained extremely strong.

Conclusion and how to respond

Thank you for reading this consultation document. I hope that you have been persuaded that there is a powerful and clear case for the abolition of tolls on both the Forth and Tay Bridges

This step would create opportunities for economic and social benefit in these areas and would also create a more coherent and consistent strategy for these old bridges in Scotland.

You are now invited to respond to this consultation paper by answering the questions the following section, and making any other comments that you consider appropriate.

Responses, which should be submitted by 12th September, 2006, may be sent to: –

Helen Eadie MSP
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH, EH99 1SP  Tel – 01383 412856  Fax – 01383 412855
Further copies of this consultation paper can be ordered by email from the address above or you can download copies of this document by following the links under the MSP section to me on the Scottish Parliament website

Under the Code of Practice on open government, responses will be made available to the public, unless respondents ask for their comments to remain confidential.

Confidential responses will nevertheless be included in any summary or statistical analysis, which does not identify individual responses.

To help inform debate on the matters covered by this paper and in the interests of openness, the responses submitted on this consultation document will be made public. It will be assumed that responses can be made public unless the respondent indicates that his or her response is confidential.

Any equalities issues are particularly welcome and I shall be most pleased to provide further information should that be necessary.

Questions:-

1. How important are the bridges to you to access jobs and markets?

2. What economic benefits would be created by removing the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges? E.g. what is the annual cost of tolls to your business?

3. What social benefits would be created by removing the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges?

4. Are there any other benefits that will arise as a consequence of removing the tolls on the Forth and Tay Road Bridges?

5. Would there be any disadvantages from removing the tolls on both the Tay and Forth Road Bridges?

6. What would be the financial implications to you/your business/organization if the tolls are removed?

7. How might this proposal impact on the social and economic regeneration of Fife and Tayside.

8. Can you indicate any equalities issues raised by my proposal?

9. Any other comments you wish to make?