PROPOSED ABOLITION OF FORTH AND TAY BRIDGE TOLLS BILL

STATEMENT OF REASONS BY HELEN EADIE MSP ON WHY NO FURTHER CONSULTATION IS REQUIRED

Background to proposal
1. In line with Rule 9.14.3 of Standing Orders, my draft proposal for an Abolition of Forth and Tay Bridge Tolls Bill was lodged on 22 May 2007. The proposal is for a Bill—

   to abolish the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges

2. I originally lodged a similar draft proposal on 22 June 2006 and on that date issued a consultation paper. The consultation paper was sent to 170+ (In addition to other groups, paper sent to Community Councils in Fife, West Lothian, Clackmannanshire, Perth, and Kinross, at which point it was forwarded to their members – this will ultimately increase the final distribution figure) groups and bodies and was also available to download from http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/pdfs/mb-consultations/BridgeTollsConsultation.pdf Consultation responses were accepted until March 2007 and a total of 334 were received. In addition I received a petition in support of my proposal signed by 89 persons.

I have today lodged in SPICe copies of all the responses I received, along with a paper summarising the arguments for and against my proposal from the consultation responses I received. The overwhelming majority of responses supported the removal of these tolls.

Statement of reasons
3. In relation to my draft proposal for this Bill, I do not consider that consultation is required for the following reasons:

The Forth and Tay Road Bridges are now the only remaining road bridges in Scotland where a toll is collected.

Toll bridges have been the subject of a major Government review. A full and extensive consultation was carried out to UK governmental standards. The Scottish Executive’s Transport White Paper published on 16 June 2004 outlined the approach for the review of existing bridge tolls in Scotland. This major review was conducted in two stages. Phase One of the review focussed on the tolling regimes on the Forth, Tay, Erskine and Skye road bridges. The review examined environmental, economic and accessibility issues as well as traffic trends and alternative tolling regimes. The Phase One consultation began in July 2004 and a report was published in December 2004 “Tolled Bridges Review: Phase One Report”.¹ This led to the removal of tolls from the Skye Bridge from 21 December 2004.

The Phase Two consultation began in April 2005. The resulting report, “Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two Report” was published in March 2006. It considered the broader operational and management issues associated with each toll bridge in Scotland. This posed twenty questions organised around two central themes – i) factors to be considered when setting tolling levels, and ii) future management arrangements for the tolled bridges. The Minister for Transport reported the findings of that major consultation to Parliament on 1 March 2006. On 31 March 2006, the tolls were removed from the Erskine Bridge.

Following the Government’s review I undertook my own consultation exercise on the proposed removal of tolls from both the Forth and Tay Bridges. This was issued to 170+ (In addition to other groups, paper sent to Community Councils in Fife, West Lothian, Clackmannanshire, Perth, and Kinross, at which point it was forwarded it to their members – this will ultimately increase the final distribution figure) groups and bodies and I received 334 responses including a petition in support signed by 89 persons.

There has now been ample opportunity for key stakeholders and members of the public to express their views on the proposal subject matter as part of these reviews and my consultation. Continuing views being expressed to me outwith any Bill proposal consultation do not differ from those expressed within the Bill proposal consultation period. Therefore I have no reason to consider that stakeholder/public views have altered significantly.

Further consultation on the same proposal would duplicate effort, incur unnecessary cost and could create impression of ‘over consultation’

4. I do not consider that any further consultation exercise need be conducted on my proposal for a Bill for the reasons set out above. I believe that there is ample published, current and pertinent information to help test, develop and refine my specific proposal and proceed with the development of the Bill’s policy and its eventual production.

Conclusion
5. I therefore request the committee consider this statement of reasons and confirm that it is satisfied with the reasons for not consulting further on the draft proposal.

Name of MSP: Helen Eadie MSP
Date: 22 May 2007

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