

# **TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 18 September 2007

Session 3

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## **TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE**

### **4<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2007, Session 3**

#### **CONVENER**

\*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

#### **DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
\*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)  
\*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)  
\*Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)  
\*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)  
\*David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

#### **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)  
Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con)  
Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)  
Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

\*attended

#### **THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:**

Richard Dixon (WWF Scotland)  
Stuart Hay (Friends of the Earth Scotland)  
Steve Hunter (Steer Davies Gleave)  
Ewan Kennedy (City of Edinburgh Council)  
Ken Laing (Dundee City Council)  
John Lauder (Sustrans Scotland)  
Bob McLellan (Fife Council)  
Janice Pauwels (City of Edinburgh Council)  
John Stephens (Steer Davies Gleave)  
Paul Tetlaw (TRANSform Scotland)

#### **CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Steve Farrell

#### **SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK**

Alastair Macfie

#### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

Clare O'Neill

#### **LOCATION**

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament

### Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

*Tuesday 18 September 2007*

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 14:00]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Patrick Harvie):** I welcome members, guests and others to the fourth meeting in 2007 of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee. I remind everybody that mobile phones, pagers and other devices should be switched off.

Agenda item 1 is a proposal to consider in private item 4, which is further discussion of our draft work programme. Is that agreed?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

14:00

**The Convener:** We have three panels of witnesses on the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Bill. I welcome John Stephens and Steve Hunter from Steer Davies Gleave and offer them a chance to say a few words of introduction.

**John Stephens (Steer Davies Gleave):** Thank you. Steve Hunter and I were two of the authors of the toll impact study report. Other team members contributed additional expertise, particularly in areas of transport and land use modelling. Steve Hunter and I hope to be able to cover most questions today, but perhaps not everything.

We looked in the study at traffic impacts and then appraised the environmental, economic and social outcomes of removing bridge tolls. Our report concluded that removing the tolls would not represent value for money. It might help our discussion if I explain further what we mean by that statement. Value for money balances the outcomes to individuals and businesses against the cost to the Scottish Government of achieving those outcomes. In this case, the outcomes to individuals and businesses represent a net loss because the disbenefits—or disadvantages or costs—of increased congestion outweigh the benefit of not having to pay the bridge toll. The annual disbenefits to business, for example, amount to around £10 million. As well as those disbenefits to individuals and businesses, there would be a cost or disbenefit to the Scottish Government. That is the report's fundamental finding.

**The Convener:** I will ask about the accuracy of previous and current predictions in the toll impact study. How confident are you that the predictions about the removal of tolls and its future impact on traffic levels across the bridges can be relied on?

**Steve Hunter (Steer Davies Gleave):** I presume that you refer to the forecast of the change in the number of vehicles. We have reasonable confidence in those predictions; they come from a model that is owned—that is probably not quite the right word—by Transport Scotland. The forecasts have been consistent during the previous two toll impact studies and the current one, even though the model that was used has been updated. We have taken great care to ensure that our forecast outcomes from the study are consistent and would not be changed in direction or meaning by small inaccuracies in that traffic model. Therefore we are confident that, given perfectly reasonable variance, our outcomes would remain the same.

**The Convener:** One of the regular refrains put to me is, "Who are all the other people who would travel across the bridge?" People make the case that nobody makes that daily road journey for fun and that if they had another option they would use it. Who are those additional people and where would the additional journeys come from?

**Steve Hunter:** There are a variety of reasons why people might make extra journeys. Some of them might be made by people who make the journey already—perhaps they travel four days a week at the moment, but will make five return journeys a week in the future. Some of the people who might change their travel behaviour are currently travelling outside the peak times.

There is quite a lot of evidence in the report, in the modelling and in the records of people crossing the bridges that a percentage of people use different routes for travelling in different directions. There is a slight imbalance between northbound and southbound flows on both bridges, which is perhaps a sign that some people are rerouting to avoid the toll that is currently charged.

**The Convener:** So, the increase in traffic going across the bridge would result in a cumulative increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but that would be due partly to a rerouting of journeys—is that correct?

**Steve Hunter:** Yes, that is correct. The overall impact would be a slight change in the level of CO<sub>2</sub> that is emitted as a result of people making a slightly different trip. A trip having slightly different characteristics—perhaps being slightly longer and faster—would have an effect on the amount of fuel that would be consumed and the amount of carbon dioxide that would be emitted. However, any new trips, constituting a percentage of the overall change, would result in wholly new carbon dioxide emission.

**The Convener:** The figure of 9,000 tonnes per annum is cumulative—it takes account of rerouted journeys as well as the emissions that result from current journeys across the bridges.

**Steve Hunter:** Yes. It takes account of all those effects.

**Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab):** How did you choose the members of the focus groups and the individuals to be interviewed in the toll impact study research?

**John Stephens:** We specified the broad characteristics of individuals whom we wanted to include in the focus groups. We tried to identify people who travelled regularly, people who were infrequent travellers and people who did not travel at all.

**Cathy Peattie:** How did you do that?

**John Stephens:** We put people on the streets to recruit. They asked people a set of questions and, if they displayed the characteristics that we had set for our quotas, invited them to attend the focus groups.

**Cathy Peattie:** How did you gather the information that you used in the toll impact study? How did you turn the opinions that were gathered from the focus groups, individual interviews and public and private organisations into statistical data that could be used by transport modelling software?

**John Stephens:** We used the focus groups to help us to understand the issues that we would need to address in writing the questionnaire for a much larger survey of people on the streets. We have reported the street interviews in detail in the document. The sample sizes are not big enough to be wholly statistically valid; the interviews were used to give us added confidence.

The interviews were designed to ask people such questions as whether, if the tolls were abolished, they would make extra trips; what the purpose of those extra trips would be; whether they would make them during peak times or at off-peak times; and whether they would make additional trips for purposes for which they did not currently make trips—whether, for example, if they did not shop in Edinburgh, the abolition of the tolls would mean that they would start to shop in Edinburgh. We asked that sort of question. There is a survey findings report for each group that we interviewed on the street. In some groups there were 70 or 80 people; other groups were smaller. That information confirms the foundations of the traffic model—the two things are quite complementary.

**Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab):** Your study is useful because it provides us with a lot of data and information that allow us to assess whether there is a logical case for the retention of the tolls or their removal from the bridges.

Let us deal with the Tay road bridge first. Paragraph 1.7 states that

"the primary reason for retaining the tolls was to meet the loan debt associated with the construction costs of the Bridge."

When you consider the other criteria—the environmental impact, the congestion impact, the economic benefits and disbenefits—your conclusion is, essentially, that the tolls should be removed from the Tay bridge. Is that a reasonable summary of your position?

**John Stephens:** No, I think we said that the tolls on the Tay bridge should be retained.

**Des McNulty:** What is your argument for that?

**John Stephens:** The principal argument is that the toll acts as a form of traffic management. Rather more people than we might have expected from our modelling and research regard the choice of travelling to Edinburgh or Fife either via the Tay bridge or on the A90 and M90 as a marginal one, and if the tolls are removed from the Tay bridge more people will move away from a safe road that the Scottish Executive has tried, with large sums of money, to make even safer and, instead, go across the bridge and down the single carriageway routes in Fife. The toll on the Tay bridge acts as a valuable form of traffic management simply because if we remove it we will take traffic off a dual carriageway and motorway route and put quite a lot more traffic on cross-country roads in Fife.

**Des McNulty:** So the congestion, air quality and economic impact issues that you say are very strong arguments against the removal of tolls on the Forth road bridge do not apply to the Tay road bridge. Instead, your argument against removing tolls on the Tay bridge is based purely on the impact on roads in Fife.

**Steve Hunter:** That is not correct. Paragraph 1.7 of the toll impact study summarises the findings of the phase 2 report, which was undertaken before we were involved in the study. They might apply in different respects, because of the different amounts and characteristics of the traffic that uses the bridges, but the reasons for not removing the tolls, including environmental and traffic congestion reasons, apply in full to both.

**Des McNulty:** Your agency is obviously expert at appraising transport projects, and the Government has a strategic appraisal system for such projects. What are the principal arguments that emerge from your modelling for and against the removal of tolls on the Forth bridge, and how strong is the evidence in support of them?

**John Stephens:** We are very familiar with the transport appraisal—after all, Steer Davies Gleave was the author of its first draft and is familiar with its application—and we applied its principles in this impact study. Our main focus has been on how traffic impacts work through into environmental impacts; into the transport economic efficiency criterion in the strategic transport appraisal guidance; and into the economic activity and location impacts that are also set out in STAG. We also had a brief look at social inclusion impacts. Steve Hunter can say more about the traffic and TEE analyses, and I can comment on impacts on real-world economy and employment issues.

**Steve Hunter:** The input traffic data that we received from Transport Scotland's consultants showed an increase in the number of vehicles on the Forth bridge, while a separate model that was

internal to our study examined very localised traffic impacts. It is too much to expect a model that covers the whole of Scotland to deal with real detail at such a level. As you might have picked up from the report, the model for testing very local impacts was not robust enough to allow us to conduct very detailed quantitative impacts—sorry, I mean quantified; I have a terrible problem with that word—but we were able to look at what would happen to local flows. We then used those data to test what would happen if we removed the tollbooths and to examine other different approaches; after all, we cannot simply remove the tollbooths and allow traffic to flow freely through those spaces.

Those models allowed us to measure changes in traffic speeds, journey times and vehicle emissions, and the impacts were quantified and became part of the value-for-money assessment.

**Des McNulty:** But what were those impacts? You are familiar with this story, but other people might not be. We would like you to spell out what your conclusions were, based on the substantial amount of work that you did.

14:15

**Steve Hunter:** We concluded that removing tolls from the bridge would result in an increase in traffic, to some degree.

**Des McNulty:** Can you be precise? You did a lot of work, so it would be helpful if you could quantify the increase for us.

**Steve Hunter:** Before I present the precise figure, I must explain that the strategic modelling that was undertaken by Transport Scotland and its consultants formed an input to our study. It showed that by 2010 there would be an increase of between 10 and 16 per cent, depending on the direction of travel, in the number of vehicles making trips across the Forth bridge during peak periods.

**Des McNulty:** Last week we heard from the bridgemaister that the bridge is full at peak periods. A significant increase at those times is not possible, because the road space for such an increase is not available. How do you respond to that suggestion?

**Steve Hunter:** There is a slight mismatch, which is explained in the report, between the peak hour as it occurs on the bridge and the peak hour that is modelled in the transport model for the whole of Scotland. It is possible to get an increase in peak-hour traffic, even when the bridge is completely at capacity. Usually that is seen as an increase in the length of the peak hour. In more localised modelling, it may be seen as queues of vehicles that are waiting to get on to the bridge. One of the

main results of removing tolls is likely to be increases in traffic queues at some location on the way up to or on the way past the bridge.

**Des McNulty:** Did you make estimates of journey time? How much longer will it take people to get from Fife to Edinburgh or from Edinburgh to Fife at peak periods as a result of toll removal?

**Steve Hunter:** We have that information. We can arrange for the committee to have it, if it would be useful.

**John Stephens:** The question was about the absolute amount by which journey time would be increased. Conventional transport appraisal uses established values of time to quantify that amount. Like the appraisal of any road or rail scheme, our report is founded on what those values of time add up to. It shows a disbenefit—journeys will get longer, and the use of the network will be less efficient.

**Des McNulty:** So there are a number of indicators that tell you, as transport professionals, that the removal of tolls is not the right thing to do, if we take political considerations out of the equation and look at the matter purely from the point of view of transport management. The removal of tolls will increase congestion, slow down traffic, increase emissions and create congestion problems that will be dispersed elsewhere. You are the experts, but that is what I take from your comments. Have I summed up your conclusions correctly?

**John Stephens:** Yes. We are saying that there will be disbenefits in time to ordinary people who are travelling to work or for shopping and other purposes. There will be significant costs to business users of the bridge. When we assess the value of those disbenefits, we get a benefit cost ratio that is significantly negative. With most projects, we would expect to get a positive value. If the value is negative, we are paying money to make things worse.

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Did you take into account the behaviour of people in neighbouring countries? We are talking about leisure motoring. We have seen the potential for people to go to work by public transport but to use their cars at other times. When you were gathering information, did you get the sense that people would be tempted to use their cars less for work purposes if they thought that there would be more congestion?

**John Stephens:** The responses that we received suggested that people might respond to the removal of the tolls by switching from public transport to car for some work journeys and by using the car more frequently for non-work journeys.

**Rob Gibson:** Are you saying that some people would switch from using public transport to using the car?

**John Stephens:** Yes. Some people would do that.

**Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD):** You said that the study showed that removing the tolls would not provide value for money. Did you mean that statement to apply to both bridges equally, or is there a stronger case for one bridge than for the other?

**Steve Hunter:** That statement applies to both bridges equally. Some effects could be judged only across the entire network because the impacts are experienced a long way across the network. Taken in isolation, the not-value-for-money argument applies to both bridges equally.

**Alison McInnes:** Your report expresses surprise at the magnitude of the impact that you identified, given that the Forth bridge is already running at capacity. Is there a process whereby increases in journey times have an impact on demand, such that there is almost a self-regulating iterative process? How did you take that into account in your longer-term projections?

**Steve Hunter:** The transport modelling that we used—which is also used by Transport Scotland—is designed to take into account the fact that, although people's initial response might be to switch away from public transport, such switching stops at the point at which journey times and congestion increase. Everything finds its own natural level again with a little bit more congestion and traffic; people do not continue to force their way on to the network just to create more congestion. In essence, people strike a balance that takes into account travel time, whether they need to pay and where they are trying to get to.

**Alison McInnes:** So your figures for the increase are net figures.

**John Stephens:** They are an equilibrium figure.

**The Convener:** I want to pursue that point about the nature of price-based demand management as it applies to bridges or any other kind of road infrastructure. Obviously, many parts of the country experience heavy levels of congestion in the absence of any such demand management. Your study indicated that users found the cost of the toll financially insignificant. Can you help us to understand the thinking processes that go on behind the different decisions that people make in their daily working lives? How would the removal of a financially insignificant toll lead to people making a different choice?

**John Stephens:** It is all about small choices at the margin. Given that many people make such choices on a daily basis, only a few people need



to switch to a different choice even one day a week for there to be a cumulative effect. We had a similar debate in the study team. For example, I travel to Dundee quite frequently. On my way back, I usually go via Perth but I would go across the bridge if there was no toll because there is a nice road across Fife. However, if that road became congested, I would probably switch back to going via Perth. I am just one of those people at the margins whose behaviour is influenced by the toll. In reality, only a few people like me would need to make that choice—that is, a very small percentage of all the people who are involved—for us to experience the kind of impacts that the analysis predicts.

**The Convener:** Is it the case that, regardless of whether the toll is 80p, 90p, £1 or £1.20, even the perception of a toll—rather than its financial impact—might be enough to change that decision-making process?

**Steve Hunter:** I suspect that that is true. I am not sure that we gathered specific evidence on that, but from personal experience I think that that is probably how people perceive tolls.

**The Convener:** Perhaps commuters will in future have longer to sit in their cars to contemplate the question.

**Des McNulty:** Phase 2 of the tolled bridges review also looked at the Erskine bridge, in relation to which the argument was used that the toll was a factor in people choosing to use either the Clyde tunnel or the Kingston bridge, both of which are very congested. Removal of the toll has apparently balanced the traffic flow among those three Clyde crossings—there has been a 30 per cent increase in the use of the Erskine bridge. Therefore, the removal of the tolls might be seen as rational in traffic management terms—that was certainly the conclusion of the phase 2 tolled bridges report. In comparison, this situation seems to be different. Can you flesh out the differences as you see them?

**John Stephens:** The answer is fairly straightforward economics. The Erskine bridge was underused, and the correct way to price such a thing is to make it free. The Forth bridge, in particular, is overutilised, so the correct thing to do in economic terms is to manage the traffic through a pricing mechanism.

**Des McNulty:** In other words, from your point of view as a traffic professional, the equity argument, on which the Government is founding its case for removal of the tolls, is entirely irrelevant and inappropriate. Is it a fair summary to say that the economic argument for removing the tolls in the case of the Erskine bridge was very strong in congestion management terms, whereas in the

case of the Forth bridge all those arguments go in the opposite direction?

**John Stephens:** In economic and transport terms—yes. We recognise that there is an equity argument, but the disbenefits to both individuals and businesses and the cost to Government are so high that I venture to suggest that there must be other ways of being fair to the people of Fife.

**Des McNulty:** Can you quantify—

**The Convener:** Can you wind up this discussion?

**Des McNulty:** The panel members have made a number of strong points about the economic and other disbenefits of the removal of tolls on the Forth bridge. Perhaps they cannot do so now, but would it be possible for them to provide a short summary in writing that extracts from their report the main factors and the figures associated with them? That would help the committee in preparing its report.

**Steve Hunter:** That is fine. We will do that.

**The Convener:** That is appreciated.

**Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):** I have a point that I wanted to make separately, but it seems relevant to bring it in now. Paragraphs 14 and 24 of the executive summary that you provided for us make it clear that you think that the case has been made for the retention of the tolls. However, the reasons that you give, which are set out very well, appear to be very different from the reasons why the tolls were imposed originally. Do those reasons for retaining the tolls have anything to do with the reasons why they were put in place all those years ago?

**John Stephens:** I am an economist and, in economics, bygones are bygones. We cannot go back to 1964 or 1966 and do anything differently. The infrastructure is there and the key issue is to make the best possible use of it from here onwards. The rest of the history of the bridges starts from today: the issue is to make the best use of them from today. That is what our report is trying to point to.

**Alex Johnstone:** You suggest that, in effect, the function of the tolls is to act as road pricing or congestion charging to affect levels of pollution and levels of traffic activity in the area.

**Steve Hunter:** That is not the only reason why the tolls are useful. The cost of maintaining the bridges is far above what was expected when they were built. The tolls go a long way towards paying for that maintenance and they have also become a useful tool for demand management.

**Alex Johnstone:** My concern is that, in effect, you seem to argue that tolls should be retained for much the same reasons as similar charges were

proposed under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. The point that I made at last week's meeting is that we are not repealing the opportunity to impose charges that the 2001 act conferred upon the Forth Estuary Transport Authority. We are in effect saying that tolls should be used for that purpose.

The 2001 act has already been put to a couple of political tests—here in Edinburgh and at the Dunfermline East by-election. Given the political reaction, do you believe that the opinions that the public express to you in consultation reflect the opinions that they express when they have the opportunity to vote on the basis of the decision-making process?

14:30

**John Stephens:** I am not sure whether I can answer that.

**Alex Johnstone:** Do you think that people gave you the same answers?

**John Stephens:** Our questionnaire was well structured and very unbiased; people answered truthfully the question that they were asked.

**Alex Johnstone:** But the answer was different from that which would have been given if they had been asked a different question.

**John Stephens:** I am sure that people did not vote in the by-election and elsewhere solely on one issue, but we would need to undertake more research to confirm that—I do not know.

**The Convener:** Perhaps we could return to that issue when the panel contains politicians rather than economists.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):** Many of the councils whose representatives are due to give evidence today have suggested various public transport alternatives that might mitigate some of the increased congestion that the witnesses mentioned. John Stephens said that the behaviour of people like him at the margins might change. Given when the study was written, I presume that it did not include anything that councils are now suggesting. Did the study assume that public transport would be static and would not improve?

**Steve Hunter:** That is correct.

**David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I will amplify Shirley-Anne Somerville's question. The study was published last month but, as any report would, it relied on statistics that go back in time—for example, figure 4.1, which covers the northbound weekday flow on the Forth road bridge, goes back to January last year. Since you produced the report, have any other factors come to your attention—such as information about traffic

flows or emissions—that would have an impact on your report and lead to a different conclusion? Last week, we heard from the bridgemaster that, at peak times, the bridge is in effect full. Having produced the report, is that your understanding?

**Steve Hunter:** That is our understanding. As I said, even if the bridge is full at the peak hour and that peak time extends to become two hours, three hours or more—and that is the only response, as a bridge cannot take more traffic than it is physically capable of taking—people will still travel. Peak periods will become longer, congestion problems will continue and emissions will be produced over a longer period. Problems will amplify in that way.

**Rob Gibson:** The study finds in relation to both bridges that the removal of tolls would lead to increased global and local traffic emissions and to some increase in traffic noise, and that it would have an adverse environmental impact under the STAG criteria. What is the percentage weight of environmental factors in a STAG appraisal?

**John Stephens:** The STAG appraisal's purpose is to present decision makers with all the information that they require to make rational and auditable decisions. How decision makers—yourselves—weight those matters is up to them. As transport professionals, we do not influence that process.

**Rob Gibson:** In the cost-benefit analysis sum, what percentage of the calculation is given over to the environmental impact?

**Steve Hunter:** Under the current guidance in Scotland, the answer is none. Monetising environmental emissions has been talked about for many years and is a hotly debated topic among transport professionals. In England, the Department for Transport has recently included values for emissions of carbon dioxide and for noise calculations. I believe that Transport Scotland's position—it would have to answer the question—is that it is still waiting to decide whether such values are robust enough to include in Scottish transport appraisal guidance.

**Rob Gibson:** You are saying that the STAG system may have to be altered to include environmental elements.

**Steve Hunter:** No. The STAG system includes environmental elements. It is just that the cost-benefit analysis does not try to capture all the impacts. We need to consider the cost-benefit analysis alongside environmental impacts, societal impacts and other areas that we could not put a price on.

**John Stephens:** If we had included values for the carbon emissions in the way that is suggested in England, that would have added to the level of

disbenefits in the monetised costs and benefits. There are no benefits; it adds to the costs.

**Rob Gibson:** You cannot monetise behaviour, however. You may be able to monetise environmental impacts but people react to circumstances such as congestion by altering their behaviour. John Stephens suggested that he took a different route to return from Dundee. I could have suggested that he went by train and avoided any of the questions about paying money on the bridge. Is he suggesting that people will not adapt their behaviour?

**Steve Hunter:** The modelled results include people adapting their behaviour. That is one of the mechanisms that the model is intended to capture. Modelling works by considering not individuals who make black-and-white choices, but large numbers of people who make a range of decisions. It takes all of those in aggregate.

**Rob Gibson:** I have two specific points on that. First, are you suggesting that removing the tolls will increase the use of the bridge by people who are travelling to work? Secondly, I hope that you will not contradict the Road Haulage Association, which suggests that the removal of the tolls is unlikely to increase the number of heavy goods vehicles using the bridge.

**John Stephens:** One of the findings from the other part of the modelling exercise is that removing the tolls would increase migration to Fife. More people would choose to live in Fife.

**Rob Gibson:** Perhaps about 1,100 people.

**John Stephens:** It is not many, but for a bridge that handles 3,000, if all those 1,100 people wanted to travel at once we would have an even bigger problem. As we said before, it is all about changes in behaviour at the margins. If 1,100 or 1,200 people migrate to Fife, the chances are that most of them will commute back to Edinburgh, with a high proportion going by car.

**The Convener:** I want to pursue the point about carbon pricing a little further. I do not expect you to be able to put figures on this at the moment, but if we were to include a price element for the environmental cost of emitting carbon, we would probably be talking about more than 50p for a crossing, or £1 to go there and back. Is that a reasonable guess? The policy consequence would be to try to make the public transport options, such as rail, cheaper, rather than making travel by road cheaper. If we went down the route of carbon pricing, would the logical conclusion be to give people different incentives?

**John Stephens:** If the pricing mechanism were used fully and carbon were priced in, I would suggest that the toll level would be higher than £1. That alone would encourage people to use public

transport. Given that transport is a peak problem, you would probably also want to vary the toll by time of day. There is no point in charging people a fiver at half past 1 in the morning when traffic is in free-flow conditions. The time you want to move people on to the buses and trains is at the peak.

**Des McNulty:** I have three relatively brief points. First, you have made a convincing case. Our next set of witnesses includes representatives of the City of Edinburgh Council, whose evidence suggests that there are clear transport, economic and environmental disbenefits to removing the tolls. Part of that is linked to a modal shift from public transport to private transport, and increased volume of use. Is it possible to quantify the investment that would be required to prevent a modal shift? In other words, how much would it cost to prevent what most people see as the negative impacts of removing the tolls?

**Steve Hunter:** It would be possible to quantify that, but it would be rather an expensive study. It is not without reason that introducing a form of road pricing has been examined in several areas of England to encourage people to mode shift and use public transport—the stick as well as the carrot in helping people to change their behaviour. You could spend a lot of money trying to reach a situation in which the public transport offer was as good as the private car. Obviously, that is not possible in some situations—you cannot provide public transport between every home and work location.

**Des McNulty:** I suspect that we will have to rely on snarl-ups to achieve that shift.

My second point is that the financial arrangements that underpin the toll regime provide a relatively virtuous circle. They provide the basis for maintaining the bridge, and over a lengthier period they also provide finance that has allowed investment in better road connections to and around the bridge. Do you have a figure that would cover not just the one-year maintenance costs but the longer-term aggregated costs to the Scottish exchequer of removing tolls? The ministers are fond of saying that it will cost £15 million to take the tolls off the Forth road bridge, because that is the amount of money that is collected. However, if we consider the work that the toll income has allowed to be done, we see that the cost of removing the tolls is a significantly larger amount. Do you have a figure for that?

**Steve Hunter:** That is not something that our specialism would allow us to calculate. You would probably need to talk to more engineering-based consultants.

**Des McNulty:** Do you accept that the cost would be significantly larger than simply the toll income?

**Steve Hunter:** I am not sure. I think that the £15 million toll income is the money that is currently spent, and I am not sure that you could achieve more than spending the amount that is available.

**Des McNulty:** I have one final question. The report was published in August 2007. My understanding is that the substantive conclusions were available certainly to civil servants and probably to ministers earlier than that. When did you pass over your principal findings to the system?

**John Stephens:** We had a first run of the modelling results some time in April, but there were questions about the suitability of the local model in the Forth area. There were also some questions about the land use model and the results that came from it. That required two or three further iterations of both the transport model and our land use model before we had conclusions that we could—

**Des McNulty:** In substantive terms, when ministers announced their intentions to remove tolls from the bridges, they should have had access to the main conclusions of your work. You had made a presentation to civil servants, so the ministers should have been advised about that. They have no excuse for not knowing what the study's conclusions say about the transport, economic and environmental impact.

**John Stephens:** The April findings were first findings. There were issues with the modelling, and we were not confident about some of the model runs. It might have been a mistake to use that information, because it could have changed subsequently when we went back and did the other model iterations.

**Des McNulty:** Did it change in substance? Did you end up drawing any conclusions in the final study that were substantially different in direction from those in the interim reports that you reported to civil servants?

**John Stephens:** There were certainly differences in the land use modelling.

**Steve Hunter:** The main thing that we were able to do was increase the robustness of the information, so that we knew that it applied more widely. You will have to ask our client who had access to it.

**The Convener:** I thank both our witnesses for their time and for agreeing to supply additional written information. We will welcome anything that they wish to add.

14:45

*Meeting suspended.*

14:47

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel. We have with us Janice Pauwels and Ewan Kennedy from the City of Edinburgh Council, Bob McLellan from Fife Council and Ken Laing from Dundee City Council. I invite the witnesses to make brief opening remarks.

**Ewan Kennedy (City of Edinburgh Council):** On behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council, I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to present evidence. I am transport planning manager for the council. My colleague Janice Pauwels will deal with questions on the environmental impact of the proposed abolition of tolls. We prepared the evidence that has been presented to the committee.

**Bob McLellan (Fife Council):** I am head of transportation services in Fife Council. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come along this afternoon. The only evidence that Fife Council has submitted is the minute of the council meeting on 2 March 2006, at which a motion to seek to have the tolls removed from the Forth and Tay bridges was agreed. That remains the current view of Fife Council.

**Ken Laing (Dundee City Council):** I am the director of contracts with Dundee City Council. Until a few weeks ago, when I changed jobs, I was the deputy director of planning and transportation and city engineer. I act as the engineer to the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board, so I have two strings to my bow, as it were. The evidence that we presented is a summation of the various committee reports that were approved during phase 1 and phase 2 of the review of tolled bridges.

**The Convener:** Thank you. How much has the Scottish Government consulted local authorities and what form has that consultation taken? You will be aware that the bill itself has not been subject to any formal consultation. What level of contact have you had with the Scottish Government about its proposals?

**Bob McLellan:** There was more consultation of local authorities than is currently the case during phase 1 of the tolled bridges review, which I think was in 2002. More recently, such consultation has been undertaken through the regional transport partnerships, as opposed to consulting local authorities directly. An example that moves away from tolls slightly is that the consultation on a replacement crossing was carried out purely through regional transport partnerships and not local authorities. Neither Fife Council nor the City of Edinburgh Council has been party to meetings about a multimodal replacement crossing. However, to go back to the tolls, it is certainly the

case that local authorities had the opportunity in 2002 to respond to the consultation document, which I believe was also the case in phase 2 of the tolled bridges review.

**The Convener:** Since the intention was announced, has there been no formal dialogue about the content of the Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Bill?

**Bob McLellan:** To the best of my knowledge, there has not. I understand that the only people from local authorities who are represented in what are called reference groups are those from regional transport partnerships. Fife Council is not represented in either the Forth or Tay reference groups.

**Ewan Kennedy:** I echo and support the comments of Mr McLellan from Fife Council. The City of Edinburgh Council was aware of the consultation process and sought to inform the elected members of the council about it. We did that in a report to the council on 28 June 2007. Much of the general evidence that has been presented to the committee, and the answers to your questions today, are covered in that report. A previous report from 2006 responded to the various consultation processes that were carried out before the bill was introduced.

**The Convener:** There has, however, been no formal dialogue about the contents of the bill.

**Ewan Kennedy:** That is correct. I echo Mr McLellan's comments and support strongly what he says about the current consultation. There seems to have been a shift away from consulting local authorities, particularly in the case of the Forth crossing, tolls and the strategic projects review. Consultation is now channelled through regional transport partnerships. We have contacted ministers and Transport Scotland to raise our concerns about the process, which we do not feel is inclusive.

**Ken Laing:** I agree with the previous comments. The only other point that I will add on behalf of Dundee is that at least we had early dialogue with Steer Davies Gleave, the consultants who carried out the study. We gave them the Paramics traffic model that was developed for Dundee city centre. The Tay bridge, which joins directly into the city centre, has a direct input. However, there has been no other formal consultation.

**The Convener:** My next question might take up some time. What is the reasoning behind your different positions on the proposal to abolish the tolls? I am grateful for the written evidence that we have received that outlines the different local authorities' positions but, for the record, I invite you to put more flesh on the bones about the reasons. Let us begin with the City of Edinburgh Council.

**Ewan Kennedy:** I will give an overview, but focus on the transport impacts. My colleague, Janice Pauwels, will deal with environmental impacts. We were invited primarily to present evidence in response to the question: if the tolls were removed, what concerns would be raised and how would we seek to mitigate them? If tolls are removed, the biggest single change will be an increase in traffic coming across the Forth road bridge. An increase during peak hours would be particularly significant. From the analysis that has been undertaken by consultants on behalf of Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government, we see that the increase will come about because of rerouting of traffic, mainly from the Kincardine bridge back towards the Forth road bridge. That, in turn, will increase queues and could increase congestion, but is more likely to cause the periods of congestion to become longer.

The second effect that we envisage is a reduction in the competitiveness of public transport compared with car-borne travel. In effect, unless there is some change in the fares structure or fare levels in public transport, its competitiveness will be reduced. The increased congestion will obviously be to the detriment of all road users, but public transport will be affected by becoming less attractive. That prediction is cause for concern, especially in respect of bus traffic. In 1997, the number of bus services coming across the Forth road bridge in the morning peak was about five services up to 9 o'clock in the morning; now, 12 services an hour come across—it is a huge success. To a large extent, that success is the result of park-and-ride and bus-priority infrastructure that Fife Council has put in place, the bus-priority infrastructure that the City of Edinburgh Council has put in place on the A90 and bus operators' provision of services.

We fear that changes will impact on public transport use by making it less attractive. If public transport has to experience the same congestion as general car traffic, people might stop using it. If it appears to be more expensive, more people will stop using it. Although rail travel across the Forth does not suffer the effects of congestion, it will be affected by the change in the relative costs.

I have probably covered most of the points on transport, so I will pass on to my colleague to deal with the environmental aspects.

**Janice Pauwels (City of Edinburgh Council):** Our main environmental concern is about the impact on air quality. The City of Edinburgh Council had already declared an air quality management area, which covers most of the city centre, in 2003; in December 2006, we had to declare a second one, which covers St John's Road in Corstorphine. Our concern is that any predicted increase in emissions is likely to

exacerbate the problems in our existing air quality management areas. We do not really know to what extent the predictions will be realised, but the increase concerns us.

The second point is that we have to meet the air quality objectives by 2010, so there is not a lot of time left to consider how to address the problem if the predicted increases in emissions take place. Given that we already have work under way to address air quality within the city, any projected traffic increase concerns us greatly.

I also make the point that the pollutants are mostly NO<sub>x</sub>. At the moment, we are achieving our levels of particulates, but any projected increase in particulate levels would also cause us concern.

15:00

**Bob McLellan:** I come back to Fife Council's decision on 2 March 2006. After the tolls were removed from the Skye and Erskine bridges, quite a lot of dialogue took place between Fife Council and Dundee Council and probably between the relevant councils and the Executive, as it was then. Equity was the driving factor: we wanted to know the rationale behind the decisions to remove the tolls from the Skye and Erskine bridges, which did not seem to be subject to the level of scrutiny that the proposals for the Forth and the Tay bridges have been subjected to. That led to our building up a head of steam. The committee might find it slightly surprising that, technically, Fife Council had no position on the issue until 2 March 2006.

I know that the committee has already taken evidence on traffic modelling from consultants and that some numbers have been mentioned. The tolled bridges review phase 1 report predicted that traffic volumes would increase by 15 to 20 per cent, but it should be noted—I am sure that the consultants will have advised the committee professionally—that that review did not take account of developments that have since taken place. For example, the size of the Ferrytoll park-and-ride facility was doubled during phase 2 of the project, the capacity of the rail service was increased and enhanced by more than 30 per cent in 2004-05, and several thousand additional parking spaces were provided at railway stations in Fife. Those developments have been accompanied by longer trains and longer platforms, all of which were funded directly or indirectly by the former Executive.

A great deal has been happening. The enhancement of public transport has been a high priority and that remains the case. In conjunction with the Scottish Government, the south east of Scotland transport partnership and all its member councils are fully committed to enhancing public

transport to give people the opportunity to use public transport and thereby achieve greater modal shift. There has been significant modal shift already.

It is difficult to look at the proposal in isolation, when another crossing is being considered. Whether the new crossing will be above ground or below ground is immaterial; if it goes ahead, it will enhance public transport further and might offer enhanced provision for high-occupancy vehicle users. Any predictions about the existing single crossing can be viewed only as short term, based on the assumption that the commitment to an additional crossing is met. The present bridge's capacity of 3,600 vehicles in two hours will change completely, depending on decisions on a new crossing. It is quite difficult to assess the tolls in isolation, although I accept that short-term impacts, such as those on emissions, would have to be addressed before an additional multimodal crossing were put in place.

On the Tay bridge, there is little doubt that the emissions that are caused by the traffic queues back into the city centre could be greatly reduced by the removal of tolls from the north side of the bridge.

**Ken Laing:** Dundee City Council's position—like that of Fife Council—is about equity: we think that the tolls should not remain.

An issue that should be borne in mind is the direct impact that traffic from the Tay bridge has on the evening peak flows in Dundee. The siting of the toll plaza and the shortness of the approach ramps to the tolls mean that, on most evenings, there is significant congestion in the whole city centre. The inner ring-road area starts to lock up as a consequence of traffic backing up on to the ring road and interfering with traffic that is trying to exit Dundee to the east and west or to cross the city centre at that point.

Dundee operates by means of an outer ring road—the Kingsway—which comes down and along the riverside, and an inner ring road, which goes round the city centre. Those roads meet just where the traffic backs up from the bridge, so it is a highly sensitive location. Interestingly, Dundee City Council wrote to the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board—back in 2002, I think, although I might be wrong—to ask it to examine the toll plaza situation because of congestion. As a consequence, the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board undertook a fairly major study. A traffic model is not necessary to understand the problem—one need just look out of my old window in Tayside house to see the congestion that is caused and the impact that it has. However, when one runs that through the Paramics traffic model, the conclusions show the congestion that is caused on the network by the backing up of traffic from the bridge.

As part of the work that we have done in developing the central waterfront proposals, we have considered complete reconstruction of the road network in that area, which would allow us to put in traffic control measures that would control the flow of traffic into, out of and across the city. That model would work, but only if there were no backing up from the toll plaza on the north side of the bridge. The consultants who undertook work on behalf of the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board concluded that the best way of dealing with the situation was to move the toll plaza to the south side of the bridge, where a larger plaza could be constructed. Obviously things have moved on since then.

I do not want to get into the work that was done in the toll impact study, but it produced one or two strange conclusions. From an origin and destination survey that was carried out as recently as April this year, we know that the vast majority of traffic that crosses the Tay road bridge is local traffic that either starts or finishes its journey within 25 miles of the bridge. We also know that the majority of journeys are made for work-related purposes. The focus group surveys that we have carried out indicated that business users or users for work purposes would not change their journey patterns as a consequence of the decision to remove tolls; they are insensitive to that. It is therefore difficult to see the predicted increase in traffic levels materialising.

The only conclusion is that the increase will take place in leisure travel, where users indicated that they might make more journeys if there were no tolls on the bridge. Dundee City Council would view more—rather than fewer—people coming into the regional centre as being positive. Clearly, the increase would need to be controlled and managed, and we would like to encourage more use of public transport in the area, as we currently do.

**The Convener:** Thank you for giving me the fullest answer possible to my question about the reasons for your position on the proposed abolition of tolls. Other members will pursue many of the issues that you have raised in relation to traffic management and so on.

The Scottish ministers have argued that fairness for bridge users is the primary concern, and both Fife Council and Dundee City Council have made the argument for fairness, or equity. Over the past few decades—more than my lifetime—the cost of owning and running a car for personal journeys has stayed more or less the same in real terms; it is much more affordable now than it was when I was born. However, the cost of public transport has gone up and up. Why is it crucial to consider fairness for car users, but not for public transport users of either bridge? If, as Mr McLellan says, we

are seeking modal shift, for a host of reasons—not least to deal with the crucial long-term issue of climate change—should not we seek to close that gap, rather than to widen it, as the bill would do?

**Bob McLellan:** My arithmetic is not as good as it used to be, but I think that removal of the £1 toll equates to taking away the petrol costs of between six and 10 miles of a journey. People will not change their travel patterns greatly if the £1 toll is removed; it will not determine whether or not they go into Edinburgh. Given that the bridge is 10.5 miles from Edinburgh city centre, they would have to travel 21 miles to “save” the cost of travelling between six and 10 miles.

**The Convener:** Forgive me, Mr McLellan, but you are making a point about the accuracy of the toll impact study. My question is this: to whom do we most urgently need to be fair?

**Bob McLellan:** I strongly suggest that we should be fair to both groups. If everyone who uses the car at the moment were to shift their mode of transport overnight, the public transport infrastructure would not be able to cope. There is no doubt that there is an issue of equity. In Fife we have about 500 bridges; there are tolls on only two of those—the Tay and Forth bridges—and there are no toll bridges anywhere else in Scotland. There are other bridges that cross estuaries—for example, the Kingston bridge in Glasgow—none of which has tolls, so why should the Forth and Tay bridges have them?

I agree whole-heartedly that the cost of public transport should be made more attractive. First ScotRail has already moved to lower fares to Fife: for example, the fare from Markinch is now the same as that from Kirkcaldy, which was not case previously and encourages people to use the train. Our aim in Fife is to get people on to public transport at the earliest part of their journey, not as close to the bridgehead as possible.

We could argue that it is not fair that there are major differences in rail costs between the west of Scotland and the east coast—I believe that fares in the west, in the Strathclyde partnership for transport area, are 23 per cent cheaper than those on the east coast. There are a myriad of equity issues around the bridge tolls and existing fares for rail and bus travel throughout Scotland. The direct answer to the question is that if we get more affordable and better-quality public transport, the bridges, or crossings, will never reach their capacity: people will be happy to travel on public transport if the cost is right.

**Ken Laing:** On the equity argument, Dundee City Council's starting point was to consider equity on a geographical basis. On public transport versus the car, the city has one of the lowest rates of car ownership of the major cities and, therefore,

one of the highest rates of use of public transport. The council has reinforced that through major investment in the provision of public transport within the city. However, it should be borne in mind that the bridge is also used by people from outwith the city who start their journeys in Angus, for instance. Travelling by public transport in such rural areas is not so simple, so many people rely on their cars. I would reflect the comments that Bob McLellan made: it is our intention to encourage people to move from cars to public transport and to make public transport as affordable and attractive as possible.

**Des McNulty:** Mr Laing said that he could look out the window of Tayside house and see some of the problems with traffic management in Dundee. My understanding is that there was a debt of approximately £13 million for the Tay bridge, which his organisation increased to £26 million by spending money on improving the toll plaza. If there was additional money, why did you not simply pay off the debt and remove the tolls three or four years ago, rather than pointlessly spending money on the toll plaza?

**Ken Laing:** I am afraid that that statement is not accurate: neither the council nor the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board made that investment. The board commissioned a study to consider what could be done to improve the toll plaza arrangement: consultants were employed to do that work and came back with two options. One was to extend the toll plaza at the north side of the bridge, in its existing location, and the other was to relocate it to the south side and start tolling vehicles travelling north-bound. Neither option was implemented as we were overtaken by events arising from the toll impact study.

**Des McNulty:** So, the money was not actually spent, but you spent a lot of time planning the process. However, you are now in new circumstances. Is that a fair summary?

**Ken Laing:** Yes.

**Des McNulty:** Last week, we heard from the bridgmaster that the Forth bridge is essentially full and is operating at capacity. In response to some of Patrick Harvie's questions, you seemed to imply that there had been a significant modal shift on to public transport in journeys between Fife and Edinburgh. Is there any evidence to support that?

**Bob McLellan:** Yes. We have figures on that in our local transport strategy, copies of which I can provide to the committee. We have carried out surveys of rail usage increases to show the overcrowding before and after the introduction of additional capacity. I do not have the exact percentage figures to hand, but there has been a modal shift to rail, which has been caused by the

increases in rail capacity over the past two or three years.

As a slight aside, that is why it is so important that we do not lose certain more marginal cross-country franchise services, which are very important to local transport because they stop at peak periods at key locations in Fife and carry hundreds of people.

**Des McNulty:** Rail use has increased in Scotland and, indeed, throughout the United Kingdom. However, my question was not about that general modal shift but about whether there is any evidence that there will be a modal shift to public transport by people who currently use the Forth road bridge. What would be the impact of removing tolls on the capacity for modal shift?

15:15

**Bob McLellan:** When we added 350 car parking spaces to the hundreds and hundreds of spaces that were already at Kirkcaldy station, they were all taken up within a couple of months—

**Des McNulty:** Perhaps I am not explaining myself very well. You have said that a whole series of mitigation measures has been introduced to achieve modal shift—in other words, to move people to rail in order to take traffic off the bridge. The bridgmaster has told us that that approach is not working and that the bridge is just as full as it has ever been. Indeed, significant projections indicate that the situation will get worse. You have already taken mitigating measures, but they have not worked, and there is little scope for introducing other such measures that will not be prohibitively expensive. In fact, the consequence of the bill will be not a modal shift to public transport but a shift in the opposite direction.

**Bob McLellan:** I am with you now. Although I began to talk about percentages, I did not finish my comments. From phase 1 of the tolled bridges review onwards, there has been a wide range of estimates for the percentage increase in vehicle movements if the tolls are removed on the Forth bridge—indeed, depending on which study you look at, the estimates go up to about 40 per cent. Those figures, particularly those in phase 1, do not take account of additional public transport measures that have been introduced. As I understand it, with the refinement of the modelling, people are now talking about a 10 per cent or less increase in vehicle movements, which means that removing the tolls will not generate a huge increase in traffic, certainly as far as public transport is concerned. The transport model for Scotland in phase 1 of the tolled bridges review did not take account of—

**Des McNulty:** But we have now had a third study.



**The Convener:** Des, this will have to be your final question. We need to move on.

**Bob McLellan:** I accept your point, Mr McNulty. I think that the third study refers to a 10 per cent increase in traffic.

We have already introduced a lot of mitigation measures, but that is not to say that we are resting on our laurels. For example, through-fares strategies and integrated ticketing have already been mentioned, and simply enhancing the signalling on the Forth rail bridge will allow more train paths to be opened up if freight shifts on to the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway line. Although a lot has happened already, there is much more still to happen.

We are all aware of the problems with the condition of the bridge. However, significant work that was carried out as part of the "SEStran Integrated Transport Corridors Study"—SITCoS—highlighted that any new crossing would not provide any more space for single-occupancy car users but, instead, would allow the introduction of light rapid transit systems or dedicated bus lanes, which would provide enhanced capacity. That said, the difficulty that we face in the short term is the existing bridge's condition.

**The Convener:** I am reluctant to get into speculation about a new crossing.

**Alison McInnes:** Mr McLellan and Mr Laing, first, you obviously dispute the findings of the toll impact study, but have you undertaken any independent research to support the local knowledge and practical experience that I do not dispute you have to hand?

Secondly, setting aside the fact that you dispute the study's findings, if the case advanced in the study were found to be correct, would the issue of equity really be so important to your two councils that you would be happy to accept the greater economic disadvantage that, as the study implies, would be posed by congestion?

**Bob McLellan:** On the second question, the fundamental issue for Fife Council is equity. On the first question, the figures range from 40 per cent to 10 per cent. I accept that other issues may be involved, but further modelling needs to be done to take account of the public transport opportunity and the fact that 80 per cent of people travel one person to a vehicle. However, those are side issues. The central issue for Fife Council is that tolls have been removed from every bridge in Scotland bar those over the Tay and the Forth. Fife Council is clear on its position: it does not want to see tolls in Fife.

**Alison McInnes:** But—

**The Convener:** Briefly.

**Alison McInnes:** I will be brief, convener. Mr McLellan did not answer my first question, which was whether Fife Council had carried out independent research to challenge the toll impact study.

**Bob McLellan:** Not independent research, but the tolled bridges review phase 1 to phase 3 reports show the figure for the increase in traffic movements reducing from 40 per cent to 10 per cent. If there were to be a phase 4 report, in which other matters were taken into account, would that further reduce the increased volume of traffic that uses the existing bridge?

**Alison McInnes:** I am sorry, convener, but if I may I will pursue the issue a little further.

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Alison McInnes:** So, now that the figure is down to 10 per cent, you do not dispute the findings of the toll impact study. The study states clearly that, even at 10 per cent, the resultant disbenefits are such that people in your council area may be seriously disadvantaged in economic terms. Is that less important than dealing with the one-off equity issue?

**Bob McLellan:** Fife Council's decision was based on equity. On capacity, the Forth bridge can take only 3,600 vehicles in any two-hour period, using two lanes. The issue is not additional cars using the bridge, but the fact that bridge capacity cannot be increased. I accept that an additional 5 per cent or 10 per cent of vehicles coming on to the bridge at peak times could lengthen the peak period, marginally or otherwise, but that is only one side of the equation. We need also to consider the parallel issue of public transport enhancements.

Let us hope that Fife is not disadvantaged as a result of an increase in bridge traffic. If that were to happen, one could argue that public transport options, such as rail, would become more attractive to people. I am not advocating that scenario, but if it were to happen, it might help the public transport argument.

**Ken Laing:** In answer to the first question, Dundee City Council has not undertaken independent research. Obviously, the toll impact study is a major body of work. We have not attempted—nor have we had the time to attempt—to critically review that work or to commission an independent study. At the outset, I was not saying that we wanted to question the study in any great detail; I was trying to reflect on the fact that any traffic modelling or prediction of growth will always be tempered by the judgments that had to be made. I was trying to say that we need to exercise caution when interpreting the results of such a study.

The study threw up a number of contradictions. By way of illustration, the Tay road bridge is effectively the only tolled route into Dundee. A number of other major routes lead into the city centre from Perth to the west, Aberdeen to the north, and from the east. A comparison was made between traffic growth on those routes and the route over the Tay over the period 2001 to 2005, which showed that growth on the other routes was in the order of 5 per cent, but that there was a higher rate of growth on the route over the Tay. One conclusion was that the toll had no impact in controlling or managing traffic growth. Other factors are at work in this regard, not only the toll.

I turn to the second question, on the equity issue. The situation on the Tay bridge differs from that on the Forth in terms of traffic volume. In Dundee, congestion in the evening peak is particularly associated with bridge traffic. The morning peak also involves bridge traffic, but the volume is similar to that on the other routes into the city centre. Peak periods are very short, confined periods. We believe that we can manage them by managing how traffic comes into the city and, as I said earlier, by managing people's journey patterns. Certainly, the issue does not override the equity issue.

**The Convener:** At this point, in order to get everything in, I ask members and witnesses to keep questions and answers reasonably brief. I want to give David Stewart an opportunity to come in on the question, after which I will call Alex Johnstone and Shirley-Anne Somerville. I also want to ensure that the witness from City of Edinburgh Council has an opportunity to respond to some of the issues. Thus far, most of the questions have been directed at the witnesses from Fife Council and Dundee City Council.

**David Stewart:** My questions build on some of Alison McInnes's points. I start with a question for the City of Edinburgh Council, because we have heard from Fife Council and Dundee City Council. The master study is the toll impact study, but have you considered any independent sources of alternative information? If not, will you consider any studies that have been completed since the toll impact study on, for example, emissions or traffic volumes? That might give you a more complete picture. The toll impact study is important but, as I said to the first panel, a lot of the information covers January to July of last year, and things have moved on since the statistics were compiled.

**Ewan Kennedy:** SEStran undertook a piece of work—I am struggling to remember when, but I think it was in 2004. At that time, SEStran was a voluntary organisation rather than a statutory body, and it undertook a series of corridor studies, including one on the cross-Forth corridor. The

study did not single out tolling, but it considered tolling alongside a range of other initiatives. However, it is fair to say that the results of that study align reasonably well with the results of the more recent studies. There are similar trends. We have not seen the trends going in the wrong direction.

That is the only piece of independent work that was undertaken jointly by all the authorities that have an interest in the corridor. The City of Edinburgh Council has not undertaken any other independent work.

Will you clarify the second part of your question? I think you asked whether the council believes that it would be useful to undertake further studies.

**David Stewart:** You considered the toll impact study, which you said was a helpful contribution to the debate. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world, but in such a world, which statistics would you access to clarify the council's position?

**Ewan Kennedy:** The findings of the most recent study are in line with what has gone before. There is a definite trend or a coming together of results that tell a similar story. There might be upper and lower bounds—say, 30 per cent and 10 per cent—but the results flag up the fact that there will be an increase in traffic on the Forth road bridge. The studies explain fairly consistently how that increase will come about and its effects on transport. From the City of Edinburgh Council's point of view, that is fairly well understood. There will be some significant negative effects not only on the travelling public but on the environment. If the decision is made to remove tolls from the bridge, a lot of work will be required to consider the impact in greater detail and to start fleshing out the measures that will be necessary to mitigate the effects and to protect public transport.

**David Stewart:** That sounds to me like a further report.

Do Dundee City Council or Fife Council have anything to add? You partially answered the point when Alison McInnes asked you about the matter earlier.

**Ken Laing:** I do not have anything to add.

**Janice Pauwels:** To add to what Ewan Kennedy said, to my knowledge there has been no detailed study of any of the environmental issues that have been mentioned. We would have to consider much more detailed dispersion modelling studies to try to determine the results of the predicted impacts. That has not been done to date and further work would definitely be required.

**David Stewart:** If the toll elimination went through, would you undertake further study to consider its effect on the environment?

**Janice Pauwels:** We would have to start a programme of monitoring over at least 12 months.

15:30

**Alex Johnstone:** Janice Pauwels, you spoke at some length about the work that was being done to improve air quality in Edinburgh. Has City of Edinburgh Council given any further consideration to introducing new proposals for city entry charging in order to underpin that?

**Janice Pauwels:** Not to my knowledge.

**Alex Johnstone:** In the event that such a policy were to be pursued, would the south end of the Forth bridge be the appropriate place to start that zone and would £1 be a big enough charge to have an effect?

**Janice Pauwels:** Can I take the fifth amendment on that?

**The Convener:** Does that answer your question?

**Alex Johnstone:** Yes.

**The Convener:** I am glad to hear it.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I have a couple of questions that are perhaps specific to Edinburgh. You mentioned in your written evidence some concerns about wear and tear on the bridge, particularly if the number of heavy goods vehicles increases. Last week, we heard from Alastair Andrew, from Forth Estuary Transport Authority, who said that there would be no effect on the maintenance regime. He thought that there would be no increase in HGVs on the bridge. There was a similar response about the Tay bridge. Does that allay your fears, particularly concerning the HGV numbers and wear and tear?

**Ewan Kennedy:** There are two dimensions to that. On the potential increase in HGVs, I might be wrong, but I am not aware of any figures that separate HGV growth from car growth. Setting that aside, however, if the bridgemaster—who knows about such matters in absolute detail—assured the council that increased HGV numbers would have no impact on the life of the bridge, the council's fears would be allayed.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We talked earlier about further work. You say that there are fears that people will move from public transport and decrease their use of buses, but no work has been done on the extent of that reduction, nor on how many additional car users who cross the Forth will go all the way into the city centre rather than use the park-and-ride facilities, or any other facilities that you might set up.

**Ewan Kennedy:** City of Edinburgh Council has done no detailed work on the degree of impact.

However, through the consultation process with bridge users, the toll impact study flagged up that there was probably greater sensitivity about the effects of congestion than about the toll itself. It is likely that we would see increased congestion and congestion over a longer period. If public transport, particularly buses, got caught up in that, it is highly probable that there would be increased sensitivity among bus passengers, which would influence their travel behaviour. I agree that that would be worthy of further investigation.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** If there were increased congestion it might persuade more people to go by train. I know from your evidence that you have considered other mitigating projects. Such projects could increase the demand on the bus to ensure that that were not such a problem.

**Ewan Kennedy:** Indeed. People could decide to go from bus to train. Equally, they could decide to go from bus to car. However, we have seen that the introduction of park and ride and bus priority on the A90 corridor have had a significant impact and, as I said earlier, the bus operator Stagecoach has reported an increase in demand. It is a two-stage process. First, we want to ensure that we protect public transport's market share. Two competing factors—cost and congestion—work against us. We need to increase priority just to stand still. If we want to continue to push up the attractiveness of public transport, particularly buses, we require mitigation in the form of fairly comprehensive segregated bus priority coming into the city.

**Des McNulty:** Can I add something?

**The Convener:** If it is brief.

**Des McNulty:** The evidence from City of Edinburgh Council is good and comprehensive, and hits a lot of the points that the committee has been trying to address. However, I will ask you about mitigation. I appreciate that one can use mitigating projects to offset different impacts, for example, noise, air quality or modal impacts. If we were not to make things worse by removing tolls from the Forth bridge, what could the mitigating measures achieve? In other words, will we make the situation worse and then spend a lot of money to get it back to where it was? Is that what we mean by mitigation?

Secondly, to what extent do you feel that the mechanics of removing the tolls—the removal of the toll booths themselves and the road improvements that are associated with that, given the confined space on the bridge—will make some of the mitigating measures that you want to take or are currently taking no longer feasible so that, whatever you do, it will be impossible to improve bus speeds or address other matters? It is fair to say that we can take mitigating measures, but we

could take them now and they would have a bigger impact. The mitigation that we will require in the context of toll removal will represent fighting hard to catch up with the impact of toll removal. Is that a fair summary of what you are saying?

**The Convener:** It may be a fair summary, but I am not sure that it is a concise one.

**Ewan Kennedy:** On the first question, the local and regional transport strategies have general targets and, in the regional transport strategy in particular, specific targets to increase the mode share of public transport—be it bus or rail—across the Forth. We can point to considerable success. I take your previous point about the bridge still being full, but that does not undermine the success in relation to, in particular, an increase in bus traffic.

The removal of tolls has a potential two-stage effect. It may impinge on the increase in mode share that we have managed to achieve thus far. As there is an upward step change in the amount of traffic on the bridge, there may be a corresponding downward step change in the use of public transport. You can argue that mitigation measures associated with the decision to remove the tolls should be directed at maintaining the status quo but, looking to the future, the policy—which is underpinned by local and regional transport strategies—continues to be to try to develop modal share. Arguably, the forecast increase in travel is in the sector of the transport market that we want to accommodate the bulk of such growth.

I think that in your second question you asked whether we can take steps to make a difference. We have introduced bus priority in the southbound direction on the A90 corridor and there is a queue management system in the southbound direction. There is limited bus priority in the northbound direction. The answer to your question on whether we could take mitigating measures in the corridor itself is yes. The SITCoS report identified that there is scope to do that. It would not entail assigning existing capacity, because that would not be workable. We would have to create new capacity for public transport.

It is fair to say that one of the effects of removing the tolls would be to present the opportunity, which perhaps does not exist now, to introduce bus priority on the toll plaza.

**Des McNulty:** Paragraph 4.2.1 of your submission says that it will cost £10 million to £20 million to do something that the bridge's size does not allow you to deliver effectively.

**The Convener:** We are going to have to move on, Des.

**Ewan Kennedy:** I am sorry; I did not hear.

**Des McNulty:** Paragraph 4.2.1 of your submission states:

“civil engineering would be required to deliver the necessary bus priority measures; costs would be likely to be in a range from £10M to £20M.”

**Ewan Kennedy:** That refers to the fact that we would be seeking to introduce new segregated public transport capacity on the corridor. The southbound queue management system required the road to be widened to create a lane for public transport, and the SITCoS report identified similar measures for similar types of engineering interventions, the nature of which means they are likely to be expensive.

**Alison McInnes:** The financial memorandum that accompanies the bill predicts that abolition of the tolls will mean only marginal costs for local authorities. Could each local authority representative respond to that?

**Ewan Kennedy:** The bulk of the evidence that has been provided by the City of Edinburgh Council focuses on mitigation measures. I will let Janice Pauwels comment on the environmental measures.

The cost of introducing mitigation measures is likely to fall on regional transport partnerships or local authorities. However, they would look to Transport Scotland or the Scottish Government to fund them; there would certainly not be enough local funding to introduce them.

**The Convener:** In that context, would it be fair to say that the financial memorandum fails to take account of the need for a local authority such as Edinburgh to examine mitigating the traffic management or environmental impacts?

**Ewan Kennedy:** Certainly the City of Edinburgh Council could not fund the traffic impact measures that would be required to accommodate any negative impact.

**Janice Pauwels:** We would have to consider funding to carry out dispersion modelling exercises to assess air quality impacts, which could cost anywhere in the region of £50,000 upwards. Such additional costs to the councils are not built in to the financial memorandum.

**The Convener:** Given that the council has had no formal contact with the Government since it announced the bridge toll proposals, I assume that there has been no indication that such funding will be made available.

**Janice Pauwels:** No.

**Alison McInnes:** Do the other two councils have any views on the financial memorandum?

**Bob McLellan:** We believe that the marginal costs to Fife Council will be zero. We have not

been asked to contribute anything to support the removal of tolls from the bridge.

A lot of projects are being developed with SEStran, including one for high-occupancy vehicles, and they are being promoted irrespective of whether the tolls stay or are removed. The HOV project will help to solve the problem that 80 per cent of vehicles that cross the bridge are single occupancy. A number of other projects, such as an additional park-and-ride scheme, are being considered in parallel with each other, but no direct cost consequences for Fife Council will arise from the removal of the bridge tolls.

**Ken Laing:** Dundee City Council is in a similar situation. We have a number of initiatives—I mentioned the central waterfront proposals that will allow the management of the traffic in that area to be restructured. It is hoped that there will be a separate funding stream for that. Likewise, regional transport partnership funding for park-and-ride schemes is also being pursued. So on the question whether removal of the tolls will have direct consequences for Dundee City Council, I reflect Bob McLellan's comments.

**Cathy Peattie:** FETA suggested that a recent agreement between the Scottish Executive and the City of Edinburgh Council over the funding of a 15-year public-private partnership programme could provide a possible model for future funding. Will the City of Edinburgh Council representatives provide the committee with some information on this PPP agreement?

**Ewan Kennedy:** I am sorry, I am unable to provide any information on that.

**Cathy Peattie:** Convener, it would be interesting to get some further information on the agreement, given the issues around future funding for the bridge.

**The Convener:** Perhaps we can pursue that in writing.

15:45

**Cathy Peattie:** I have another question. Last week, the committee heard from trade unions that represent workers on the Forth bridge that there had been no consultation with the workforce. I am concerned to hear that there was no consultation with the local councils either. Have you investigated whether your authorities can offer jobs, training or other assistance to FETA staff who may lose their jobs due to the abolition of tolls?

**Janice Pauwels:** From the City of Edinburgh Council's perspective, a number of protocols are in place to cover redeployment, and the first approach in Edinburgh would be to consider redeploying affected staff.

**Cathy Peattie:** Has that happened yet? Have there been any discussions?

**Janice Pauwels:** Protocols have been drafted, and I understand that there have been discussions with the trade unions, certainly from the Edinburgh perspective.

**Cathy Peattie:** That is heartening. What is the situation with Fife?

**Bob McLellan:** We had a confidential report some time ago on what the impact might be if tolls were taken off the Tay bridge. Our response was along the lines that the management and maintenance of the bridge would still require to be carried out, irrespective of the future arrangements. All that we could offer at that stage to the people employed in the tollbooths was that they would be considered as public sector employees and they would be able to compete against others for any available job.

**Cathy Peattie:** But there has been no discussion about working with the people who might be about to lose their jobs. Skills will still be needed, and there is a concern that the skills might be lost. Has there been no discussion with Fife Council so far?

**Bob McLellan:** I have not been involved in any discussion on the maintenance and management of staff of either bridge, but I am aware that approaches have been made.

**The Convener:** Did you want to add anything, Mr Laing?

**Ken Laing:** The question was specifically about FETA, but I know that, in the case of the Tay bridge, Dundee City Council was approached and gave support. We also received a report at the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board just a day or two ago, which suggested that the issues are being resolved and there is no need to look outwith the joint board.

**Cathy Peattie:** That is why I asked about the Forth bridge. I understand that the situation for the Tay bridge is different.

**The Convener:** I thank all our witnesses very much. I am aware that we have overrun slightly on our expected schedule, but that is well worth doing when the evidence is gone into in such detail.

I suspend the meeting for a short break.

15:47

*Meeting suspended.*

15:54

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our third panel: Richard Dixon from WWF Scotland; John Lauder from Sustrans Scotland; Paul Tetlaw from TRANSform Scotland; and Stuart Hay from Friends of the Earth Scotland. I give the witnesses the opportunity to introduce themselves briefly and to add anything that they want to say before we begin questioning.

**Paul Tetlaw (TRANSform Scotland):** I am the chair of TRANSform Scotland. I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to it. TRANSform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance. It is a membership organisation that is made up of all major public transport operators, including train and ferry operators, several local councils, all the major environmental groups, several consultancies and car clubs.

**Stuart Hay (Friends of the Earth Scotland):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My organisation has been involved with this issue in some form or another for a good 10 years. The bill is an alarming development because of its implications for the environment and I look forward to putting some of those points on the record.

**John Lauder (Sustrans Scotland):** Sustrans is a sustainable transport charity. Our main driver is encouraging people to make short journeys by walking and cycling, but we have a wider perspective. The bill's thrust to retain the private motor car as the major means of transport concerns us and we would like a greater switch to public transport.

**Richard Dixon (WWF Scotland):** As members might expect, I came here by train from my office in highland Perthshire. When I cross the Forth rail bridge, I look at the beautiful structure and realise that part of my ticket price paid for the bridge's considerable maintenance bill. Painting that bridge is estimated to cost £10 million a year and there is lots more to do than just that. I travelled on a cheap day return, so I was subject to sensible demand management. As a rail passenger, I feel that it is sensible and fair to pay for the infrastructure and to be subject to demand management—although the way the time is going, my cheap day return will have to be upgraded.

Here we are debating a bill that seems to do the opposite of what I described. It rules out any possibility of demand management on one of our major pieces of infrastructure and it transfers the cost of that infrastructure from the people who use it to general taxation. That is a backwards step.

The most important point is the message that that sends, as John Lauder suggested. The Government and potentially the Parliament are

telling Scotland's citizens, "It's okay to drive. We'll continue to support car driving. Don't worry about all that other nonsense about modal shift—you'll be okay in your car, mate."

**The Convener:** Richard Dixon began by giving a general position on the bill, which is appreciated. I offer the other witnesses the opportunity to do that and to speak about consultation. This week and last, the committee has heard the trade unions and local authorities express concern that the Government has not formally consulted or had dialogue with them since it announced its proposals for the bill. I assume that the same is true of the environment and sustainable transport organisations. Will you confirm that? Is the process acceptable to you as stakeholders?

**Stuart Hay:** What you describe is the case: we have not been involved in any prior consultation. We responded to earlier studies such as the tolled bridges review, but that evidence has been disregarded in producing the bill.

**Paul Tetlaw:** I am not aware of any formal consultation. We responded to a debate on bridge tolls in Parliament in May by issuing to all MSPs a briefing paper setting out some arguments—we have also submitted that briefing in evidence today—but we did so on our own initiative.

**John Lauder:** I have nothing to add.

**David Stewart:** The Scottish Government has made several arguments for abolishing tolls, one of which is equity with the abolition of tolls on the Erskine bridge and on the Skye bridge in my neck of the woods—the Highlands and Islands. Economists, environmentalists, people who promote sustainability and people who are interested in modal shift make other arguments. What is your view on the equity argument?

16:00

**Richard Dixon:** It is a remarkable argument. It is sad that the only major argument that Dundee City Council and Fife Council were able to advance to you was, "They've had it, so we want it." It is bizarre that they could not come up with an even seemingly technical justification for the removal of the tolls from the bridges that affect them.

It was a populist move by the previous Administration to remove the tolls on the Erskine and Skye bridges. The key indicator of that is that the announcement about the Skye bridge was made on 21 December—a nice Christmas present for the locals and a nice story for Nicol Stephen not many months before the UK general election. That is a mark of how political the move was. Alex Johnstone said earlier that some of these transport issues have been put to the political test;

the result always seems to go in favour of the car driver, against the interests of the environment and even, as in this case, against the interests of the economy.

The equity argument is a rather insane one—we have done something silly in the west, so let us do the same silly thing in the east. That is, at bottom, what the equity argument is. The Erskine bridge was probably the worst bridge in Scotland to remove the tolls from, as it has the most spare capacity to fill of any of the big bridges. In removing the tolls, the Government sent the clear message, “Fill that capacity up, boys.” That is what is going to happen elsewhere. The decision on the Erskine bridge was probably the worst of them. The first decisions were bad enough and now we are into phase 2.

It is pathetic that the equity argument is all that the councils can come up with. It is very hard to believe the argument that simply because something has been done in the west, we should do it in the east. After all, we do not apply that to football, for instance.

**Paul Tetlaw:** Richard Dixon told us that he came here today by train on an off-peak ticket. Had he travelled at peak times, he would have paid a peak fare to cross the Forth railway bridge either north or south.

It is suggested that the only tool that we have that might manage demand, the toll, should be taken away. Not long ago, we were talking about just the reverse—variable tolls that might help to manage the demand for use of the bridge. That seemed an eminently sensible thing to do and the direction in which we ought to be going elsewhere, broadening out that concept. Now, we are talking not only about not doing that but about throwing away the idea of tolls altogether.

A point was made earlier about the need for equity between car users and public transport users. It is suggested that the cost of maintaining the bridge should be transferred from the users to the general taxpayer. That means that the least affluent, who are not car users, will pick up the tab for something that is used by the more affluent car users. That seems a much more important equity argument than the one that we heard earlier.

**Stuart Hay:** The report on the study into the tolls states that the study

“was unable to find any real evidence of significant social impact resulting from the existence or removal of the tolls.”

There is no real evidence of social equity issues. On geography, there are all sorts of different costs depending on where people live in the country, of which tolls are just one. The policy to remove the tolls is the thin end of the wedge. People in Edinburgh face a lot of extra costs that people in

Fife do not, but we are not saying that we are going to even out all those—unless the Government is saying that everybody should pay the same wherever they live.

**Des McNulty:** In the previous session of Parliament, we passed legislation to require strategic environmental assessments on programmes, projects and policies. The Government is suggesting that this is a purely financial bill and that therefore a strategic assessment is not necessary. In view of all the evidence that you have seen, is that a plausible position for the Government to have taken?

**Stuart Hay:** There is a big issue here. Before the Government takes a step that has major implications for the whole of transport policy in and around the Forth, including the local transport strategy, which must be rewritten to take account of the change, there should be a requirement on it to undertake a strategic environmental assessment to determine the best policy option. Unfortunately, that is now going to be a paper exercise because the decision has been taken through the financial part of the bill.

**Des McNulty:** I want to ask the question on mitigation that I put to members of the previous panel. Considerable amounts of money have been spent on public transport improvements in Fife and on attempts to improve bus patronage levels among those who travel between Edinburgh and Fife. However, as far as we can see, those improvements have not reduced the amount of vehicle traffic using the Forth road bridge. Given that removing the toll will add a further incentive for people to use their cars more frequently—and, by implication, provide a disincentive for people to use public transport—would you be in favour of further mitigation measures to try to push people back on to trains and buses? Do you feel frustrated that more and more money will need to be spent on such mitigation measures for us simply to stand still? On the one hand, the Government claims that it wants to do something about climate change but, on the other, its policies will mean that in practice more money will be spent on things that favour the driver.

**Richard Dixon:** You are absolutely right that we are very frustrated by the proposal. It will be a double whammy. The proposed abolition of tolls on both bridges will only encourage greater numbers of people to make the crossing using cars rather than public transport. At the same time, it will remove a revenue stream that could have been used—as was sometimes the case in the past—to fund the alternatives. Therefore, we will be hit twice.

At the moment, we are probably running to stand still. We are working hard on mitigation measures, but those are not really stopping the

growth in traffic on either of the bridges. However, that will be doubly hard once less money is available and people have the added incentive of not having to pay a toll to get across the bridges. I am sure that John Lauder will say a bit more about some of the things that we should do. Of course we should invest in mitigation measures as much as possible, given that we will be stuck with the situation if the bill is passed.

On climate change emissions, the toll impact study that was carried out by the consultants not only provides some figures for the percentage increase in traffic on the bridges but turns those figures into a CO<sub>2</sub> number of around 9,000 tonnes extra per year. To answer Patrick Harvie's earlier question on what that would mean in monetary terms, Sir Nicholas Stern's estimate of £50 a tonne would suggest a cost to society of about £0.5 million a year. Of course, that is the extra cost on top of that which is imposed by all the existing traffic on the bridge. An extra cost of £0.5 million a year would be imposed by the extra traffic that would result from abolishing the tolls.

I agree with Des McNulty that this is the key challenge for the SNP Administration. It is also a key challenge for the committee and the Parliament in helping the Administration to run Scotland. The Administration has made very good promises on climate change, which the committee will consider, but transport is clearly the issue on which the Administration acknowledges that it will have the most difficulty in reconciling its very good ambitions on climate change with the realities of running Scotland. Clearly, the bill takes us in the wrong direction. It sends a signal to the public that car use will be encouraged and less emphasis will be placed on public transport. This is one of the crunch points for the new Government in trying to reconcile those two things.

Transport is a crucial area. The Scottish emissions data that were released today show that transport accounts for about a fifth of Scotland's emissions, so transport is a big sector. Quite soon, transport will overtake the electricity sector as the biggest sector for emissions. Transport emissions have also been growing fastest, as they have grown by 10 per cent between 1990 and 2005, according to the figures that were released today. Transport is the big challenge, as it is the big emissions sector that is growing. It also presents the Government with a big conflict with its ambitions on climate change.

The bill is a test of intention and message. If it is passed, but the committee encourages ministers to say something sensible to indicate that it is not a signal just to drive a car, and if other positive transport measures follow it, some of the contradiction will be headed off.

**Des McNulty:** It is an axiom in politics that we should watch what people do, rather than listen to

what they say they will do, especially if they say that they will do it with a target of 2050. How credible is the posture of making lavish promises on climate change, pitched 30 or 40 years in advance, when the Government's first steps are to remove the tolls from the Erskine bridge—

**Rob Gibson:** The previous Government did that.

**Des McNulty:** I meant to say the Forth and Tay bridges. The Government has also made commitments to road building. It is not possible to reconcile those measures with its promises on climate change; there is a basic contradiction between the two. I will not use the word that the Presiding Officer called unacceptable last week, but it is a case of saying one thing and doing something else. You should take a strong view on that.

**Richard Dixon:** You will be reassured to hear that we are keeping score. So far, the score is 2-1 against. We are pleased that the issue of oil transfer in the Forth was addressed. The Government opposed trams in Edinburgh, but fortunately the Parliament pushed the scheme through. Now tolls are to be abolished. The SNP has made a good proposal on climate change, but so far its actions are taking it in the opposite direction. We will keep watching, keep making a noise about the issue and keep taking it up in forums such as this and with ministers and parties, whenever we get the chance to do so.

**Paul Tetlaw:** Des McNulty asked whether a strategic environmental assessment would be appropriate. It would, but the right approach would be to have a wider strategic assessment of transport in the area. An additional Kincardine bridge and the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine line are already under construction. Surely, in response to the challenges of climate change, congestion and unhealthy lifestyles, we should assess transport in the area in the round to identify the steps that we should take. That means looking at how heavy goods transport, car transport, different aspects of public transport, walking and cycling can play a fair role, rather than picking off populist, short-term issues—forgive me for saying that—in isolation. We need a structured assessment in the round, because we are dealing with long-term issues that deserve a long-term strategy.

**Stuart Hay:** My comments relate to the policy context of the bill. The transport strategy that the previous Scottish Executive published focused on three priority areas. One was to improve journey times—to make travelling around Scotland quicker, easier and more reliable. The bill does not do that, as it increases congestion and journey times. The second priority, which we strongly support, was to reduce emissions. Again, the bill will have a strong adverse impact in that area. The



final priority was to ensure that Scotland has high-quality public transport choices. The bill fails on that count, because money that would have been available for investment in public transport will be used to subsidise car owners.

The climate change strategy talks about

“integrating climate change routinely into policy development across all sectors and at all levels”,

but the bill ignores the issue completely. The strategy also talks about “Promoting good governance”, but the large amount of evidence that the bill will have a negative impact on emissions has been ignored. The key principle of “Living within environmental limits” has also been ignored, as emissions will increase under the bill.

The climate change programme also talks about “Achieving a sustainable economy”, but from what I read in the toll impact study, the abolition of tolls will have a negative overall net present value of more than £0.5 billion—that does not even include the full environmental costs.

16:15

**John Lauder:** My colleagues have covered most issues. Stuart Hay mentioned the national transport strategy, which was published at the end of last year. The strategy has not been mentioned by the current Government and it would be interesting to know where that sits.

We have not considered the bill's knock-on effect on congestion in communities around the bridges and in commuter corridors. There is no doubt that increased congestion prevents people from making short journeys by bike or on foot, because the streets are busy, noisy and polluted. Congested streets are not friendly places to be.

The fundamental issue is that the bill does nothing to put down a marker of the Scottish Government's intention to take carbon emissions seriously. Retention of the tolls would encourage people not to use private motor cars all the time and to use public transport for appropriate journeys. We do not want people to think that we are attacking private motorists; we are saying that people should make appropriate decisions about the journeys that they make. The bill does not challenge people's perceptions about how they travel and contains nothing that will stop people reaching for the car keys every time they make a journey.

We must also consider the cost to our economy of inactivity, in particular as a result of obesity. Dedication to the private motor car leads to inactivity. People do not want to break away from their cars; they want to use them for every journey. The proposal to scrap tolls sends a wider signal to society.

**The Convener:** Several witnesses said that strategic environmental assessment should be a requirement, but the Executive's bill team said that it is not a requirement. Is that right? Is the Executive in the clear on that?

**Stuart Hay:** SEA might not be a requirement, given the financial programmes loophole in the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. However, local transport strategies, which underpin everything and will be drastically affected by the bill, should be reviewed and a SEA should be done on the policy implications. The logical approach would be to do the SEA first, in the context of the local transport strategy, and to consider whether the removal of tolls is a sensible option. Given the current situation, it will be difficult to do that.

**The Convener:** Is the Executive exploiting a loophole in the legislation?

**Stuart Hay:** Yes.

**Rob Gibson:** The toll impact study found that, for both bridges, the removal of tolls would be likely to increase local and global traffic emissions and traffic noise, and would have an adverse environmental impact under the STAG criteria. However, we heard that there are no measures of environmental impact in the STAG criteria.

**Richard Dixon:** There was a remarkable revelation from the first panel of witnesses, when that question elicited the response that environmental measures were given no weight in the decision. That was stunning.

Quite a lot of environmental information is before us. An interesting difference of opinion was revealed during questions to the second panel of witnesses. Witnesses from the City of Edinburgh Council expressed concern about air pollution, but witnesses from Dundee City Council and Fife Council seemed not to be concerned about the issue. However, the toll impact study found that Fife and Dundee are likely to suffer greater increases in air pollution than are predicted for Edinburgh. There are already problems in those areas. A witness from the City of Edinburgh Council said that the council has two air quality management areas. Last year, air quality in those areas failed to meet international standards on nitrogen dioxide. Air quality in two areas in Dundee also failed to meet the standards, but the gentleman from Dundee City Council did not appear to be concerned about that. Similarly, air quality in an area in Dunfermline failed to meet the standards, but the gentleman from Fife Council did not appear concerned about that. By taking the tolls off the bridge we are going to prolong our breach of European air quality directive standards, yet only one of the three councils appears to be concerned about that.

**Rob Gibson:** Do any of the other witnesses wish to comment on my question?

**Stuart Hay:** It is quite surprising that the STAG appraisal does not yet take such issues into account, especially now that climate change is on everyone's agenda. We have been trying to track down accurate CO<sub>2</sub> figures for a lot of transport projects over a number of years, but we have failed to do so.

The net present value of the proposal tells us that it will give a poor return on public investment, even without the inclusion of the factors that we have discussed. That is frustrating for organisations such as ours, which have spent years campaigning for public transport proposals that have positive net present values but have still been knocked out. This might be the first time in history that a project that has a negative net present value in terms of economic benefit has been put forward by the Government.

**Rob Gibson:** I am not going to comment on what you have campaigned about—what I have to say on the subject might be very limited.

The point is that the impact study says that the removal of the tolls might add less than 0.1 per cent to the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> across Scotland. The gentleman from Dundee, Mr Laing, suggested that there are many other roads into Dundee that also create pollution and, presumably, the situation is the same in Edinburgh. Why are you getting so hot under the collar about the bridge tolls when the numbers of cars entering Edinburgh and Dundee by other roads are far greater than the numbers that enter by the bridges?

**Richard Dixon:** The bridges are important avenues by which people access the two cities. We know that many people who live in Fife drive into Edinburgh. That population will be influenced by the removal of tolls. Of course there are other roads that bring traffic into Edinburgh and Dundee, but we are not, at the moment, discussing proposals that relate to them. The proposal that we are discussing is one that will significantly increase the amount of traffic, particularly in Dundee.

The Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment report that was done in the previous decade identified crossings of rivers as particularly significant factors in the creation of new traffic. If you build a new bridge, you generate much more traffic than you would if you built the same length of road somewhere else and if you make a bridge more attractive by taking away tolls, you will generate more traffic than you would if you had done something similar elsewhere, because a bridge is a key part of any infrastructure network.

That is the factual side; the other side concerns the symbolic importance of bridges. As we saw in

the Dunfermline West by-election and the debate about the Skye bridge tolls, bridges are iconic things that people relate to and around which debates form. This debate is important to us because we can bring home to people the contradiction between a climate policy that says that we are going to reduce emissions and a transport policy that does not seem to be aiming to do that at all.

**Rob Gibson:** So, at the price of a tax on the geography of where you live—because this country is not round; it is ragged and has islands—you are prepared to say that the argument about this bridge is more important than giving people carbon rations in relation to their modes of transport. Nothing that we say about the equity argument holds any sway with you at all. Basically, you are saying that people can just be disadvantaged and not travel.

**Richard Dixon:** No, that is not what I am saying. We are here to talk about the tolls on these two bridges because that is what the bill is about. We are not stating that this is our highest priority. If I talked to you about something else, you would not listen, because you are dealing with the bill. There are many other issues relating to climate change and many other means by which we might address it. I think that all the groups here have a mature attitude to transport equity. For instance, although all of us would be concerned about flights from Edinburgh to London, the growth in those flights and the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that are involved, we are much less concerned about flights to the islands, which are clearly part of a lifeline service, part of keeping a community going and the only option for many things.

We have a mature geographical take on equity issues around Scotland. My point on equity was limited simply to the fact that two bridges have lost tolls and the only argument that two of the three councils could put to you was, "We should have the same, thank you very much, because that's fair."

**Rob Gibson:** So, basically—

**The Convener:** I think that there is a supplementary question on island flights in particular. I will come back to you after that.

**David Stewart:** It is a minor point. Mr Dixon, do you agree that there is a technical reason why flights to the islands cause less environmental damage? Most of the island services are turbo prop planes, which emit less CO<sub>2</sub> than normal jets.

**Richard Dixon:** Yes, indeed. That is right. If we came to a debate about island living, we would say that we should not give a completely free ride to flights, because ferries are an option, but none of us would say anything against the continuation of flights to the islands, whereas we might take a position that flights to London should simply stop.

**Rob Gibson:** From what I understand, you have a basically mature attitude to geography—apart from towards the people who live in Angus and Fife. Would not linking the abolition of bridge tolls, which is an equity issue, with a climate change bill make it much easier to have a fair starting point from which the citizens of Scotland can ration their emissions? Will not abolition of the tolls have such a small impact that it will not really send any signal at all?

**Stuart Hay:** We have to consider everything in the round. Tolls abolition is one proposal and the increase in emissions might be 0.1 per cent, but the M74 extension will lead to a 3 per cent increase when it comes on stream and the Aberdeen western peripheral road will lead to a 0.3 per cent increase. When we add all those up, it becomes quite a big figure.

Cutting carbon emissions is difficult: it is perfectly feasible, but the longer we leave it the harder and more expensive it becomes. The difference in respect of the increase in emissions from abolishing bridge tolls is that it is an unnecessary increase. Those emissions do not exist at the moment, so there is no cost of cutting them. In fact, we would save money by keeping the tolls because we would be able to invest that money in public transport to cut emissions elsewhere. We are turning a win-win situation into a lose-lose situation, which seems to be madness.

**Paul Tetlaw:** I return to the point about equity and whether we are focused solely on the Forth and Tay bridges. As Richard Dixon said, that is the debate at the moment, but 18 months ago the issue under discussion—although not in Parliament—was variable tolls on the Forth road bridge, which I said was eminently sensible and is the way we should go everywhere. We have a good starting point from which to roll that out elsewhere, so why throw it away?

Keeping tolls and introducing variable tolls would give people in Fife who travel south a financial benefit. We heard earlier that 80 per cent of cars that come over the bridge have just one person in them. If we were to introduce and strengthen mechanisms that encourage people to think differently about how they travel, we would encourage more people to share cars, encourage more families not to have two cars and encourage people to adopt fitter lifestyles altogether. It might sound perverse, but those measures would give the people in Fife who travel south the opportunity to be first in line to adopt a better and less costly lifestyle. However, we are going to take that opportunity away, which will take us back to square one with encouraging such changes throughout Scotland. Where will we then start with that?

**John Lauder:** That is the crucial question. At some stage, we must make a start with cutting

carbon emissions. It does not seem to me at all logical to increase them and then to have to go back to try to reduce them.

16:30

**Richard Dixon:** You have heard the broad point about not the car passenger but wider society paying for the bridges. That is an equity issue on which the bill seems to be taking us in the wrong direction. The toll impact study says that removing the tolls will mean that a cost of £0.5 billion over the study period will be imposed on society. That is expressed in net terms as £10 million a year of extra costs, mostly to Scottish businesses. If we are concerned about equity, surely we should keep the tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges and put them back on the Erskine bridge and, perhaps, the Skye bridge, although the situation is different there.

**The Convener:** I am afraid that that is not within the scope of the bill.

**Des McNulty:** Have you done any work that would tell us to what extent removing the tolls will set us back in achieving our carbon targets, both within the immediate three or four-year period and up to 2050? What additional hurdle are we creating?

**Richard Dixon:** As Stuart Hay said, one could do modelling on the total package of transport projects that might happen over the next 10 years and decide what it would mean for future climate change emissions. No one has done that yet. The previous Executive commissioned work on projections of future climate change emissions, which the Government—as it now is—has not yet published. That work might contain some of that information. Apparently, it contains a number of different transport scenarios, but given that it has not been published—we have been waiting for some time—we cannot tell what level of detail it contains. We do not know whether it refers to particular road schemes or to tolls on bridges. It would be interesting to see it.

As far as I am aware, although specific work has been carried out in the toll impact study and the related studies, there is no big picture of what Scotland's emissions will be like if we either remove or keep the tolls, and how much extra effort we will have to make in other parts of the economy to meet the 3 per cent annual reduction target or the target to reduce emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

**Des McNulty:** We are focusing on the bill—not the full package of transport measures. What would be your attitude if the Government said that although it had agreed the 3 per cent target, it could not meet it because it had, as its first act, taken tolls off the bridges? Do you think that the

organisations that you represent would find such parenthesising, if you like, in any way acceptable, given what else the Government has said about climate change?

**Richard Dixon:** That would be completely unacceptable and would be a clear betrayal of the people who voted for the Scottish National Party on the basis of its manifesto commitments. Our interpretation of the manifesto is that it set a long-term target for 2050, but it also said that the SNP would reduce climate change emissions from Scotland by 3 per cent a year. Our interpretation is that over the four years, the SNP Government—if it serves a full term—should reduce Scotland's emissions by 12 per cent. The Government is only just starting, so it might not do quite that much this year, but by the end of the four years, the right figure has to be reached, or it will not have delivered what it promised. The manifesto certainly did not say, "We'll achieve 3 per cent unless we build a big road or take some tolls off a bridge"; it said, "We'll achieve 3 per cent." We want to hold the Government to that promise.

**Des McNulty:** Can you quantify the implications of removing tolls on the 12 per cent reduction target? What reduction would we now need to achieve in order to meet that target? Would it be 15 per cent?

**Richard Dixon:** The toll impact study, which uses the traffic predictions—we know that the Forth traffic predictions are lower than in previous studies, so they might not be correct—predicts that there will be an extra 9,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year, which is about 0.1 per cent of Scotland's emissions. In relation to the 3 per cent target, that figure is quite small, but abolishing tolls would send a symbolic message that would encourage greater car use throughout Scotland.

As we move forward and try to meet the 3 per cent target every year, we will become ever keener to find even 0.1 per cent to save. If we lock an increase in today, in 20 years we will be wishing that we had not, because we will need that 0.1 per cent to make our 3 per cent target for that year.

**The Convener:** I want to pursue that point. Am I right that, if there is a further delay before annual 3 per cent reductions begin to happen, even a small 0.1 per cent increase will be cumulative and we will require a deeper cut in the future?

**Richard Dixon:** That is correct. Of course, the longer we wait before we start our 3 per cent reductions, the higher that percentage will have to be—it will become 4 per cent eventually if we want to meet our 2050 target. That is why we assume that the current Government must start today and produce a 12 per cent reduction in its first four years in government.

**Stuart Hay:** I can put the debate in context. I did some quick calculations this morning: we are talking about 9,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. In 2003-04, the Government's microrenewables programme—the Scottish community renewables initiative—displaced 555 tonnes. We would have to multiply by 16 times what that multimillion pound programme did that year to match the increase.

I would have liked to find an equivalent for transport, but the problem is that we are not currently getting from the Executive clear CO<sub>2</sub> figures on the different elements.

**John Lauder:** Sustrans figures show that the national cycle network last year saved 44,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from 35 million journeys that were made throughout Scotland. I met the minister for a chat last week, and he reckoned that that was 0.1 per cent. All the people who are pedalling are doing it for naught, because we are going to increase the levels.

**The Convener:** There is some debate over the figures.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** You might have covered some of this in your previous answers. What action would you like the Scottish Government to take to address transport issues across the Forth and Tay as opposed to abolishing tolls? Variable tolls have been mentioned already but—putting that to one side because of time—are there other options?

**Paul Tetlaw:** I am in danger of repeating a little of what I said earlier, but I would like there to be a more strategic approach to consideration of the transport infrastructure in the area, including the different types of transport, the different bridges further up the Forth, as well as the bridges at Queensferry and the rail infrastructure. To consider all that in the round seems to be a sensible way forward. If we are going to take away tolls—a demand management measure—we could consider another demand management measure, which is the reallocation of road space to public transport users. That might eat into the figure of 80 per cent of cars crossing the Forth bridge having just a single person in them.

**John Lauder:** A simple and practical solution might be to consider links to stations from communities and to improve path networks. A quarter of all car journeys are less than 2 miles, which is eminently walkable or cyclable. A quick study of the stations that serve the lines would be well worth while in respect of encouraging people not to drive their cars to those stations and giving them a better and more practical solution for getting to the station and taking that public transport journey.

**Alison McInnes:** I want more detail on that. If the tolls are abolished, what provision for public

transport do you want to see in the redesigned approaches to the two bridges? That was touched on earlier. Perhaps there could be a dedicated bus space.

**Paul Tetlaw:** We heard earlier witnesses from the various councils talk about the success of some dedicated bus lanes and how they have increased bus use. If we give buses such priority so that motorists see buses whizzing past them while they are sat in a traffic jam, it sends important signals—the opposite of those that would be sent by taking tolls away. Such moves tend to work on a subconscious level.

Word of mouth is also important. If people tell friends and colleagues that the experience of a journey by bus or train was better and quicker, it helps to spread the message. A raft of different measures can be taken to change the mindset and to encourage people to decide that public transport is a more attractive option. Pricing mechanisms must form a key component. As I said, people who choose to cross the Forth by train must pay almost twice the fare if they travel at peak times, which is a disincentive.

**Stuart Hay:** We have not looked into the matter as much as we might otherwise have done because we will be lucky to get all the programmed improvements if the revenue stream is cut. We must consider the implications of that. Many improvements are programmed, but the chances of any additional improvements going ahead will be greatly diminished by the proposals in the bill.

**John Lauder:** I would encourage employers to produce travel plans for their staff, which would give staff the option of considering other methods of getting to and from work, rather than relying on the private motor car.

**Richard Dixon:** If the bill is passed and more traffic and congestion are created, that will create a new audience, sitting in traffic jams thinking, “I wish there was a second Forth road bridge.” It is the beginning of a slippery slope.

**The Convener:** Perhaps some of them will be tempted to think, “I wish I could pay £1 to have a shorter queue.” We will not know that for a while, however, if Parliament decides to pass the bill.

I thank all the witnesses for their evidence. They have been sat here for quite some time, but we are grateful for the opportunity to question you.

## Subordinate Legislation

### Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area) Order 2007 (SI 2007/2139)

16:42

**The Convener:** The next item is consideration of SI 2007/2139, which is subject to the negative procedure. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has made no comments on the order, no comments have been received from members and no motions to annul have been lodged. Do members agree to make no comments on the order?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** We agreed earlier to take our final item in private.

16:42

*Meeting continued in private until 16:58.*



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