



Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils

working together to improve your local transport

Severn Consultation Team
Roads Investment Strategy Futures
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

10th March 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Severn Crossings: Reducing Toll Prices and Other Issues: Joint Response from the West of England Councils (Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)

Please find outlined below a joint response from the four West of England Councils to the current consultation on reducing toll prices on the Severn crossings. The same response has also been provided online, and is structured according to the questions set out in the consultation document.

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed reductions in tolls?

No. The West of England councils object to this proposal.

The West of England councils are pursuing transport policies intended to reduce car use and promote the use of sustainable transport alternatives, in order to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions, improve air quality and tackle traffic congestion, whilst supporting economic growth.

As proposed, the reduction in bridge tolls outlined in the consultation document will conflict with these policies. A reduction in the tolls will encourage and increase unsustainable travel habits, by encouraging car use at a time when the UK is committed to reducing carbon emissions substantially in line with its challenging commitments within the Climate Change Act.

The consultation report highlights that the reduced toll charges will increase traffic by a further 17% by 2028 over and above forecast growth. This increase in traffic into the West of England will have a very significant, negative impact on congestion on and around the M4 and M5 motorway junctions within South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, which are already experiencing acute congestion during peak periods. This problem is forecast to worsen with underlying traffic growth.

The modelling work referenced in the consultation document appears to have focused on the implications for the crossings themselves but the document makes no reference to the implications for the Strategic Road Network in the West of England.



Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils

working together to improve your local transport

The M4 and M5 within the West of England form a critical node in the Strategic Road Network, connecting the South West peninsula and South Wales to the rest of the UK. The forecast additional 17% traffic resulting from the reduction in tolls will result in a major increase in congestion on the M4 and M5 in the West of England. This will have significant consequences for connectivity into South Wales and towards the South West within the West of England area. There are currently no practical means for mitigating this impact with online improvements to the M4 and M5: there are currently no plans for further widening of the M4 and M5 in the area.

This could therefore have perverse consequences, by resulting in a significant worsening in journey times and journey time reliability for traffic heading to and from South Wales. This deterioration in connectivity would be contrary to the stated objectives of reducing tolls on the Severn Crossings.

Indirect impacts (for example by encouraging commuting by car to key employment areas) will be likely to be experienced across a significantly wider area, again on roads already experiencing significant congestion, hampering the operation of bus services, and further frustrating efforts to persuade car drivers with local destinations to adopt more sustainable travel behaviour.

The West of England councils are currently completing a Joint Transport Study, which has assessed the implication of future traffic growth up to 2036, and which is proposing a strategy including a substantial increase in investment in the transport network to address its impacts. The investment proposed has a strong emphasis on sustainable transport modes, in order to hold forecast private vehicle movements to current levels. The deliverability of this outcome is likely to be reduced by this proposal to reduce the bridge tolls.

It is also disappointing that the consultation document suggests that the Government does not appear to have considered an option to maintain the current toll levels.

A possible compromise scenario could be to maintain current charging levels during peak commuter times. We would also suggest the hypothecation of this revenue to help fund rapid transit, bus and rail services, which would be sustainable practice and would be a principle that is understood by motorists continuing to pay the tolls if sufficiently publicised.

The councils do support the proposed reduction in charge for buses with more than 17 seats.

Question 2: If you have any specific comments on the legislative proposals, including the draft charging order, please provide them.

The councils appreciate that the Severn Bridges Act 1992 notes that tolls should cease once the “funding requirement” has been met, and the Government’s efforts to establish a Charging Order under the Transport Act 2000 (effectively becoming a road user charge) to give more flexibility around charging arrangements. It is the level of charge suggested which is considered to be contrary to national, regional and local transport policy.

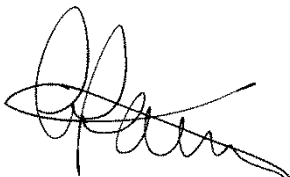
Question 3: If you have any views on the future of the TAG payment system, please provide them

The councils support the retention of a TAG payment system.

Question 4: Bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages, do you think that the Government should consider the idea of introducing two-way free-flow charging?

The councils support the idea of two-way free-flow charging.

Yours faithfully,



Bill Davies
West of England Office