

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

LETTER BY EMAIL

19 April 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

The Severn Crossings – Abolishing the Tolls

North Bristol SusCom Ltd. is a group of leading employers working together to **reduce congestion** and support the development of a fully integrated, **sustainable transport network** for North Bristol. We know that combatting traffic congestion is vital for the long-term prosperity of our businesses and the health and well-being of our staff.

We **lead by example**, taking a co-ordinated approach to managing our traffic impact and supporting our 40,000+ staff and 30,000 students to reduce the number of short car journeys they make. **North Bristol SusCom** promotes car sharing, walking, cycling, bus and rail as preferred ways to travel to work and around the area on business. We also support home working and if journeys need to be undertaken by car we promote electric vehicles and car sharing.

We are writing to you to express our concerns about the UK Government's decision to abolish the tolls on the Severn Crossings by the end of this year. In particular, we are concerned about the increased traffic and congestion this will cause and the impact it will have on the M4 corridor, the M4/M5 Almondsbury interchange, the M4/M32 Junction, the A4174 ring road, the M5 J16 at Aztec West and the M5 J17 at Cribbs Causeway and Cribbs Patchway new neighbourhood.

The West of England and North Bristol, in particular, are home to world class organisations and our region is a net contributor to HMRC. We need to ensure that we keep our economy moving but we currently suffer some of the worst congestion in the UK, particularly at peak times.

The decision to abolish the tolls will exacerbate an already congested area.

Our concerns focus on two key areas:

- 1. the likely increase in traffic levels and congestion following removal of tolls**
- 2. the lack of planning to mitigate traffic increases and enable greater use of sustainable transport**



1. the likely increase in traffic levels and congestion following removal of tolls

According to your Department's January 2017 Consultation paper, **The Severn Crossings: Reducing toll prices and other issues** *"forecasts indicate that traffic across the Severn Crossings will increase by 28% between 2018 and 2027. But as a result of our proposed toll levels, based on the results of independent modelling commission by the Department, traffic growth will increase by 45%. Consequently because of reduction in tolls traffic volumes are forecast to increase by 17% over and above what they would have done"* (page 14).

Those forecasts related to a reduction in tolls. There were no similar forecasts provided for removal of the tolls. In fact, the consultation document outlined a number of options that the Government was **not** proposing, which included abolishing the tolls:

"The Government is aware of the views expressed by some stakeholders that the tolls should be abolished altogether. But this would put at risk the future of the Crossings."

"The Government is also concerned that reduced tolls could result in increased traffic and congestion in areas surrounding the Crossings, both in Bristol and along the M4 in Wales, where there are already concerns about congestion levels. Reducing the tolls by 50% would allow us to assess the impact, on the Crossing and more generally, of increased traffic flows." (page 12).

Some key questions we have for the Department of Transport are "What happened between the consultation period, which closed in March 2017, and the Government announcement in July 2017 that the tolls would be abolished, to make abolishing the tolls the preferred option?" and "What technical evidence/forecasts have been produced that show what the likely impact will be on the transport network when the tolls are abolished?"

Our concern is that no such detailed forecasts/transport modelling has been undertaken. We now ask that your department urgently undertakes the modelling needed to understand the implications abolishing the tolls will have on the existing road traffic network and on the choices people will make on how they commute and travel between South Wales and the West of England.

2. the lack of planning to mitigate traffic increases and enable greater use of sustainable transport

We would have expected the Government to have developed a plan to deal with the expected increase in traffic that either a reduction in tolls or abolishing the tolls would generate. The proposed £1.4bn M4 relief road in

Newport will do nothing to mitigate traffic increases in the West of England and the M4/M5 junction in particular.

We know, through annual travel to work surveys, that a growing number of our members' employees live in South Wales and commute to North Bristol for work. We know that for many the tolls have acted as an incentive to save money by car sharing, commuting by train, motorcycle and even bicycle. We also know that many people who commute by car are frustrated that they do not have viable alternatives to get to work as bus services between South Wales and North Bristol employers are neither extensive nor direct and there are capacity issues on the trains.

We are concerned that many of our members' employees who currently travel by car share, train, motorcycle and bicycle may now be attracted to drive when the tolls are removed, and this will add to increased traffic, air pollution and congestion.

More West of England based staff are now likely to consider South Wales as a commutable place to live, due to lower house prices (in the short term at least) so we will see an increase in employees commuting from South Wales adding to the congestion and strains on public transport – with no current plans for improvements to transport choices.

We ask that the UK Government create and fund an investment programme to help mitigate the negative impacts of their decision to abolish the tolls. The South Wales and West of England areas could work together to develop the multi-modal investment plan to improve connectivity between our areas. The plan could look at potential investments around Park & Rides, Multi-Modal Interchanges, High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes, commuter coaches, improved rail capacity, improved cycle links.

We ask that the Department for Transport take the concerns seriously.

The worst outcome for everyone would be the removal of tolls and the M4, M5 and surrounding road networks become one big car park because there are no viable alternatives for people to make their journeys.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss this further.

Yours Sincerely



Ann O'Driscoll
Director



cc: Tim Bowles, Mayor, West of England Combined Authority