

Ref: CD425

Bruce Crawford MSP
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Dear Sirs

Forth and Tay Road Bridges (Removal of Tolls) Bill

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give our views on the above.

I have enclosed comments on the Federation's views and hope you find them useful.

If you wish to further discuss any of the comments please contact Susan Love our Scottish Policy Development Officer on telephone: 0141-221-0775 or by e-mail Scotland.policy@fsb.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Willox', written in a cursive style.

Andy Willox OBE
FSB Scottish Policy Convener

Enc.



Forth and Tay Road Bridges (Removal of Tolls) Bill

Response from FSB Scotland

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses Scotland is Scotland's largest direct-member business organisation, representing over 18,000 members. FSB Scotland campaigns for an economic and social environment which allows small businesses to prosper.

As our members depend on the easy movement of goods and services, we take a strong interest in transport issues. Small businesses across Scotland use the Tay and Forth Bridges, so we welcome this opportunity to comment on the proposed Bill to remove tolls from these bridges.

We believe that tolls should be removed from both the Tay and Forth Road Bridges on a number of grounds, which we set out in this response. We would like to highlight, in particular, the cost to our members of retaining bridge tolls, and the potential benefits of removing them.

Funding Maintenance and Improvements

FSB Scotland believes that tolls should be removed from both the Tay and Forth Road Bridges, and that maintenance and improvements of these bridges should be funded by the Scottish Executive.

We believe that the Tay and Forth Road Bridges should be part of the wider trunk road network. Wherever they are located, road bridges serve local and national transport needs, and as such, should be paid for out of national transport expenditure, like any other trunk road in Scotland.

There is also the issue of fairness to consider. Tolls on the Skye and Erskine Bridges have now been scrapped, and Ministers have accepted responsibility for the maintenance of these bridges. It is neither fair nor consistent that businesses in the east of Scotland should be burdened with paying bridge tolls to make essential journeys, while businesses in the west of the country have been relieved of a similar burden.

Impact of Removing the Tolls

FSB Scotland strongly believes that removing tolls on the Tay and Forth Road Bridges would benefit small businesses, the wider community, and the Scottish economy as a whole.

Essential Business Journeys

For many of our members, crossing the Tay and Forth Bridges (often at peak times) is an essential part of their business. This may be through large or small scale deliveries to customers (including other businesses), meeting with clients, or simply transporting necessary equipment. Many have no practical alternative route they can take either; they therefore have little choice but to pay the tolls. FSB Scotland strongly believes that small businesses should not be penalised for making journeys that are essential to their survival – business journeys that are ultimately essential to the health of the wider Scottish economy.

If tolls were to be removed from the Tay and Forth Bridges, this would have a positive impact on small business users, who would see varying levels of reduction in transport costs, and potentially fewer delays due to congestion.

Cost of the tolls

Our members are currently over-burdened with transport costs, which is a major concern to many small businesses. In a recent survey, for example, 72% of FSB members expressed dissatisfaction with fuel costs; while 47% expressed dissatisfaction with road tax. Tolls simply add to this burden for businesses using the Tay and Forth Bridges.

Removing the bridge tolls will go some way towards alleviating this burden for many of our members; allowing them to invest more in their businesses, and ultimately benefiting the Scottish economy.

Congestion

Many businesses are negatively affected by congestion on the Tay and Forth Bridges, particularly as a result of the costs incurred because of delays. Our members have expressed their frustration that congestion around the bridges is largely due to queuing to pay the bridge tolls. We would like to highlight evidence from Dundee City Council in support of this claim. The Council's recently published report – in response to the Scottish Executive's call for evidence on the impact of the tolls – uses traffic modelling to demonstrate that tolls on the Tay Bridge cause queues and congestion.

This suggests that if the tolls were removed much unnecessary queuing could be eliminated, allowing traffic to flow more freely and reducing congestion.

Economic Growth

If growing the economy remains the top priority of the Scottish Executive, then it makes little sense to continue to impose burdens such as bridge tolls on small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy. Removing the tolls on the Tay and Forth Bridges would give those businesses and the economy a real boost.

For further information on any of the points raised in this submission, please contact Julie Shackleton, Deputy Policy Officer, on Julie.shackleton@fsb.org.uk or 0141 221 0775