

Forth Crossing

Forth Crossing Bill Committee

March 2010

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses is Scotland's largest direct-member business organisation, representing around 20,000 members. The FSB campaigns for an economic and social environment which allows small businesses to grow and prosper.

We welcome the opportunity to submit our comments to the Forth Crossing Bill Committee on the Forth Crossing Bill.

The FSB has taken a considerable interest in recent years in the issue of a new Forth Crossing as it affects a significant number of our members in the East of Scotland and beyond. As a representative business organisation we are keen to develop our infrastructure to ensure effective transport links for business across Scotland. In a 2008 survey of members, the FSB found that in Scotland small businesses lost 7.5 hours per week to traffic congestion, so they are naturally keen to ensure that all routes are as accessible as possible.

Many of our members use the existing Forth Bridge, often at peak times, as a necessary part of their business. For example, this may be to deliver goods to customers or meet with clients. The FSB supports the primary aim of the Scottish Government to grow the Scottish economy and so we support the building of a new crossing, but would also like to see the maximum utilisation of the existing bridge, when the new structure is in place.

New Forth Crossing

The FSB has supported the idea of a new crossing on the basis that the consequences of disruption and additional costs to business of extended closure of the existing bridge, is not an economically viable option. Many micro and small businesses rely on the bridge on a daily basis to run their business and it is important to ensure the infrastructure is in place to allow the smooth operation of businesses across Scotland.

The FSB supported the removal of tolls from the Forth Bridge as a means of benefiting the business community and also growing the Scottish economy. We would like to see a commitment from the Scottish Government that there will be no re-introduction of tolls to cross the River Forth on either the existing bridge or new crossing.

The FSB has also taken a considerable interest in procurement in recent years. While we have welcomed the creation of Public Contracts Scotland and the Single Point of Enquiry, we have been expressing concern about the aggregation of contracts within the Scottish public sector, which has been restricting opportunities to smaller businesses. We would like to see a commitment from the Scottish Government that small businesses will be given an equal and fair opportunity to bid for contracts associated with the building of the new Forth Crossing.

It is also important we recognise the importance of the road haulage industry to the Scottish economy and that the heavy vehicles they use to transport goods across Scotland do have an impact on the fabric of the structure and road surfaces in the longer term. The FSB would like to see the highest specification of materials used on the new crossing in order that the longest possible lifespan can be extracted from this investment of public money.

Conclusion

The FSB is pleased that the Scottish Government has recognised the need to invest in Scotland's infrastructure by building a new Forth Crossing. Many micro and small businesses rely on the existing crossing to make deliveries and visit clients. It is essential that given the age of the existing bridge and the likelihood of significant improvements needing to be made in the coming years, that a new crossing is built to ensure the continued free flow of traffic over the River Forth. As we have also made clear in this submission, we would like to see a commitment from the Scottish Government that there will be no re-introduction of tolls over the existing bridge or new crossing; we would like to see a fair procurement process, where small businesses are given opportunities to win contracts; and finally that the new crossing should be built to the highest standard to ensure it has a long life and is good value for the tax payer investment.

Should you require any further information, please contact: Martyn McIntyre, Policy Officer on (0141) 221 0775 or martyn.mcintyre@fsb.org.uk