

Forth Crossing Bill – Public Transport Corridor Transport, Infrastructure & Climate Change Committee

February 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 Transport, Infrastructure & Climate Change Committee on the *Forth Crossing Bill – Public Transport Corridor*.

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. As a representative business organisation, we are keen to develop our transport infrastructure to ensure effective transport links for businesses across Scotland.

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 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.

Public Transport Corridor

The FSB represents a diverse range of micro, small and medium-sized businesses. It should be noted that for many businesses, there is no alternative to the use of private vehicles in the day-to-day running of their business. Measures which seek to encourage public transport use for non-essential car users, such as congestion charging, can, therefore, result in unfair restrictions on small businesses.

Nonetheless, the FSB understands the need to tackle the impact of growing numbers of vehicles on our roads. Congestion is a serious issue for small businesses. Indeed in a 2008 FSB survey, we found that, on average, small

businesses lost 7.5 hours per week to traffic congestion in Scotland, so they are naturally keen to ensure that all available routes are as accessible as possible. It follows that many of our members who use the existing Forth Bridge are concerned that the proposed public transport corridor option may leave the existing crossing under-used.

The FSB has also received representations from local members about the proximity of the new 'park and ride' facility to the bridge. A concern has been expressed that it is too close to the crossing and could potentially lead to a bottle neck, thus exacerbating traffic congestion in the area.

The FSB would suggest that public transport vehicles are given sole use of one of the traffic lanes. The other lane would be allocated to commercial vehicles of up to 7.5 ton gross vehicle weight (GVW). We feel that not only would this increase crossing numbers on the existing bridge, by restricting the weight of vehicles allowed to cross, it would also minimise damage to the carriageway and bridge structure. Very few smaller businesses operate with vehicles above this weight and most vans and car derived vans fall into the 3.5 ton (GVW) bracket. We believe that this suggestion would give small businesses that regularly use the bridge a cost saving by reducing journey times by allowing them to go about their business on less congested roads.

We also note that an advanced traffic management system is to be created both north and south of the river. We believe that sensible and controlled use of this new system could allow the filtering of multi-occupancy vehicles over the existing bridge when traffic conditions on the new crossing warrant it; such as when there is a breakdown, heavy traffic conditions, bridge maintenance or severe weather.

Conclusion

The FSB has sought to be as constructive as possible in our response to this consultation. We believe that while developing the existing bridge as a public transport corridor may be desirable as a method of reducing the overall number of vehicles on the road, and thus levels of congestion, we must not forget that most small businesses rely on their vehicles for the day-to-day running of their business. We would argue therefore that it is important that while one lane of the existing bridge is designated for public transport use, the other lane should be allocated to small commercial vehicles. This will maximise the use of the infrastructure while reducing costs and journey times for small businesses.

The construction of a new crossing offers an opportunity to create a significantly improved transport infrastructure network in the east of Scotland. The FSB welcomes the opportunity to submit this response to your inquiry and is open to any discussion to explore further options to maximise sensible use of the existing bridge.

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