

Ref: /JS/AK /CD393

Keith Main
Scottish Executive
Road Pricing Team
Area 2D
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

Dear Sirs

**Study of the Economic, Social and Environmental Costs and Impacts of
Retaining or Removing the Tay and Forth Tolls**

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



Andy Willox OBE
FSB Scottish Policy Convener

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Study of the Economic, Social and Environmental Costs and Impacts of Retaining or Removing the Tay and Forth Tolls

Response from the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses is Scotland's largest direct-member business organisation, representing over 18,000 members. The FSB 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 would like to comment on the main issues that affect them in relation to the bridge tolls.

The Federation welcomes this opportunity to comment on the impact of retaining or removing the Tay and Forth Bridge tolls. We welcome this full review, and would strongly urge the consultants charged with undertaking the review to speak to a wide range of small businesses – across different sectors and geographical areas. To build an accurate picture of the impact of the tolls, the review should extend beyond Fife and Dundee to the whole of the east of Scotland and further afield. We would like to highlight the cost to our members of retaining the bridge tolls, and the potential benefits of removing them.

Cost

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 the congestion which costs businesses dear.

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 alternative route they can take either; they therefore have little choice but to pay the tolls. The Federation 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.

Fairness

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.

Trunk Road Network

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.

Economic Growth

If growing the economy remains the top priority of the Scottish Executive, then it makes little sense 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 send a strong signal that the Scottish Executive is determined to support small businesses, and would give those businesses and the economy a real boost.