Public Petitions Committee – a template for e-petitions

Should you wish to submit an e-petition allowing signatures to be gathered on-line on the Public Petitions Committee e-petitioner web pages please complete the template below. Before submitting your e-petition please consult the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on what is and is not admissible. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

**Details of principal petitioner:**

Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to.

Rev. Ross Brown,

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**Text of petition:**

The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS

“Petition by rev. Ross Brown calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge.”

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**Period for gathering signatures:**

Please enter the closing date for gathering signatures on your petition, which we would usually recommend is a period of between 4-6 weeks

Closing date:
Additional information:

Please enter any other information relating to the issues raised in your e-petition, including the reasons why the action requested is necessary. The text entered in this field should not exceed 2 pages. However, you may wish to provide further sources/links to background information.

The issues being raised in this petition affects many communities both north and south of the River Forth. I bring this proposal as a Fifer but I am mindful of the huge detrimental impact of the proposals to increase the tolls to £4 across the whole of Central East Scotland. This decision by the Forth Estuary Transport Authority is totally unacceptable. The decision has been taken against a background of the Skye Bridge Tolls having been removed. The Erskine Bridge Tolls seemingly to be removed soon and the only Bridges left in Scotland namely the Forth and the Tay are to have increased Toll charges. This is perverse logic and completely unjust. The proposals to increase the tolls for users of the Forth Bridge are totally unacceptable. The proposals are to have a variety of different tolls in place at different times of the day depending on whether a car is being used by one user or more. If taken to its logical conclusion every road in Scotland where there is congestion ought to be charged a toll. Why should the users of the Forth Bridge be treated in such an inequitable way? Why should those users who are unable to access good employment opportunities locally be penalised for having to travel elsewhere to earn a living? If the haulage industry has caused so much damage to the bridge and road surface why should they be allowed to pass without a much increased fee or be made by byelaw to reroute via Kincardine?

Why should motor cyclists (and cyclists) be permitted to cross free of charge while car and light goods vehicles have to pay? (motor cyclists drive along side cars jumping the toll booth conga lane style frustrating other motorists who wait patiently in them the lanes to pay at the booths)

Why should the people of West Fife have to pay to cross a bridge that was due to have it’s tolls abolished once it was paid for? (which was in the early 90s)

Meanwhile seeing others in our nation having their road infrastructure paid out of government resources e.g. Skye Bridge? Which has a lesser traffic flow and is not a major route covering east central and the Forth Road Bridge is a main Trans European route for Scotland with neighbouring Rosyth Dockyard which is a gateway to Europe.

Given the huge taxation exacted upon motorists through our petrol taxes, V.A.T, etc on motoring costs why is there a persistency to persecute the people of West Fife, East Central Scotland and the Highlands by prolonged feasibility studies, delaying action on building a bridge even more, meanwhile scaremongering concerned commuters?

On the latter point is the Parliament aware some people are moving out of the Duloch area east of Dunfermline back to Edinburgh for fear of not getting to work and the pressures caused by commuting/bridge delays and now dramatically increased tolls?

My parishioners are constantly talking of being ignored and left out in the dark regarding their need for good transport coverage and road networks, whilst in the mean time having to leave earlier and earlier to get to work due to over crowded roads. It is not uncommon to be leaving to get to work in Lothian or Edinburgh at 6.30am in order to get to start around 8am. Even at this time in the morning, the Inverkeithing town and approaches to the bridge are excessively busy. Something is going to give in the near future and it will only take some lobby group to organise protests etc. to cause chaos. Feelings are running high in our communities regarding road transport, and I feel these frustrations must be addressed with high profile statements and clear commitments being given to the people of West Fife by the Scottish Parliament in order to alleviate fears caused by press manipulation.

Train services and bus services are not adequate with no major new rail lines having been built in East Central Scotland for the over 100 years. The train capacity does not match demand having grown by nearly 40% in the last ten years. Trains are regularly cancelled with no warning. Many commuters using the bridge are business people who require their vehicles to
carry the tools of their trade. Many business people from areas surrounding the capital city already state that they no longer can tender for business in Edinburgh because of the punitive fines that are imposed on them and if these charges are to be imposed too then the many businesses will collapse and this impacts on those business people travelling to sell their products and services going north as well as those businesses from the north selling south of the River Forth.

Every effort has been made by Fife Council over the years to increase public transport. In relatively recent years Fife Council was one of only two local authorities to have provided free bus passes for all of the senior citizens living in Fife and also provided train journeys to Edinburgh and Glasgow at minimal cost. Essentially it was well ahead of others in this key aspect of public policy. Fife Council has and continues to provide major subsidy to the public transport infrastructure in Fife with tens of millions of pounds of investment in the past twenty years.

Local authorities surrounding the Forth Bridge continue with massively important work in leading on a range of major initiatives to improve and develop Public Transport having been players in the South East Scotland Transport Partnership for over ten years. The through ticketing scheme has been just one of the examples where a key focus for that partnership as well as developing vastly improved public transport information systems has been on making it possible to have through ticketing from one bus to another. Fife Council initiated the Park and Ride facility at Ferrytoll where the car park immediately to the north of the Forth Bridge allows car users to park their cars there and use the buses at a very favourable cost direct to the City Centre.

The key point here is that not all vehicles travelling across either go to or come from Edinburgh City Centre. In fact, only 12% of all bridge users are heading to or from the City Centre. The key destinations for other bridge users are Glasgow, the A1 or the M4, Stirling, Falkirk, Linlithgow, East Lothian towns and villages. Commuters to or from these areas are predominantly business people moving in either direction and for whom if they were to rely on public transport would necessarily have to go into Edinburgh and then back out again to their main destination thereby imposing a major burden on an already creaking public transport infrastructure at Haymarket and Waverly railway stations and intolerable demand on the new Edinburgh bus station. Journeys for the people concerned would not take account of the special equipment required by the business people or the products that sales persons are required to carry for demonstration purposes.

In essence whilst I applaud developments in Public Transport improvements there has to be recognition that for a vast number of people they don’t have train or bus alternatives that are suitable for serving their needs. Car users must be accommodated on the basis of fairly developed policies and must be able to have the use of major routes in the same way that other people across Scotland do.

Finally, I believe as do many other people in the community, that it is quite wrong to have policy developed in the way that FETA is developing policy; namely, every time that Edinburgh City Council leaders are in the chair we have a policy that is manifestly unfair to car users and every time that Fife Council is in the chair the policy swings the other way recognising the needs of car users. All of this happens each six months depending which authority is in the chair. In my opinion sound policies should be developed that recognise the economic disadvantage of all of those areas that surround Edinburgh. Edinburgh’s prosperity has blinded it to the hardship and suffering of so many outside the city and I do hope that the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will reject this manifestly unfair proposal decided on the casting vote of the Chair at that time in the hands of Edinburgh City Council supported by Perth and Kinross Councillors.
Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting an e-petition:
Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern, by for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MSPs. Details of those approached should be entered.

Fife MSPs have asked Parliamentary Questions and Helen Eadie MSP has written to the First Minister Jack McConnell MSP, the Transport Minister Nicol Stephen MSP and all of the Board members of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority as well as leading Fife and Edinburgh Councillors.

Comments to stimulate on-line discussion:
Please provide at least one comment to set the scene for an on-line discussion on the petition, not exceeding 10 lines of text.

These tolls are effectively congestion charging which is discriminating against one of the areas with a number of the most deprived and disadvantaged communities in Scotland apart from Glasgow. If congestion charges are to be used in Scotland they should be applied equitably for all major routes only following a referendum in the same way that Edinburgh City Council had a referendum and that all areas in Scotland with an interest in this main Trans-European route should have a vote in any such referendum. To selectively impose charging for the Forth Bridge would result in many people on both sides of the River no longer finding it economic to work in their current employment.

Petitioners appearing before the Committee
The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions Committee to speak in support of their petition. Such an invitation will only be made if the Convener considers this would be useful in facilitating the Committee’s consideration of the petition. It should be noted that due to the large volume of petitions it has to consider, the Committee is not able to invite all petitioners to appear before the Committee to speak in support of their petition.

Please indicate below whether you request to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee

a template for e-petitions. July 2004
I DO NOT request to make a brief statement before the Committee

Signature of principal petitioner:
When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.

Signature: ..............................................................

Date: 27/12/2005

For advice on the content and wording of your e-petition please contact:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186 Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Note
Completed e-petition forms should also be sent to petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

*template for e-petitions. July 2004*
email: sjnicholson@rac.co.uk

Dr James Johnston  
Clerk to Public Petitions Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
TG.01  
Parliamentary Headquarters  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Dear Dr Johnston

**Consideration of Petition PE921**

My apologies for the late submission of this letter.

As events have somewhat overtaken the Rev Ross's petition - with the announcement of a rejection of a proposed increase on the Forth Bridge in March, the publication of the Tolled Bridges Review Phase Two and, only last week, notice of a further study into the impact of tolls, it would seem that a submission from the RAC Foundation is on this occasion unnecessary.

The RAC Foundation will fully co-operate with this new study and provide evidence to the Minister and his consultants as well as responding to the consultation on a proposed Bill on the removal of tolls from the Tay and Forth Bridges by the MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife.

I hope that this helps you and the committee members. If I can provide any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Sue Nicholson  
Head of Campaigns and Policy  
RAC Foundation.
From: Greig, Neil [Neil.Greig@TheAA.com]
Sent: 27 April 2006 10:30
To: Hough R (Richard)
Subject: Consideration of Petitions

Richard

Thank you for your recent letters – I apologise that you have had to write twice to elicit a response from the AA Trust. The AA Trust has no objection to its views being made public.

Petition PE921

We believe that this petition has now been superseded by events eg the Toll Bridges Review and we have no further comments to add.

Petition PE908/PE909

The AA Trust believes that these petitions highlight the fundamental problem of lack of resources available to enforce traffic regulation orders. There are a plethora of traffic regulation orders produced by Councils on a daily basis and often with little regard for the ultimate ability of the police or the Councils to enforce them. De-criminalisation of car parking was supposed to allow for greater enforcement of traffic orders and better traffic management but there is little concrete evidence that this has happened in any area other than paid for parking.

The AA Trust sympathises with the plight of disabled drivers but would not support any changes to the current system of traffic order production until resources can be shown to be available to enforce them.

Neil Greig
Head of Policy, Scotland
The AA Motoring Trust

04/05/2006
15 March 2006

Dr James Johnston  
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
TG.01  
Public Petitions Committee  
Parliamentary Headquarters  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Johnston

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE921

Thank you for your letter of 8 February in which you seek Scottish Enterprise’s (SE) comments on Petition PE921.

As I am sure you will be aware, since receipt of your letter, there have been several developments relating to the Forth Road Bridge and tolling policy. Of particular relevance was the announcement made by the Minister for Transport, Tavish Scott, on 1 March 2006, stating that tolls on the Forth Road Bridge would remain at £1.00 and that the suggested variable tolling strategy, which would have seen a toll of £4.00 in peak hours for single occupancy vehicles, would not be implemented at this time.

In addition to this, the Transport Minister has also announced that the planning of a new bridge would commence in the near future, following reports that the bridge may have to close to all vehicular traffic by 2019.

SE fully supports and welcomes the decision to move forward on the planning processes associated with a new crossing. We also take the view that the issue of continuing toll charges is essentially a political decision that properly rests with Ministers and as such is not an issue on which SE feels able to comment.

Yours sincerely

Jack Perry
Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 8 February 2006, in which you asked me to respond to Petition PE 921 by the Rev. Ross Brown, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge.

The petition raises a number of issues and I feel that the best way to address this is to refer to the statement I made to Parliament on 1 March. During that statement, I announced that Scottish Ministers had rejected the Forth Estuary Transport Authority’s application for approval in principle of its road user charging proposals.

The official report of my statement to Parliament can be found at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-06/sor0301-02.htm#Col23595.

I hope that this reply is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of PE921.

TAVISH SCOTT
Martin E (Eileen)

From: Johnston JD (James)
Sent: 22 March 2006 16:16
To: Martin E (Eileen)
Cc: Hough R (Richard)
Subject: FW: Consultation Response: PE921

For logging please

Jim

-----Original Message-----
From: Andrew Watson [mailto:andrew.watson@fsb.org.uk]
Sent: Tuesday, March 21, 2006 4:49 PM
To: Johnston JD (James)
Subject: Consultation Response: PE921

Dear Dr Johnston

Thank you for your letter of 8th February 2006, inviting the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland to respond to Petition PE921, in the name of Rev. Ross Brown, calling for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge. We welcome the opportunity to comment on this issue.

Recent events have somewhat overtaken the original purpose of the petition. As you will be aware, in a Ministerial Statement to Parliament on Wednesday 1st March 2006, Transport Minister Tavish Scott MSP rejected the application from FETA to increase tolls, and they are to remain at £1 for the foreseeable future.

The FSB in Scotland responded in detail to the Tolled Bridges Review in August 2005, and to the Forth Estuary Transport Initiative- Application for Approval in Principle consultation in December 2005. In both, the FSB in Scotland opposed any increase in the cost of crossing the Forth Road Bridge. Ultimately, we want to see the Scottish Executive remove tolls from all bridges in Scotland and consider such bridges as part of the trunk road network. Until such times as the tolls are removed, we remain entirely opposed to any increase in the cost of crossing the Forth, especially one that would unfairly penalise essential business users, who have to cross the bridge at different times during the day, and often travel alone.

I hope this email, and the more detailed consultation responses I have enclosed, will be of use to the Committee in their consideration of this petition.

If you need any further information, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Andrew

Andrew Watson
Deputy Head of Press & Parliamentary Affairs
Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland
Tolled Bridges Review – Phase Two Consultation

Response from the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland welcomes this opportunity to comment on phase two of the review of tolled bridges in Scotland. With 19,000 members in Scotland, all depending on easy movement of goods and services to ensure their business’s success, we take a strong interest in transport issues and, in particular, the road network. Businesses from across Scotland use the three tolled bridges and a number of key points came out of discussions with FSB members:

- It should be recognised that most businesses have no choice other than to use private vehicles – often single occupancy vehicles – at peak times, in the day-to-day running 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. At a time when Scotland is aiming for economic growth it would be counter-productive to penalise these businesses.
- It is worth noting that there seems to be a preconception that traffic crossing the bridges is trying to enter or exit a city. This is often not the case with the bridges providing part of the road network for businesses moving goods and services around Scotland.
- Congestion has a damaging effect on businesses and our primary concern is to get traffic moving more quickly without punishing SMEs who must use the tolled bridges.
- There is growing resentment that tolls still exist on the Erskine Bridge when the bridge is part of the trunk road network.

Questions

Question 1: Do you think that the system for verifying Blue Badge exemptions should be changed? If so, can you suggest what these changes should be?

Yes, we are in favour of any system which speeds up the process of passing through the tolls and do not understand why the existing system is so complicated. We are particularly in favour of moving towards a verification system which could work alongside electronic tolls.

Question 2: Do you consider that the exemptions for emergency service vehicles should remain limited to the Ambulance, Fire and Police Services, or should we consider extending this to cover other key services?

There is clearly merit in considering the application of exemptions as defined in the Road User Charging (Exemption from Charges) Regulations: this would extend the existing exemption to coastguard vehicles. We also believe that it may be worth considering an exemption for utility
company vehicles attending an emergency e.g. gas leak or water main problem, although we accept that it may be difficult to differentiate between those attending an emergency and those simply on the road for general maintenance.

Question 3: Vehicles used by bridge authorities to respond to breakdowns on each bridge are exempt. Do you see a case for extending exemptions to the AA, RAC or other commercial breakdown services responding to breakdowns on the road network other than where this is the responsibility of the bridge authorities?

Yes, movement of traffic is critical for businesses and so if the AA, RAC or other commercial breakdown service (including small, independent operators) are attending a problem on the road network which requires use of the tolled bridges to reach the problem, then an exemption for these services should be considered. We understand that there is a certification system for rescue and recovery vehicles which could be used to ensure such an exemption is not abused.

Question 4: Should public transport vehicles and multiple occupancy vehicles be considered for exemption from bridge tolls?

As an efficient, affordable and reliable public transport is central to tackling congestion, we agree that there is a case for exempting public service vehicles. This would be in line with exemptions in the Road User Charging (Exemption from Charges) Regulations.

Exempting multiple occupancy vehicles (MOVs) could place an undue burden on single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) - many of which will be businesses as outlined above. It may be worth noting that many vehicles which are classified as SOVs on passing through the tolls may have been MOVs when travelling in the opposite direction. This is particularly the case for taxis/minibuses transporting passengers into Edinburgh for onward transport connections (e.g. airport). In considering any exemption for MOVs we believe that there is a clear case to consider the unique case of taxis and other private hire vehicles.

Question 5: Should tolled bridges offer multiple crossing discount vouchers to all bridge users, or particular classes of users such as buses or multiple occupancy vehicles? If so, why should this be?

Whilst in theory discount vouchers may be seen to offer some form of incentive for regular use, in practice this is unlikely to be the case. Drivers choose the most practical route for each journey and we do not see how savings on tolls would affect that. The value of discounts may be relatively low, but the removal of these schemes would represent a significant cost increase for regular business users, such as the haulage industry and, on balance, we do not believe it would help reduce congestion. We do, however, support the introduction of one discount scheme to be used at all three Scottish bridges. We are keen to see how such a discount scheme could be run compatibly with electronic tolls and so we would encourage a move away from a paper voucher scheme as a first step.

Question 6: What are your views on a common vehicle classification system for levying tolls at all Scotland's tolled bridges?
This seems an entirely sensible approach. We would suggest a simpler classification system based on vehicle excise duty codes as follows:

1. Private Light Goods – up to 3 ½ tonnes
2. Fixed Wheel Commercials – from 3 ½ tonnes to articulated vehicles
3. Articulated Vehicles

It may be worth considering whether a fourth classification is necessary for motorcycles/scooters.

We would anticipate some form of classification system which could be easily recognised at electronic tolls – perhaps through bar-coding of tax discs, for example.

Question 7: Should we encourage modal shift from single occupancy cars to public transport and multiple occupancy vehicles on all tolled bridges? If so, how might this be achieved?

It is clear that there may be scope to reduce the level of single occupancy car journeys. The distinction between cars and other SOVs engaged in some form of commercial activity is important but we must ensure that in attempts to reduce congestion we do not penalise businesses using the road network as the main route for transporting goods and services.

We believe that improved public transport – such as better park and ride facilities and more reliable train services – is key to encouraging modal shift. It might also be possible to encourage some form of incentive to encourage employees from very large businesses to car share or consider other methods of transporting large numbers of employees to an individual workplace. Many companies are already implementing such schemes and this should be encouraged. We believe it is important to offer incentives, rather than punishments (e.g. workplace parking levy) to encourage a reduction in single occupancy car journeys.

Question 8: Do you think that raising tolls at peak times would result in less congestion at those times?

No, this is unlikely to make a difference and would unfairly punish businesses who must use the bridge at peak times in order to meet delivery times or appointments. Given the current levels of congestion at peak times it is fair to assume that most drivers who can avoid rush hour are already doing so, and those that can't are already being punished by longer journey times.

Question 9: Should tolls reflect the impacts of different vehicle types on the need for maintenance, repair and strengthening programmes? If so, do you have suggestions for how this might be done?

While it could be argued that goods vehicles are heavier today than envisaged at the time of construction of the tolled bridges, this is also the case for many roads across Scotland where there is no suggestion of increasing costs accordingly for heavy goods vehicles. We believe that if the same goods were transported in smaller vehicles, congestion would be exacerbated by a larger number of goods vehicles on our roads. It seems odd to suggest this at the same time as talking of encouraging more passengers to travel in fewer vehicles. The haulage industry, in particular, is
experiencing a difficult business environment and it is likely that any increased toll charges for this industry would be passed on to other business customers, which seems a futile exercise.

**Question 10:** Do you think the current process involving Public Local Inquiries (PLIs) is appropriate for making changes to tolls or charges to meet the costs of managing, maintaining and operating a bridge?

On balance we agree that this process should be retained, although we would like to see some form of business representation as a key part of any change to tolls.

**Question 11:** Do you consider that final approval by Scottish Ministers is an essential safeguard for toll/charge payers or do you think that the final decision is a matter for the management authority for the bridge?

Again, on balance it was felt that Ministers should still play a role in deciding toll levels, however it is important that there is full consultation with bridge users – including businesses.

**Question 12:** Do you consider all tolls should be subject to increases linked to an inflation index?

No, there should be no assumption in favour of regular increases.

**Question 13:** What advantages and disadvantages do you see if any or all the tolled bridges were to be managed by the Scottish Executive or the national transport agency?

As the first phase of this review concluded each of the three tolled bridges is unique and we therefore believe there is a case for retaining management of each bridge at a local level, enabling more responsive, accountable decision-making.

Ideally we would envisage the bridges being part of the wider trunk road network (and, consequently, toll-free). Were responsibility for managing the trunk road network to be passed to Transport Scotland, then – assuming the bridges were part of this network – it would also be sensible to pass management of the bridges to the agency.

**Question 14:** Should we consider transferring some or all of the powers and functions of current bridge authorities to Regional Transport Partnerships?

No. Statutory RTPs are, as yet, untested and their powers undetermined. With the establishment of a national transport agency, and the existing roles of local authorities and bridge authorities, we believe it would be unwise to pass more responsibilities to yet another organisation.

**Question 15:** As the Erskine Bridge functions as a key national and strategic link for the West of Scotland as well as an important local link for communities north and south of the River Clyde, do you see any argument for de-trunking it so that it could become the responsibility of the RTP for the West of Scotland?
No, and we would vigorously oppose any such proposal. Indeed, there is a strong argument for removing tolls from the Erskine Bridge since it is already part of the trunk road network.

Question 16: Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the FETA model, for any or all of the bridges?

Question 17: Do you have any views on the advantages or disadvantages of the TRBJB model, for any or all of the bridges?

We have no evidence to suggest that one model is more effective than the other. Regardless of which management system is implemented, it is imperative that: a) there is structured ongoing consultation (perhaps through a sub-group or some other forum) with bridge users, including specific business representation; b) meetings, decisions and accounts remain transparent; and c) that councillors, as elected local representatives, are accountable for decisions taken.

It may also be worth considering whether or not either of these management options allow for the co-opting of business representatives – as well as other user groups – onto the management board/committee.

Question 18: Do you think there would be any merit in having a single body responsible for operating and managing all tolled bridges in Scotland?

Question 19: If you think all bridges should be run by one body what form, powers and functions should this body have?

Please see responses to questions 13 and 17.

Question 20: Are there any other management options that you would like to suggest?

No, but we would draw attention to the factors outlined in our response to question 17.

For further details or to discuss any of the points above in more detail, please contact Susan Love, Policy Development Officer on scotspolicy@fsb.org.uk or 01259 723713
Forth Estuary Transport Initiative – Application for Approval in Principle

Response from the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland welcomes this opportunity to comment on the ITI application submitted by FETA. With 19,000 members in Scotland, all depending on easy movement of goods and services to ensure their business’s success, we take a strong interest in transport issues and, in particular, the road network. As set out in the detail of the application, the Forth Road Bridge plays a significant strategic role in Scotland’s infrastructure and so any significant changes to charging regimes on the bridge will affect businesses across Scotland.

We note that if this application is approved in principle, a more detailed statutory consultation will be carried out in 2006 however given the substantial changes proposed the Federation, as Scotland’s largest business organisation, felt it would be appropriate to make some broad comments at this stage.

Timing

Whilst we acknowledge that FETA was due to come forward with a replacement charging scheme (to replace the current toll order) we are disappointed that the timing of this application and the Scottish Executive’s Tolled Bridges Review has been so insensitive. The Federation spent time consulting with members across Scotland in order to respond to the Phase Two review. This review covered many of the issues being taken forward in the FETA application such as: SOVIMOV discounts; an end to discounting; peak time charging; charging HGVs proportionately; exemptions to tolls; linkages to other bodies; and classification of vehicles. Since FETA has proceeded with its application irrespective of the outcome of the Tolled Bridges Review, FSB members will naturally question the point of offering comments to the Scottish Executive on the review. It is particularly disappointing that the very issues where there was a lack of consistency across the country e.g. classification of vehicles for tolls, which would clearly benefit from a national position, are being taken forward by FETA before any national position has been determined.

We agree that action needs to be taken but it does seem strange that, at a time when transport strategy is about to take a far more strategic step forward, this application should be considered in isolation before the development of the new national transport strategy and the work of the new RTPs.

A National Issue

The application clearly sets out the significant problems facing the Forth Road Bridge. We are in no doubt that the current rise in vehicle crossings cannot continue and that it is FETA’s responsibility to manage the viability of the existing crossing. However we are concerned that this is a problem of national infrastructure which necessitates wider analysis.
FETA has representatives from the local authority areas bordering the bridge and the application focuses on journey origins and destinations within these council areas, largely on end destinations in West Lothian, West and North Edinburgh and Edinburgh city centre. The application sets out that:

"Overall, the Forth Road Bridge carries a significant proportion of long distance trips at all times. In the weekday peak periods over a third of all trips are long distance, in the off peak nearly half of all trips are long distance. This confirms the importance of the bridge outside the local context of the land use relationship between South Fife housing and the Lothians employment factors." (p.9)

Despite this statement, the idea of dealing with longer-distance traffic does not appear to be teased out anywhere else in the application. The application is – quite understandably – attempting to focus on the large number of SOV ‘commuter’ vehicles crossing the Forth and most of the plans are targeted at both managing demand, by discouraging those ‘unnecessary’ crossings, and funding alternative public transport options, most of which are focused on increased park and ride and bus routes between some of the destinations mentioned above. However, there is no discussion of the fact that a significant proportion of the traffic (as set out above) is long distance and probably using the bridge because it is part of our national infrastructure and road network. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the impact of any proposed changes to this group of vehicles should be better understood before any decisions are taken.

It also seems likely that the Scottish Executive will need to take a more strategic view of this problem since neither FETA, not SESTRAN, hold all the powers to solve the problems. It would seem to make better sense to delay implementation of this strategy until it can be considered within the context of the new national transport strategy and regional transport strategies. Accordingly we would support the suggestion that the current tolling regime should be extended by another three years.

**Essential Business Users**

We are astonished that throughout the application there is no discussion about the different types of traffic using the bridge. Whilst it would be fair to say that in capacity and maintenance terms this is irrelevant, it is certainly important when considering solutions – particularly where these solutions rely on understanding the behaviour of motorists and attempt to alter that behaviour. The tone of this application suggests that all single occupancy vehicles crossing the bridge at peak times are commuters who could choose an alternative. There is absolutely no reference to business vehicles (other than HGVs) which use the bridge because it is part of the road network which they use to deliver goods and services, often at peak times, usually with only one person in the vehicle. In planning future management of the bridge, FETA must explicitly acknowledge that the bridge is there to help transport goods and services across Scotland and that business should not be punished for doing so.

Congestion affects businesses and has an impact on the economy but there seems little point in penalising business users with increased charges whilst simultaneously using as a justification for cost increases the fact that congestion is bad for the economy. Small businesses will always be the losers in indiscriminate road user charging schemes but some form of exemption from peak time charges for business users could avoid this and would ensure that the scheme targeted those whose behaviour the scheme is designed to change. If
reductions can be allowed for multiple occupancy then there is absolutely no reason that business vehicles should not also be eligible for a reduction – the increased charge is a stick to encourage drivers to consider alternatives. For those who decide to car-share, there will be a reduction which means that business users are the only ones who are simply paying a higher charge with no alternative. This cannot be a good option for Scotland’s economy.

Business Impact

There does not appear to be a thorough impact assessment accompanying this application. We note that it references economic assessment from the SITCoS study but having also referred to that document we can see little other than estimations of job figures. Most impact assessments carried out by the Scottish Executive require far more detailed assessment of the impact on businesses, particularly small businesses. Before any decisions are taken we would strongly urge the Scottish Executive to ensure that a business impact assessment of the measures proposed is carried out by FETA.

Central Financing

We must question the ruling out of any form of central financing from the Scottish Executive which is written off in the application as a ‘blunt tool’ which would ultimately mean that those not using the bridge would have to pay for it. To suggest that this is unthinkable is just silly since this is how every other part of road network (with the exception of the three tolled bridges) is paid for and since this is a major part of our infrastructure which is facing what could be described as a crisis, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that more significant national funding might be required. This issue was also mentioned in the Phase Two review.

Comparisons

To support the application FETA refers to charges of other tolled bridges and the M6 toll road. Neither of these seems particularly fair or helpful comparisons since there is a toll-free alternative on the M6 and bridges elsewhere in Europe are likely to be subject to entirely different road pricing systems e.g. no road tax.

For further information on any of the points raised in this submission, please contact Susan Love, Policy Development Officer, on scopecp.policy@fetb.org.uk or 01229 723713
1. **Introduction**

TRANSform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and more socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators, local authorities, national environment and conservation groups, consultancies and local transport campaigns.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Petition PE921:

"Petition by Rev. Ross Brown calling for the Scottish parliament to urge the Scottish Executive not to increase the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge."

TRANSform Scotland takes the view that, as there has been no increase in the price of road use in recent years, there is no sound case for reducing or removing bridge tolls.

At the same time, climate change emissions from the transport sector continue to rise. There is no prospect of Scottish governance addressing Scotland’s disastrous environmental record if action is not taken to increase, not decrease, the price of road transport.

2. **Transport prices and costs**

The pressing economic, social and environmental problems of traffic congestion, air pollution and climate change are to a large extent caused by over-dependence on the private car. This situation has come about for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which is the failure of motoring to reflect the costs it imposes on the environment.

Contrary to the frequent statements by motoring organisations of the "hard-pressed motorist", the simple fact is that over recent decades the real price of motoring has not increased.

Private motoring is more affordable today than it was 20 years ago, while the price of public transport has risen: since 1980, bus and rail fares have risen by 37% in real terms. Future projections suggest that without action being taken, that the price of private motoring will fall by 29% between 2000 and 2010 and a further 24% by 2025.

There have been no increases in taxes on petrol over the last two years. Increases in fuel duty planned by the Treasury have been scrapped in response to rising oil prices and pressure from motoring and road haulage groups. In Scotland the percentage of fuel price that is taken up by taxes is lower today than it was in 1996.

Furthermore, and crucially, the transport sector does not cover its external costs. It is estimated that road taxation covers only one-third to one-half of the costs private car
users and haulage companies currently impose on society and the environment. The University of Leeds’ Institute for Transport Studies report, commissioned by the UK Department for Transport, *Surface Transport Costs & Charges,* in what remains the most comprehensive report of its kind in the UK, reported that:

"For the British road sector as a whole, taxes and charges in 1998 covered between one third to a half of their relevant marginal social and environmental costs, depending on the range of the cost estimates examined. Congestion costs, making up some two-thirds of overall costs, are the most important cost category, followed by environmental costs, accident costs and infrastructure maintenance."

The authors were subsequently quoted as saying that "fer from being over-taxed, motorists pay only a third to a half of the costs they impose on society... [The report] claims the cost of congestion, pollution, infrastructure maintenance and accidents far outweighs the £32 billion fuel and car taxes collected each year."v

3. **Climate Change Programme**

The transport sector is one of the principal contributors to climate change. There is now widespread acceptance that climate change is real, that it is already having damaging impacts across the planet, and that these impacts will worsen.

Yet despite a now high level of awareness of this issue, there is however little evidence that the Scottish transport sector is taking measures to reduce emissions: car use and road freight levels continue to increase, while progress on vehicle efficiency is limited at best.

Action to reduce the price of car commuting across the Forth Road Bridge could only be read as a specific encouragement towards long-distance car commuting – the very policy that the sustainable transport policies espoused by the Scottish Executive (in its Climate Change Programme and its draft National Transport Strategy) seeks to deter.

3. **Tolled Bridges Review**

TRANSform Scotland remains critical of the Scottish Executive’s failure to support FETA’s road charging proposals for the Forth Road Bridge, and its ultimate decision to reject FETA’s Application in Principle for a road user charge.

TRANSform Scotland holds that if the Scottish Executive is not prepared to support local plans for tackling traffic congestion, and having also failed to support The City of Edinburgh Council’s 2005 congestion charging proposal, it is its responsibility to come forward with a national road pricing scheme for reducing traffic levels and pollution. It has so far failed to come forward with any such scheme.
4. **Summary of views on Petition PE921**

Existing levels of road traffic are a major problem for the environment, for public health, and for the economy. Road traffic, through air and noise pollution, is a major factor in adversely affecting public health. Traffic levels also have a major damaging impact on the global environment, and in particular as a major contributor to climate change. More locally, road traffic levels adversely affect the economy through the imposition of congestion costs. The forecasts for traffic growth must not, for the environmental and economic health of the country, be allowed to come to fruition.

For progress to be made in reducing traffic congestion, and for tackling emissions from transport, it is imperative that the price of road use rises so that it more closely reflects the costs it imposes on the economy, society and the environment.

Whilst it may be very tempting to support populist demands for reducing the price of road use, such a policy can only lead to an intensification of the problems of the transport sector, and the worsening of the sector's external impacts. For these reasons, we can find no compelling case why the Scottish Parliament should take action to restrict the opportunities for the Scottish Executive to take action to tackle these problems.

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Quoted in Financial Times, 07/08/01.

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**TRANSform Scotland**

*the campaign for sustainable transport*

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21 June 2006

Dr Jim Johnston
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Dr Johnston

Petition PE921 – Rev. Ross Brown

VisitScotland welcomes the announcement made in Parliament on 1 March, 2006 by Tavish Scott MSP, Minister for Transport and Telecommunications not to increase tolls for crossing the Forth Road Bridge.

The tourism industry in Fife were extremely concerned by the potential impact an increase in tolls could have on tourism in Fife and this was expressed to us at a number of industry meetings we held in Fife earlier this year. Indeed, the Forth Bridge crossing is of crucial strategic importance to not only tourism in Fife, but to the wider Scottish tourism industry. Research commissioned by VisitScotland shows that 62% of visitors cite ease of travel around Scotland while being here as an important factor. As increasing numbers of tourists are coming to Scotland for a short break, strategic transport links such as the Forth Bridge become increasingly important to tourism.

In addition, we welcome the decision by the Scottish Executive following the announcement of the Tolled Bridges Review - Phase Two to undertake a further study of the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges. We look forward to the outcome of the review and welcome the fact that it will examine the impacts of the tolls on the economy, local communities in Fife and Dundee, while also examining the wider impacts on the Lothians and Scotland as a whole.

I hope this response is helpful, however, please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Chris Maguire
Corporate Affairs Executive
14th February 2006

The Scottish Parliament
Public Petitions Committee
TG.01
Parliamentary Headquarters
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Dr Johnston

Consideration of Petition PE921

I am writing with reference to your letter of 8 February 2006.

FETA has recommended introducing a road user charge for the Forth Road Bridge. In some cases, this will result in bridge users paying more to cross the bridge than they do at the moment using the current tolls system.

Why do we need road user charging for the bridge at all? It is a question that has, understandably, been asked.

The real reasons can be found both in understanding the history of the bridge and how it has been funded up to now, and an appreciation of what FETA's remit actually is as a transport authority.

Originally, tolls were introduced to pay off the bulk of loans needed to pay for the construction of the bridge. By the mid 1990s, some 30 years after the bridge first opened, the full cost had finally been paid off.

By that time however, a schedule of essential maintenance works on the bridge meant that the tolling regime was extended.

Work included major schemes to strengthen the main towers, improve the bridge's maritime defences and to replace the suspender ropes. These were brought about by a combination of the huge increase in traffic loads, changing safety regulations and the need to take the lead in ensuring the highest public safety standards.
The current tolling regime is due to finish in March this year. FETA was set up two years ago as the organisation not just concerned with the ongoing maintenance and operation of the bridge, but as a transport authority which could take a long-term view about managing all aspects of transport across the River Forth.

In short, this meant looking at how the bridge is currently used, and recommending a package of measures which could improve traffic flow across it.

These measures are detailed in FETA's Local Transport Strategy published in 2005. They include funding the new A8000 M9 spur, which has already started; building a new park-and-ride at Halbeath; providing dedicated bus lanes for the M90; doubling the size of the Ferrytoll park-and-ride and part-funding a new link road to Rosyth, as well as providing subsidies for new bus routes and feeder buses throughout Fife and West Lothian.

These measures are necessary if we are to improve traffic flow across the bridge, to the benefit of all users. Yet, under current legislation, the only way that FETA can raise money to pay for these essential schemes is by introducing road user charging.

Just as the essential maintenance works in the mid-1990s were funded by the current tolling regime, so will future improvement measures have to be funded, in the main, by those using the bridge.

Even if public funding was available for the bridge, this poses an interesting question about who should fund improvements. Should it be taxpayers from throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, or should it be those who use the bridge the most?

And this, of course, is assuming that the road user charging is simply just about raising necessary revenue, which it isn't. There is also much environmental reasoning behind its charging structure, such as the drive to encourage car sharing by offering reductions for multi-car occupancy, the need to encourage more off-peak travel to reduce congestion and the huge investment in public transport.

This has been reflected in FETA's road user charging recommendations. The basic £1 charge still exists which will fund ongoing maintenance and bridge operation. If you choose to travel at peak times and as a single vehicle occupant, you will pay more, yet you will be contributing to a significant package of bridge improvements which will make your life a lot easier in the longer-term.
There are two more additional points which need to be made. Much has been mentioned recently about the urgent need to address corrosion of the main bridge cables. The funds required to fight the corrosion will come out of the base £1 maintenance charge and not from any additional charge raised to deliver bridge improvements.

Secondly, FETA’s position on calling for a new multi-modal crossing of the Forth is well known. Again, this has no direct impact on the proposed road user charging scheme for the existing bridge. Whatever happens with the second crossing, we will still need a well-managed and adequately funded road crossing which will serve users now, and last well into the future.

If Ministerial approval is granted, FETA will enter a period of extensive public consultation about the proposed road user charging scheme. As such, we welcome as many views and opinions about the charging scheme as possible and how users want their bridge to be managed in the future. There are still many decisions to be made and we are ultimately accountable to the public audiences we serve.

Yours faithfully

Alastair Andrew
General Manager
For logging.

-----Original Message-----
From: Garry Clark [mailto:gclark@scottishchambers.org.uk]
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2006 10:14 AM
To: Hough R (Richard)
Subject: Consideration of Petition PE921

Dear Richard,

Further to your letter of 24 April 2006 and my email of 27 April 2006, the following is the response of Scottish Chambers of Commerce to the request of the Public Petitions Committee for our views on Petition PE921, which calls on the Scottish Executive not to increase tolls on the Forth Road Bridge.

Scottish Chambers of Commerce support the removal of tolls from the Forth and Tay Road Bridges. A number of local Chambers of Commerce are either directly or indirectly affected by the tolling of these bridges, including Fife Chamber of Commerce and Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce. Both of these Chambers are also actively campaigning to have the tolls scrapped.

At the time of the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Scotland had four tolled bridges: the Skye Bridge, the Erskine Bridge, the Tay Road Bridge and the Forth Road Bridge. In May 2006, this had been reduced to just two: the Tay and Forth Bridges. This leaves the east coast of Scotland, and Fife in particular, at a measurable disadvantage compared to other parts of Scotland.

According to figures published by the Forth Estuary Transport Authority, the number of cars and light vehicles using the Forth Road Bridge in 2004 was 10,728,568, whilst the number of heavy vehicles was 703,504. Projected traffic growth levels for 2010 estimate daily traffic of more than 35,000 vehicles, up from just over 32,000 movements per day in 2004. These vehicles are subject to tolls and revenues are therefore high and increasing.

For Fife in particular, the cost of tolls is felt particularly acutely, since it affects local people and businesses in a number of ways. Those most directly affected include residents of Fife who commute to work outwith the Kingdom, businesses whose road freight routes run north and south of Fife via the bridges, and tourist related businesses who rely on a steady flow of visitors into Fife.

Clearly if tolls are abolished then this would mean incorporating the maintenance costs of these bridges into the general Scottish transport budget, where they would compete for priority among other road infrastructure projects. Nevertheless given the strategic importance of these bridges to Scotland and given the situation which now exists with the Skye and Erskine bridges, the argument that travellers to Fife should bear the brunt of this cost does not appear to be equitable.

Obviously there remain concerns over the lifespan of the Forth Road Bridge and about its capacity to handle heavy vehicles in the medium term. An early decision on the construction of a new Forth crossing on the lower reaches of the river is vital for the Scottish economy.

Kind regards.

Garry Clark

Policy & Campaigns Executive

Scottish Chambers of Commerce

30 George Square

13/06/2006
Dear Mr. McMahon,

Thank you for informing Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission about the public consultation launched on a petition against increasing the tolls on the Forth Road Bridge.

Mr Barrot will not be making a submission on the Commission’s behalf.

Yours sincerely

Francis MORGAN

Mr Michael McMahon MSP
Convener of the Public Petitions Committee
TG.01
Parliamentary Headquarters
UK – Edinburgh EH99 1SP