

Forth Bridge Closure...

Did the Scottish Government assess the impact on bridge integrity, and climate and toxic emissions, before scrapping tolls in 2008?

Letter below published in The Herald 11.12.15, with Herald editor's headline...

Raising, not scrapping, bridge tolls could have averted this fiasco

Dear Editor

Successive bridgemasters have been saying for years that the Forth Road Bridge is operating at well over its design capacity - which presumably means that it was at risk of being damaged by traffic weight and vibration.

This was confirmed by the Scottish Government's 2006 Tolloed Bridges Review, Phase 2 Report, which referred to *"wear and tear ... from all forms of traffic"* - including impacts on structure, not just on surfacing. The report was clear that tolling could be used to adjust levels of traffic using the bridge. Tolls could also be higher for more damaging vehicles, *"The bridge operators believe there is a strong case for setting toll levels for HGVs which better reflect this impact on the bridge structure and surfacing."*

With today's increasing climate-related tragedies and toxic air pollution concerns, it is also worth noting that the Phase 1 Report, as long ago as 2004, had warned that changes in tolls could impact on both CO2 and toxic emissions. For example, appropriate tolling *"could help reduce congestion in Edinburgh," "could potentially have a positive impact on the city centre's air quality" and "could affect emissions of greenhouse gases."*

Although not mentioned in those reports, a suitable tolling regime could also have helped modify the unfortunate trends in dispersed location of housing and employment raised by your correspondent Alex Orr (Herald 9 December).

Given the above warnings in official Scottish Government documents in 2004 and 2006, and the fact that the bridge was already operating over capacity, we need to ask whether the new SNP government analysed the potential dangers and downsides before scrapping tolls entirely, just two years later in 2008, thereby encouraging yet more traffic onto the already over-stretched structure?

Indeed a thorough analysis at the time might even have shown that the only responsible action, rather than scrapping tolls, would have been to increase them (particularly on HGVs) to safeguard the integrity of the bridge - and perhaps even prevent the present disaster. Any Inquiry should address this issue and present lessons for the future.

If indeed tolls were scrapped without any proper analysis of the implications for bridge integrity then current commuters, travellers and businesses may now be paying in spades for what was a populist but environmentally damaging policy of the new SNP government.

Yours

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Incidentally the above reports can be found here...

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080705150358/http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Transport/Road/TollBridge>