

TAMAR BRIDGE AND TORPOINT FERRY JOINT COMMITTEE

8 DECEMBER 2023

FUTURE FINANCING REPORT

APPENDIX 5

WRITTEN RESPONSES FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Luke Pollard MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Andrew Vallance
Governance and Finance Manager
Tamar Crossings
Tamar Bridge Office
Pemros Road
Plymouth
PL5 1LP

13 November 2023

Dear Andrew,

TAMAR CROSSINGS CONSULTATION

I am writing to submit views to your consultation on changes to the tolls for users of the Torpoint Ferry and Tamar Bridge. As the Member of Parliament for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, I represent the Plymouth-side of the Torpoint Ferry and thousands of people who use the bridge and the ferry daily.

I appreciate the financial pressures that Tamar Crossings are facing and further understand your need to raise tolls. None of us like paying more but I believe it is important that the bridge and the ferry is adequately resourced to remain safe, operational and future-proof. I am aware that the Torpoint Ferries will need to be replaced in the next few years and there is an ambition to replace them with lower-carbon models. In a cost of living crisis I think all efforts should be made to reduce costs, sweat current assets and limit impact of higher tolls on local people.

I believe there should be cheaper tolls for local people using the bridge and the ferry. Working with Cllr Kate Ewert who represents the Rame Peninsula and Fred Thomas, Labour's candidate in Plymouth Moor View, we have prepared an alternative proposal that I would like you to consider. 'Cheaper tolls for local people' as an approach does not seek to change the required financial envelope for the crossings. Rather our proposal seeks to ensure that the gap between tolls paid by local people using the Tamar Tag and visitors and irregular visitors is grown over time delivering cheaper tolls for local people.

There is already a 50% discount for using the Tamar Tag and our proposal is that over a decade this is increased, year after year, so that there is a considerable benefit for being local or a regular user of the crossings. Importantly, this should not change the overall financial envelope for the crossings.

I would furthermore encourage you to reject proposals to freeze tolls as part of a pre-election gimmick. We need a long-term plan for funding the bridge and to that end can I make two further suggestions. Firstly, given the political importance of the Tamar Crossings and the need for the government of the day to agree to changes to legislation and approve new tolls, I believe you should start holding an annual meeting with Members of Parliament.

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This single briefing is a chance for MPs from Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, South East Cornwall and Plymouth Moor View to understand the crossings' finances, the current challenges and opportunities and work in closer partnership with the Joint Committee, local councillors and the team who run the crossings. I am a fan of cross-party and cross-Tamar working and think there would be real benefit to a regular forum for discussions, questions and planning.

Secondly, I believe that it is now time to look again at the legislation that governs the Tamar Crossings. The various Tamar Bridge Acts date from decades ago and in recent years the framework (legislative and tolls) for other toll bridges in England and Wales have changed significantly. I recognise that Government does not want to take on the bridge and the ferry, nor does it want to contribute to the running costs, but I believe they can assist us in modernising the legislation, helping cut costs and stream-lining the process on inflation-adjusted toll rises. I think there should be movement towards cross-party support for a 21st century Tamar Bridge Act and that we should lobby all the major parties for this ahead of the fast approaching General Election.

On the questions you ask in your consultation document, I look forward to seeing the summaries of the public's responses. However, I do want you to take on board the following views: I do not believe in splitting the fare structure for the ferry and the bridge. This could sink the viability of the ferry and load more traffic onto the bridge. As an advocate of cheaper tolls for local people, I do not believe you should claw back any of the discount between cash fares and tolls using a Tamar Tag – you should increase it but do so explicitly to support local people using Tamar Tags. You asked for views on demand pricing for peak time travel and this may work where there are genuine alternative routes for people to take but I do not believe that peak time pricing would work for travellers across the Tamar at present. It would just penalise regular commuters for work or education.

I would welcome the chance to meet to discuss my proposals and how local MPs can work with Tamar Crossings to modernise operations, secure fairer funding where available and ensure that the bridge and ferry are genuinely financially sustainable now and into the future.

Best wishes,
Luke

Luke Pollard MP
Member of Parliament for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport



TOWN
COUNCIL

Konsel An Dre Essa

28 October 2023

To whom it may concern

Saltash Town council are pleased to be asked to give their views on the Tamar Crossing consultation.

Saltash Town Council considers that the Tamar Crossings and in particular the Tamar Road Bridge are key parts of our towns infrastructure, and play a large part in our towns life. Many residents use the bridge on a daily basis to access employment and education, many others use it to access healthcare, leisure and for shopping trips.

At recent Town Council meetings there has been a focus on congestion in and around Saltash caused by delays on the bridge and the knock-on impact of this congestion to the public and businesses just trying to get around our town. Anecdotally, residents have informed us that journey times across the bridge have increased, thus traffic ends up being queued through Saltash, primarily impacting North Road/New Road and Fore Street through the Town Centre. This has significant negative impact on local residents who sometimes feel trapped in their own homes, or have to put up with queues of traffic right outside their door. This is inevitably leading to increased pollution which has well documented impacts on peoples health and wellbeing. Further, this is having a negative impact on businesses trying to take or make deliveries within the town and further afield. At a recent meeting of the Town Council, it was deemed a priority to resolve the congestion by the Saltash Chamber of Commerce.

We ask you to urgently look to resolve whatever is behind the additional delays that appear to be the cause of serious traffic congestion in and around Saltash, and implement mitigation to relieve this congestion which is having financial and health impacts on people's lives.

One suggestion is to automatically open the toll plaza barriers when congestion rises above a certain threshold, thus removing any toll payment time that is contributing to the delays. We suggest you consider this and possibly run a trial to see if it helps to reduce congestion and its impact.

A longer term suggestion is to find a way to remove those tolling related delays, and that could primarily be through utilising Automatic Number Plate Recognition, thus allowing near 'free flow' of traffic, which should reduce delays and therefore congestion.



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gdpr@saltash.gov.uk

In terms of tolling levels, Saltash Town Council would like you to carefully consider the impact of increasing tolls, and keep any increase to an absolute minimum, if at all. We would encourage better management of the organisation and assets through external review of your operating methods, that includes looking at alternative income generation methods to reduce any toll increases.

Saltash Town Council would support an increased differential between those with and without Tamar Tag accounts, and whilst it would mean that visitors to Cornwall or less frequent bridge and ferry users would pay proportionally more, it is felt that this would be more easily absorbed by these infrequent users.

Ultimately you must maintain a safe and efficient pair of crossings, we would support strong negotiations with National Highways in terms of them paying a substantive contribution for operation of the A38 across the bridge and A374 across the ferry, and other efforts to provide a better funding solution for the crossings going forward.

There have been some criticism of your survey, and we are unsure why you haven't informed all account holders in regard to the consultation, as you hold those details. The range of questions and possible options in our opinion is not well designed, which may make some people feel unable to, or are minded not to complete what they consider to be a poor survey.

So, to reiterate, please keep the tolls as low as possible, look seriously at an increased differential, or increased discount level for account holders. Please also keep at the top of your 'to do' list mitigation measures to reduce and eventually eliminate traffic congestion caused by bridge delays, and look at the suggestion to allow 'free flow' when congestion impacts traffic flows through Saltash.

We would welcome further engagement and are always pleased to welcome representatives at our meetings.

Submitted by Councillor Richard Bickford
Mayor of Saltash 2023 - 2024
On behalf of Saltash Town Council



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Good morning David

The opportunity for a stakeholder response to the Public Consultation 2023 – Funding the Crossings was considered at the October 2023 council, where it was **resolved** to provide the following feedback: -

Torpoint Town Council strongly oppose any option which separates the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry tolls and anticipates a significant unknown impact, socially and economically to human behaviour for Torpoint and the Rame Peninsula. The 24/7 Torpoint Ferry service is an essential life service that should be maintained.

Kind regards

Milly

Milly Southworth Cert(HE), BA(Hons), FSLCC

Town Clerk & RFO Torpoint Town Council

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SheviocK Parish Council

The Bill Warren Room, SheviocK Memorial Hall, Craffhole, Torpoint, Cornwall, PL11 3DG
Clerk: Mrs Nancy Gray. Telephone: 01503 232996 Email: sheviocKpc@btinternet.com

Tamar Crossings

16/10/2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

SheviocK Parish Council wishes to submit the following points in reference to the Tamar Crossing Consultation:

- Following the bridge and ferry user consultation, on October Saturday 8th and Tuesday 10th of October, SheviocK Parish Council wishes to note that: The result of the consultation may be biased towards reducing fares for the Tamar bridge by increasing tolls on the ferry (part 2 on the questionnaire/ Option 4 on the leaflet). As there is likely to be more users of the bridge than the ferry, who have been given access to the consultation.
- SheviocK Parish is on a peninsula, with most essential services, employment, businesses and facilities across the Tamar in Devon. In respect of travel costs, it is 7.2 miles one way to drive Torpoint Ferry, 13 miles one way to drive to the Tamar bridge and 41 miles one way if not using the bridge or Ferry travelling via Tavistock. As you will therefore note, there are no other viable cost option, regarding costs and time, for commuters/local businesses or residents. It is already very costly to access facilities across the Tamar, even if using the bridge or ferry. It is an unfair "tax" on the parishioners, and those living on the Cornish side of the Tamar (even with a tag). Furthermore, most suppliers charge parishioners extra as they must factor in the costs for crossing the Tamar from Devon.
- Noting that Cornwall is one of the poorest regions in England and Northern Europe. Any further increase to fares will increase the risk of local businesses failing - unable to meet the additional costs/ or be competitive, thus increasing unemployment. It would discourage investment and prevent growth as well as put an added strain on already below average household incomes.
- If fares rise again, it will discourage the use of the bridge/ferry as people cut back further and business fail, as a result revenue drops causing fares to rise again. Could it be better to encourage more users, by offering businesses and local people incentives/reduce fares. Could this be trialled? There is already anger and concern that tolls have only just risen after Covid by 30% (above inflation).
- Levelling up/HS2 reallocated funding bid. Could Tamar Crossings re-apply for government funding, with the backing of local Town and Parish Councils, Plymouth City Council, Cornwall Council and local MPs? Using the Crossing is an economic and day to

day life necessity with no other option available, noting comparisons to other crossings within Great Britain, which are cheaper and/or subsidised nationally.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Nancy Gray, Parish Clerk.

On behalf of
Sheviock Parish Council.

Dear David,

Please find attached a completed stakeholder consultation response on behalf of the Tamar Toll Action Group.

With best wishes,

Dr Mel Priston,

Chair, Tamar Toll Action Group

Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Funding the Crossings

Consultation, October 2023

The accompanying leaflet explains our current and forecast financial position.

Please read the leaflet before completing this questionnaire.

Your responses to this consultation will ensure that all relevant factors are taken into account in considering any changes to toll levels.

Section 1 Your use of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry

Please provide answers for both bridge and ferry

TAMAR BRIDGE Please tick one box only

1a How often do you usually travel across the bridge?

- 1 More than 5 times a week
- 2 5 times a week
- 3 1 – 4 times a week
- 4 Less than once a week
- 5 Less than once a month
- 6 Never

1b How do you usually travel across the bridge?

- 1 Private car/van
- 2 Light goods vehicle (eg Transit van)
- 3 Medium goods vehicle (ie 2-axle lorry)
- 4 HGV (ie lorry with more than 2 axles)
- 5 Motorcycle/scooter
- 6 Bicycle
- 7 Local bus
- 8 Walk
- 9 Do not use the bridge
- 10 Other _____

1c How do you currently pay to use the bridge?

- 1 TamarTag
- 2 Cash
- 3 Contactless card
- 4 Sometimes cash/contactless, sometimes Tag
- 5 Exempt/free
- 6 Do not use the bridge

1d Thinking about your most frequent journey using the bridge, what is the main reason for the crossing?

- 1 Commuting journeys (to and from work)
- 2 Business
- 3 Education
- 4 Healthcare
- 5 Recreation/leisure
- 6 Shopping
- 7 Do not use the bridge
- 8 Other CARING FOR FAMILY

TORPOINT FERRY Please tick one box only

1a How often do you usually travel on the ferry?

- 1 More than 5 times a week
- 2 5 times a week
- 3 1 – 4 times a week
- 4 Less than once a week
- 5 Less than once a month
- 6 Never

1b How do you usually travel across on the ferry?

- 1 Private car/van
- 2 Light goods vehicle (eg Transit van)
- 3 Medium goods vehicle (ie 2-axle lorry)
- 4 Motorcycle/scooter
- 5 Bicycle
- 6 Local bus
- 7 Walk
- 8 Do not use the ferry
- 9 Other _____

1c How do you currently pay to use the ferry?

- 1 TamarTag
- 2 Cash
- 3 Contactless card
- 4 Sometimes cash/contactless, sometimes Tag
- 5 Exempt/free
- 6 Do not use the ferry

1d Thinking about your most frequent journey using the ferry, what is the main reason for the crossing?

- 1 Commuting journeys (to and from work)
- 2 Business
- 3 Education
- 4 Healthcare
- 5 Recreation/leisure
- 6 Shopping
- 7 Do not use the ferry
- 8 Other CARING FOR FAMILY

Section 2 Your views on the Bridge and Ferry price structure

Currently our customers pay different amounts depending on what vehicle they drive and whether or not they pre-pay using a TamarTag account. There are potentially different ways in which tolls can be varied, and this section invites your views to inform our decisions.

We also want to know how your travel may change in the future.

- 1 We could charge differently by the time of day or the day of the week to help manage demand. Should we:**

Please tick one box

- 1 Charge more for travelling during peak times
2 Charge more for travelling during off-peak times
3 Increase charges uniformly
 NONE OF THE ABOVE

- 2 We could have different prices at the Bridge and Ferry to reflect the higher operating costs at the ferry. Should we:**

Please tick one box

- 1 Charge more for using the Torpoint Ferry
2 Keep the charges the same for both crossings

- 3 We could increase the pricing difference between bigger vehicles and cars to more accurately reflect the wear and tear on the crossings. Should we:**

Please tick one box

- 1 Increase the difference
2 Reduce the difference
3 Keep the current pricing ratios

- 4 We could change the discount we give for pre-payment using a TamarTag. Should we:**

Please tick one box

- 1 Reduce the percentage discount for TamarTag account holders
2 Increase the percentage discount for TamarTag account holders
3 Keep the existing 50% percentage discount

- 5 We are in a climate emergency and we could reduce the impact on the environment if we encourage low emission vehicles by charging them less. Should we:**

Please tick one box

- 1 Reduce charges for vehicles with lower emissions
2 Keep charges independent of vehicle emissions

6 Do you think that your travel patterns will change in the near future?

Yes, go to question 7

No, go to question 9

7 If you have replied yes to question 6, how do you think your use of the crossings will change?

Please tick all boxes that apply

1 Less frequent

4 Using public transport less

2 More frequent

5 Using public transport more

3 At different times of day

6 Walk more/cycle more

8 What do you think would cause this change in behaviour?

Please tick all boxes that apply

1 More home working

5 Using local suppliers

2 Unemployed/retirement

6 Increased home deliveries

3 Socialising less

7 Other TOLLS TOO EXPENSIVE

4 Improve health/environment

9 In order to help us analyse the responses, please provide your postcode:

*Representing members across
DEVON and CORNWALL*

Section 3 The options to resolve the financial shortfall

The accompanying leaflet details the characteristics of the various options being considered. Of the options which do you think is the most appropriate to resolve the financial shortfall?

Option details are as follows:

Please tick one box

1 Increase tolls for cars to £3.00 cash and £1.50 tag, with corresponding increases for other tolls.

2 Increase tolls for cars to £3.20 cash and £1.60 tag, with corresponding increases for other tolls.

3 Increase tolls for cars to £3.00 cash and £1.80 tag, with corresponding increases for other tolls.

4 Increase bridge tolls for cars to £3.00 cash and £1.50 tag and ferry tolls to £4.00 cash and £2.00 tag, with corresponding increases for other tolls.

5 No change in tolls.

For each option, the proposed toll for other classes of vehicle are available online at our website

10 Have you got any other concerns or suggestions on the charging structure or the service in general?

The Tamar Toll Action Group (TTAG) would like to raise a formal complaint about the consultation; on three counts:

Firstly: Only limited numbers of tag account holders were invited to participate in the consultation despite Tamar Crossings having access to all account holders' contact details. This is particularly disappointing after it was acknowledged following the previous 2022 consultation on the 2023 toll increase, that whilst the legal obligations had been met Tamar Crossings should try to do better in the future. For this 2023 consultation TTAG has been informed that 14,800 emails were sent out to tag holders, yet at last advice provided to TTAG, Tamar Crossings have over 54,000 Tag account holders. That is only just over 27% of your customers contacted despite Tamar Crossings receiving an income stream of in excess of £520,000 annually via the £0.80 monthly subscription from Tag Account holders. We consider that this sum should at least buy those account holders a level of customer service, including keeping them informed of proposals for change of this level of importance to users.

Secondly: That the consultation questionnaire has been constructed based around the use of 'forced choice methodology' to obtain Tamar Crossings' desired outcome (i.e. to present an apparent agreement from the public in support of an increase in tolls). TTAG's position is that this appears directly opposed to the Gunning principles for legitimate consultations. A large number of TTAG members (numbering over 3,300) have reported to us that that they wanted to complete the questionnaire, but felt they couldn't, or shouldn't, respond to it as to do so would result in them having to agree to an increase in tolls that they did not support. They further commented that they were concerned that the data they entered would then go on to be used to support that position in the toll increase application to the Secretary of State for Transport.

Thirdly: In the consultation there was no consideration or questions /options relating to cost cutting to address Tamar Crossings' proposed solutions for their predicted deficit. What is Tamar Crossings' contribution going to be to reduce their operating costs and how much longer can they continue to spend money that they don't have? Reliance on the two authorities and general public to bail them out of a situation of their own making is not an appropriate management strategy reflective of the high salaries paid to those running the organisation, this needs to be improved. TTAG does not accept the notion that Tamar Crossings are a business, as described by Cllr. Pears at the last Joint Committee meeting. Instead we consider that both of the Crossings are critical pieces of strategic transport infrastructure that should be provided appropriate funding from the Government. That said, it is necessary for Tamar Crossing to act prudently with their finances and perform as a business would, i.e. tailoring their expenditure to suit their income rather than attempting to force this equation to work in reverse, as appears to be the current practice. The proposed project for replacement of the toll booths with new ones being just one recent example of expenditure that is not affordable.

Based on the above three points, TTAG feels strongly that the results of the consultation should be considered flawed; it follows that the results should be disregarded and a fairer set of options for local users be put forward instead. The 'user pays' principle, though flawed in its concept from the outset, is no longer sustainable, particularly as green travel increases and debt interest payments spiral. It is also TTAG's suspicion that Tamar Crossings' debt and operating costs are borne mostly by local residents and businesses of Plymouth and SE Cornwall (with a high probability that the lion's share of this is from SE Cornwall due to its greater reliance on Plymouth than the reverse scenario) rather than visitors to the area. We look to Councillors representing their constituents to do a better job of advocating for them.

Regarding the charging structure, TTAG continues to lobby hard for our local representatives in Government to fight for central government funding on our behalf. This as the funding needed to support both crossings is fairly inconsequential if funded on a national level (the £15m annual cost to July 2023 is just 0.0015% of the Government's £1 trillion annual budget). At the Conservative Party conference speech in autumn 2023, Mr Sunak referenced using the funding saved on cancellation on HS2 to fund East to West transport links across the country. At multiple points he stated "across the nation". Here in the West Country we have two critical East/West transport links that have no viable alternative and a people that desperately need central support with funding these crossings. Currently in London, the Government and TfL between them are offering to fund two thirds of the £200 million repair bill for Hammersmith Bridge. Hammersmith and Fulham Council are opposed to paying their 1/3 share and have stated that they wish to apply tolls to recoup that third. However, those Councils have also gone on record as saying that those tolls will not apply to people resident in their borough. The disparity here does not escape the Action Group's notice, nor the notice of our supporters, who are rightly angry at the notion of paying increasing costs for the Tamar Crossings whilst their taxes contribute to repair of a far less vital crossing in the capital.

In the interim leading up to any Government support, we would like to see the difference between the cash price and tag price increased to address the burden of the tolls on local users. Also, a geographical limit on who can apply for the current Tag Discount scheme so that it is genuinely for people reliant on the crossings for regular daily use.

**For further information please visit our website at www.tamarcrossings.org.uk
Please return using the pre-paid envelope provided by 29 October 2023**