



RESPONSE TO STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PROJECTS REVIEW ANNOUNCEMENT

15th December 2008

Close inspection of the recent announcement of a cheaper new Forth road bridge casts real doubt on the government's claim to have saved £1.7bn on the cost of the proposed new bridge. The transport minister Stewart Stevenson argued that by using the old bridge for public transport, he could avoid having to build such multi-modal capacity into the new bridge.

But the government's Forth Replacement Crossing Study last year concluded that the new bridge should be simply a twin-carriageway with cycle and walk ways – but with no multi-modal public transport. So the minister's claim to have saved billions on something he was never going to build is a red herring, to say the least.

The government admits that the Forth Replacement Crossing Study was not tasked with adding public transport provision but said its decision last December to build a new bridge did include provision for multi-modal public transport. Like the Hokey-Cokey, sometimes it's in; sometimes it's out.

Meanwhile, ForthRight Alliance welcomes confirmation that the existing Forth road bridge, which we were repeatedly told was in terminal decay, can now be repaired and kept open. Ministers always insisted that the new bridge would be a replacement, as the old bridge was seriously corroded and might have to close. But this last week's announcement that it would stay open confirms comments earlier this year by the bridge's chief engineer that he was "highly confident" cable drying would arrest the corrosion. Subsequent tests have confirmed that drying is working.

This means there is no longer any justification for a new bridge: if the old bridge is capable of being repaired to carry public transport, then it is capable of carrying other traffic. The entire justification for the multi-billion-pound project was bogus and now, by allowing the old bridge to be fixed, the minister has effectively admitted this.
