



Note to CEC Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee

10th February 2009

Dear Members of the Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee,

On behalf of the ForthRight Alliance (FRA) I wish to write to you to let you know that we very much welcome the report (Item no. 26 - <http://cpol.edinburgh.gov.uk/getdoc_ext.asp?DocId=122645>) to be considered by you tomorrow.

In essence, the FRA believes that the Scottish Government's and Scottish Parliament's decision to build a second road crossing of the Forth at Queensferry is wrong on engineering, transport, environmental, economic and social justice grounds. Such a bridge is *both unnecessary and unwelcome* as a series of reports have indicated that to the question "Can we fix the existing bridge?" the answer is, as in a phrase in common use these days at the highest political level, "Yes we can!".

Indeed, given the "encouraging" results already seen from the initial sections of the west main cable now being de-humidified, the Chief Engineer and Bridgemaster of FETA is "confident" that the corrosion in the main cables can be halted before traffic restrictions on the existing bridge become necessary. Moreover, since the most recent inspection of the main cables has shown that the wires are deteriorating at a slower rate than first feared, any weight restrictions might now not have to be introduced until 2021.

Even were cable drying to prove unsuccessful then replacement or additional cables can be fitted over 7 or 8 years at a capital cost of between £91 and £122 million - and, according to a report to FETA last year, with only occasional overnight and weekend total closures. It can thus be seen that re-cabling, if required, can be carried out to a timescale not much more than is required by the building of a new bridge - and at only 5% of the capital cost. We therefore particularly welcome recommendation 8.9 in the report before you.

To cap it all, the proposal that the existing bridge should be retained in use - something we knew was possible all along - but reserved for public transport only is simply not credible when one looks into this suggestion in any detail.

The bridge carried 11,840,338 vehicles northbound in 2006 - of which only some 87,085 comprised buses. That's 0.7354942%.

Work carried out for the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership in 2003 indicated that all the additional road capacity provided by an additional bridge completed in 2016 would be used up by 2031 - and this assumed that the existing bridge was still carrying general traffic and that both bridges were tolled with charges increasing yearly in real terms.

It really does strain belief, therefore, that, while the new crossing becomes increasingly congested (a fact implicitly accepted by the Scottish Government in its recognition of the need for Intelligent Transport System technology to be in place throughout from Halbeath to the M9 from day one of the opening of a new bridge), users of that bridge will be content to look sideways at the existing bridge

carrying a bus at most every few minutes. The end result will be two bridges carrying general road traffic with only heavy goods vehicles perhaps being excluded from the existing structure.

We will have spent a fortune to be back to square one in terms of traffic congestion over the Forth at Queensferry and will have seen huge increases in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of the additional traffic generated by an additional crossing - and at the opportunity cost of delayed and cancelled school, hospital and other transport infrastructure projects throughout the land.

Indeed, such are the opportunity costs to communities throughout the land of spending some £2,340 million on a additional crossing that we would expect the Scottish Parliament to have to approve the delay and cancellation of a specific list of projects were they to fund the new bridge from the annual block allocations from Westminster. That would certainly help concentrate minds. We again particularly welcome recommendation 8.9 in the report.

Far better then, in our view, that that the Scottish Government should work to resolve the problems of the existing bridge within easily available budgets as its top priority.

For further details of our case, I have attached above a copy of the briefing paper which we circulated to MSPs last month prior to their debate in the Scottish Parliament on this matter of 15th January. This essentially updated our briefing paper of the very beginning of December last year which was produced in advance of the statement to the Scottish Parliament of 10th December 2008 by Stewart Stevenson MSP, Scottish Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change, regarding the Scottish Government's conclusions following completion of the Strategic Transport Projects Review. Both of these papers - and other material - can be viewed on our website at <http://www.forthrightalliance.org/>.

Once again, on behalf of the ForthRight Alliance, I warmly welcome the report before you.

Yours sincerely

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