

## Itchen Bridge Toll Automation

### Objections/Complaints about the proposed Order and Responses

Ref	Objection/Complaint	Response/Response to be sent
1.	<p>I refer to the above Order on behalf of Southampton Action for Access (SAFA).            May we respectfully draw your attention to the wording in Section 3 (under the Maximum Tolls) i.e. Note "that disabled drivers, in able, to gain a disabled discount must have a SCC Disabled Concession Smart Card".            SAFA feels that 'Disabled Drivers', should read Eligible Disabled Persons will need to be in receipt of the Higher Rate of the Mobility component of Disability Living Allowance and provide a photocopy of both sides of their Blue Badge.            Also, may we enquire what arrangements / facility will be in place for drivers with upper arm impairments / arm amputees, in order for the barrier to operate?            We are aware that machinery is available, which automatically links the driver to a toll operative, if that fail to insert a smart card or cash within 30 seconds.            We look forward to your response in due course.</p>	<p>Disabled driver' in the Order will read Disabled person on the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance.            Drivers with upper arm impairments/arm amputees the arrangements will be a accommodated through the system of monitoring operated by supervisory staff present in the toll plaza building incorporating a list of registration numbers for disabled drivers.</p>
2.	<p><b>I would like to raise my objections to the proposed automation of the Itchen Bridge.</b></p> <p>I commute from Bursledon to Southampton and usually leave at 09:15. The roads are usually very quiet at this time of the morning. 95% of the time I never have to queue. If I do, then it's <b>just</b> after the mini roundabout (just before the toll itself) and takes about 2mins to pay and continue over the bridge.</p> <p>This morning, 22 November 2012, I left at the usual time and there was a queue which extended from the Itchen Bridge to the <b>strawberry fields, at the far end of Portsmouth Road!</b> That would be a queue over a mile long! I have never seen this even when I've left a little earlier and is completely unacceptable!</p> <p>I left for work at the same time yesterday and there was no queue until I reached the toll bridge itself!</p> <p>Due to this extended traffic I was <b>30mins late for work</b>. I would have hated to see the queue from 08:00 onwards. It probably extended to the Tesco Roundabout in Bursledon!</p> <p>What happens when an Ambulance, Fire Engine or Police vehicle needs to get, speedily, from Portsmouth Road, over the Itchen Bridge or vice versa? With a tailback of that length (and the oncoming traffic in the opposite lane) they will find it nigh on impossible, to navigate through the traffic. This is an important reason why I think your proposal needs to be scrapped. You could potentially be costing lives just so you can save money.</p> <p>The machines do not give change...What kind of "service" is that? What happens when someone puts a 50p coin in the machine and it doesn't read the weight or features correctly? If you don't have any other coins then I guess you're stuck there?</p> <p>I can see that the agenda is to get commuters to obtain smart cards to make it easier to get through the toll. I don't believe that the public should have to go out of their way to fit in with your proposals. This is not in keeping with a Treating Customers Fairly ethos. You should design your proposals in such a way that it does not inconvenience us.</p> <p>If the toll booths aren't manned then surely you can bring the extortionate prices down as there are less salaries to pay? Or you could, in the very least, have no charge during peak hours so the traffic can move through unhindered. You now have no justification in fleecing people as machines are cheaper to maintain.</p> <p>I would assume that you have decided to automate the bridge to cut costs, increase efficiency &amp; decrease congestion. So far you have achieved the polar opposite and have done a sterling job of that!</p> <p>To summarise, these are the reasons I want to, vehemently, object to your proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive increase in queues!</li> <li>• Decreased service</li> <li>• Decreased efficiency</li> <li>• Increased frustration</li> <li>• Increased pollution</li> <li>• Health &amp; Safety</li> <li>• No change given</li> <li>• Price is not decreasing even though booths will be unmanned</li> <li>• Limiting payment options</li> </ul>	<p>There have been minor difficulties with the new system which are being resolved and at times processing payments has increased whilst drivers become familiar with the new arrangements. However the council is confident that once the new automated toll collection is fully implemented it will operate as quickly as the original manual collection system. The council is endeavouring to provide a system that balances speed and ease of use with the minimisation of overall costs.</p> <p>The operational arrangements will be very closely monitored over the next few weeks and the system will be refined to address any remaining issues.</p> <p>The Smartcities card provides a more convenient alternative to the current payment arrangements and the whole process from applying for a card to topping up with credit can be completed online via the website available at the link below. With regard to the comment about Treating Customers Fairly ethos, the council has simply replaced the present token system which had to be obtained by those qualifying for a concession with an alternative method of payment and receipt of concession by way of the Smartcities card.</p> <p><a href="http://www.southampton.gov.uk/living/smartcities/default.aspx">http://www.southampton.gov.uk/living/smartcities/default.aspx</a></p> <p>The cards are being issued with no charge and it enables users to access their accounts, check the balance and top up online providing a more efficient arrangement for all parties. In addition the toll collection equipment will provide a reminder at the roadside when the balance gets low to remind users to top up the account.</p> <p>Levying a toll flows from the enabling Hampshire Act 1983 which sets out the requirement to invest in the ongoing maintenance of the structure and to control local traffic flows and to preserve the character and amenities of the area. Without the toll in place traffic flows would increase significantly leading to adverse impacts upon the local community.</p> <p>Once the system has been fully automated staff will continue to be on hand monitoring the automated system from the adjacent toll plaza enabling them to deal quickly with any unexpected or unusual events. In relation to emergency vehicles once automation is completed the bus lane adjacent to the toll plaza will continue to be used for emergency use. This arrangement has been agreed with the emergency services as a suitable arrangement post automation. .</p>

<p>3. I have used the Itchen Bridge for over twenty years and everyday for the last year, I fully object as to why should we pay for a peak service when the toll is now automated. I understand why you have charged a peak rate for the extra staff during the peak hours but surely your cost have now reduced as this must have been your highest overhead. Also I still don't understand why you discriminate between people who live in a catchment area and people who do not.</p>	<p>The toll charges are not directly related to the level of staffing required to collect the tolls but are levied to fund bridge maintenance and assist in the regulation of traffic flows in the area as permitted under the enabling Hampshire Act 1983. This Act sets out the principle that the bridge was constructed for the benefit of the local community and not as a commuter route. Consequently it enables concessions to be offered that would assist the disabled or elderly, establishment of industry or commerce and where the traffic is of a local character.</p>
<p>4. If I have sent this to the wrong person, I apologise and I will be grateful if you will tell me who I need to resend this too. I have just discovered that the new Itchen Bridge toll system will not give any change to users. I regularly use the bridge (twice per day) and I am lucky enough to be eligible to use tokens. There have been times when I have run out of tokens as our local shop cannot supply enough. This means that I have to use cash and I have ALWAYS been given my change! I cannot believe in this day and age that our council, can even consider putting in a system which will take money from people in a way which I consider to be unjust. I am sure you would agree that if you visited a shop to purchase an item, you would EXPECT to be given your change or you would soon complain and in fact if they refused as there was a sign outside saying "no change given" you would shop elsewhere. As you will appreciate, we cant "go elsewhere" to get across the bridge except go around the long way adding to congestion and putting more pollution into the Southampton air. I have to say, I am sorely disappointed by this and think it is absolutely disgusting that the council are allowed to do this, not only to its residents who also pay their council tax, but also to visitors to our "rip off city." How will this look when visitors go and tell their friends about this? I have used the bridge for many years and I remember the council saying "when this was paid for, it would be free," I guess this must either be the worlds most expensive bridge or someone has changed their minds. Whilst I appreciate that the bridge will generate a lot of much needed income into the city, I still find it hard to believe that this is even legal. I will be grateful if you will confirm if this actually is legal not to give change. I have been across the Severn Bridge and received my change, the M6 Toll road and received my change and I have been across the Forth Bridge which was free! I hope you will be able to give me some genuine reasons why my council have decided to do this. I look forward to your response</p> <p>Many thanks for your detailed response to my queries regarding the toll bridge.</p> <p>I do understand that the climate we are in is difficult and we all need to save money (like I need my change when I pay for goods or services) but I still feel very strongly that I should be given my change as money is tight for me too. I have had a look at the Smart Cities Site and I note that I can top up on line, or at Gateway or Peartree/Sholing Housing Office. As I am concerned about using my credit card on line and the local housing office is not open outside my working hours (I work 7:30am – 4:00pm weekdays) and I do not visit the city centre as the car parking charges are unaffordable, please tell me how else you are going to make provision for me to use this service. I currently use bridge tokens as I use the bridge most days to get to and from work (I get my tokens from my local shop, which helps me to support local traders). I am sorry that I do not agree with you that the bridge will flow more quickly as many people like me, will be angry that if they do not have the correct money they will not get change. This WILL cause delays and also make people irate! What will happen when a visitor to the city who may be unaware that they cannot receive any change? I am sure they will not be happy and after contacting citizens advice over this matter, they are suggesting that people may be able to contest the lack of change with the toll collectors. If this happens, will this not put even more pressure on the council services? I still would like to know if what you are choosing to do is legal and I will be grateful if you will point me in the direction to find this information out (is there some legislation which states that a council is allowed to take money without giving change for a service). As you have said "the continued application of the tolls and the enabling Act states that the toll is to be used for the maintenance of the bridge, to avoid causing traffic congestion and to preserve the character and amenities of the area. In these respects if the toll was removed it is likely that apart from the impacts of the loss of income the route would be used by far more non local vehicles from cars though to heavy goods vehicles. The additional traffic flows would cause significant congestion with associated adverse impact upon the local area,"</p>	<p>The automation of the toll collections is being introduced to provide a more efficient and convenient collection system including the introduction of a new Smartcities card Itchen Bridge application. This application will enable bridge users to apply and top up the card on-line and then simply present the card at the toll bridge where the crossing fee will be deducted from the account. Alternative arrangements will be in place for people not having access to the internet. This form of payment arrangement removes the need for customers to pay with cash and as it enables access to the concession arrangements will be more convenient than the existing token system it replaces. It is anticipated that the majority of the bridge users will choose to take up the option of using a Smartcities card to pay the toll. The link below will take you to the Smartcities card web page where further details are available about all of the new arrangements. <a href="http://www.southampton.gov.uk/living/smartcities/default.aspx">http://www.southampton.gov.uk/living/smartcities/default.aspx</a> Payment by cash will still be available at the bridge however from an operational perspective the provision of change introduces higher equipment purchase and maintenance costs and cash handling costs. The extra time it would take to provide change could introduce traffic delays at an unacceptable level particularly at peak times. To assist the public with the new arrangements the changes are being introduced incrementally over the next few months and staff will continue to be hand to deal with any individual problems. The enabling Act states that the toll is to be used for the maintenance of the bridge, to avoid causing traffic congestion and to preserve the character and amenities of the area. In these respects if the toll was removed it is likely that apart from the impacts of the loss of income the route would be used by far more non local vehicles from cars though to heavy goods vehicles. The additional traffic flows would cause significant congestion with associated adverse impact upon the local area.</p> <p>By introducing the new arrangement the council is endeavouring to provide a system that balances ease of use with the minimisation of overall costs. The introduction of the Smartcities card provides a more convenient payment arrangement removing completely the need to pay with cash at the roadside. The testing of the new collection system has started and the initial results in terms of transaction times for cash payments are certainly lower than those of the manual toll collection arrangements. Testing will continue for several weeks and we anticipate that the average transaction time for all forms of payment will be lower than the existing levels. As with any new arrangement we appreciate it requires time for all users to become familiar with the new system and this is why the staff will continue to be on hand to assist for the next few months. The matter of not providing change has been given due consideration and does not conflict with any legal obligations . The fact that the system does not provide change will be clearly displayed at the point of payment in a similar manner to the arrangements operating in car parks. In terms of the online payment system the council has to meet the highest standards for this service and is audited to ensure the level of performance is maintained. The council do not store any of the card details and all data in encrypted with the council handling thousands of transactions on an ongoing basis. Once the Smartcities card system is available to the public and as an alternative to payment on line or at one of the council offices you will be able to pay over the phone by contacting Cash Office. The cash office in Gateway is open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 8.30am - 4.30pm, Wednesday 9.30am - 4.30pm, Friday 8.30am - 4pm. The number to call for the Cash Office is 023 8083 2654 and the link below provides useful information as well. <a href="http://www.southampton.gov.uk/customer-service/gateway.aspx">http://www.southampton.gov.uk/customer-service/gateway.aspx</a> The toll acts as a control mechanism on vehicle movements and therefore there is no direct correlation with the expenditure on the bridge maintenance. The blue street lights have been installed through a 25 year street lighting contract replacing lighting columns across the city and not directly from the collection of tolls.</p>

	<p>does this mean that ALL money raised goes solely for the maintenance of the bridge and running costs? If this is the case, where can I find out how much income has been raised over the last 5 years and the expenditure for repairs and would this also include "the cost of the pretty blue lights" which cost a fortune in a time when the council was making staff redundant and bins were not being emptied due to the council having "no money?" I will be watching developments very closely and I am sure I may wish to contact you again for further information; I hope this will be ok but I look forward to your reply and the answers to my questions.</p>	