

DECISION-MAKER:	CABINET
SUBJECT:	ITCHEN BRIDGE TOLL CHARGES
DATE OF DECISION:	16 JANUARY 2024
REPORT OF:	COUNCILLOR KEOGH CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Not applicable.

BRIEF SUMMARY

The Council has proposed removing the off peak charging classification from the Itchen Bridge Toll for Class 2 vehicles (defined as vehicles measuring up to 1.33m at first axle) so that all vehicles in this category would pay a single rate for all trips. It also proposed that the toll for Class 4 vehicles (defined as vehicles measuring greater than 2.39m at first axle) increase from £25 to £40 with the corresponding concessionary rate for Class 4 vehicles accessing the Local Concession Zone increasing from £2 to £3. The reason for the proposal is to ensure that all Class 2 vehicles using the crossing are contributing the same costs towards the maintenance of the bridge while ensuring that the toll continues to prompt drivers, particularly HGV traffic, to make a meaningful decision about whether to use the route. The Council has received 324 responses to the consultation on the proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

	(i)	To remove the Off Peak charging classification from the Itchen Bridge Toll for Class 2 vehicles and introduce a single charge band for all trips.
	(ii)	To implement an increase in the Itchen Bridge toll paid by Class 4 vehicles from £25 to £40 and an increase in the associated concessionary rate (for Class 4 vehicles accessing the Local Concession Zone) from £2 to £3

REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	To encourage all drivers of Class 2 vehicles to make a meaningful decision about using the bridge and associated routes regardless of the time of crossing in order to better manage congestion in the areas around the bridge and support on going maintenance demands
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2.	To recognise that all traffic contributes to the structural depreciation of the Itchen Bridge and highway surface regardless of the time of crossing
3.	To strongly discourage non-local HGV traffic from using the Itchen Bridge crossing and associated routes
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
4.	To continue operating an off peak period as per the exiting structure as this would not properly account the wear and tear creating by the high volume of traffic that crosses the bridge in off peak periods.
5.	To increase the toll for Class 4 vehicles crossing the Itchen Bridge as the £25 charge will become less of a deterrent year on year with increases in inflation
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
6.	The Council has proposed removing the Off Peak classification for Class 2 vehicles (defined as vehicles measuring up to 1.33m at first axle) from the Itchen Bridge toll, meaning that all Class 2 crossings of the bridge would be payable at the standard rate of £1.00 or £0.40 for Southampton residents with a Smart Cities card. The Council has also proposed increasing the toll for Class 4 vehicles (defined as vehicles measuring greater than 2.39m at first axle) from £25 to £40 and the increasing associated concession from £2 to £3.
7.	Construction of the Itchen Bridge was completed in 1977. The crossing is a post-tensioned, fixed cantilever structure that is 28m high at its apex. The reason for the size of the bridge was to allow for shipping to pass beneath it and as a consequence it constitutes a significant structure in terms of construction and ongoing maintenance costs. It is unusual for a single Local Authority to have sole financial responsibility for a bridge of this size and structure. The construction of the bridge also opened up a highway route for traffic that was previously not available. The Council therefore gave consideration to the need to manage the volume of traffic using the route, particularly traffic that was non-local in nature. The Council was also keen that HGV traffic should only use the bridge to reach destinations in the local area. Therefore, prior to the construction of the bridge, the Council planned for the bridge to be a toll crossing for the dual purposes of financing the construction and maintenance costs of the bridge and to ensure that the increased traffic did not lead to congestion or harm the amenity of the local area along the new route. The principle of the Itchen Bridge becoming a Toll route was approved by parliament in 1973 and the reasons as outlined above for maintaining the toll were later enshrined in Section 22 of the Hampshire Act 1983 (See Appendix 1).
8.	Bridges, tunnels and other large infrastructure projects constitute significant investment, and there are other examples within the UK of tolls being used to finance construction/maintenance costs and subsequently manage vehicle crossings. The other major toll routes in the UK and the costs for cars and HGVs to use these routes are listed in Appendix 2. While these have been included for comparative purposes, the rationale for toll prices will vary from location to location depending on the type of route, the volume of traffic using that route, the organisations responsible for managing the route and any relevant legislative processes. It should be noted that such routes are typically operated either by private interests on behalf of Local Authorities or the Government (e.g. Mersey Gateway, M6 Toll) or by a joint partnership of Local

	<p>Authorities (e.g. Tamar Bridge, Clifton Bridge). As noted, Southampton is a rare example of a single Local Authority being solely responsible for the financial upkeep of such a structure.</p>
9.	<p>The reason for the circumstances as outlined is that the decision to move forward with construction of the bridge was that taken at Local Authority level. It was not a project initiated by central government and no government funding was provided for the construction of the bridge or subsequent major maintenance works. The bridge does not serve a route of key strategic importance and therefore, the Council is unlikely to be successful were it to bid for significant funding to finance maintenance projects for the structure. By contrast, Northam Bridge does sit on a key strategic transport route. The vital maintenance works carried out to that crossing in 2015 were made possible via funding from the Department for Transport for which the Council had made a successful bid. If the Council is to maintain the Itchen Bridge crossing, it needs to provide the finance for major works itself. Examples of past maintenance projects to the Itchen Bridge include replacement of bearings in 2011 and multiple replacement of expansion joints which have a life expectancy of approximately 7 to 10 years..</p>
10.	<p>The Council is now planning what will be the most significant programme of maintenance works to the Itchen Bridge crossing since it first opened. The works which will include resurfacing, drainage improvements and the installation of additional safety features, are expected to cost up to £5M. They are currently scheduled to be delivered in the Summer of 2024. The maintenance project will ensure that the bridge remains in good working order and is a key example of the maintenance works that can be delivered via funding secured against the tolls that are paid through vehicle crossings.</p>
11.	<p>The Itchen Bridge itself functions via central spans resting on bearings which by design allows for movement as the bridge is crossed by vehicles. This flexibility is common in large bridge structures as otherwise the span would crack under the repeated external pressures of traffic movements and as the bridge expands and contracts through temperature changes. As the bridge responds to these pressures, the structural features that facilitate these movements (bearings, expansion joints etc) will degrade over time. As such, any vehicle crossing is contributing to the wear and tear of the structure, regardless of what time the crossing is made. The current peak periods are 07:00 to 09:30 and 16:00 to 18:30 Monday to Friday. A profile of weekly vehicle crossings (from 04/12/2023 to 10/12/2023) is shown in Appendix 3. This week was selected as there were no football matches that would have noticeably affect the figures on the given day. Over 70% of the crossings occurred in periods currently categorised as off peak but these will have had an equal impact to the structure. By having the same toll for Class 2 vehicles for all times of the day, all crossings are making the same contribution to the upkeep of the bridge. As shown in Appendix 2, this approach is also reflective of other UK toll routes, with the majority neither defining nor making a distinction between peak and off peak periods. It is also noted that the Council does not seek to manage peak traffic via means of encouraging traffic to travel at an earlier period along any other of the radial routes into the City Centre (or other busy roads).</p>
12.	<p>The route served via the bridge is single carriageway and as such is unsuited for carrying large volumes of HGV traffic or vehicles of a similar size. Since the bridge first opened in 1977, the toll for HGVs has been set at a level to</p>

	discourage HGVs from using this route, with the crossing initially costing £10 for this vehicle type. It has since risen to £25, but has not been subject to an increase since 2002. In order for it to constitute a meaningful deterrent, the relevant toll category therefore needs to increase in line with inflation. Accordingly, services costing £25 in the early 2000s would now be priced in the region of £40.
13.	<p>The Council carried out a consultation on the proposals from 10th November 2023, which closed on 15th December 2023. There were a total of 390 responses to the consultation.</p> <p>324 responses were logged as objections 35 responses were logged as being in support 31 responses were logged as comments</p> <p>A summary of the objections and the officer response is included as Appendix 4.</p> <p>The consultation responses in full are included as Appendix 5.</p> <p>Officers are of the view that no objections have been submitted that constitute a material overriding consideration to the proposals.</p>

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Capital/Revenue

14.	<p>As discussed in the report, the primary purpose of the proposals is to encourage all drivers of Class 2 vehicles to make a meaningful decision about using the bridge and associated routes regardless of the time of crossing in order to better manage congestion in the areas around the bridge and support on going maintenance demands.</p> <p>The projected revenue impact of the proposals are set out below. The projections assume a potential minor reduction in traffic volume. As noted in the report, there are works planned to the bridge in 2024/25 which may have an impact on bridge finances and this has also been accounted for.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="331 1664 1433 1792"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2023/24</th> <th>2024/25</th> <th>2025/26</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Additional Income £'000</td> <td>72</td> <td>300</td> <td>428</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Surplus revenue generated by the toll contributes to maintenance of the bridge, the highway and the maintenance of the toll plaza equipment. While the Council may not have direct cause to use the surplus for maintenance in any given year, there are associated costs (Highways contract, Street lighting contract, Capital financing costs) that are drawn from the general fund.</p>		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Additional Income £'000	72	300	428
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<u>Property/Other</u>	
15.	N/A
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
16.	The statutory powers to manage the Itchen Bridge crossing by means of Toll payment are set out in Section 22 of the Hampshire Act 1983.
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
17.	In reaching a decision on increasing toll charges, or removing concessions the Council has had regard to its legal duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and Crime & Disorder Act 1998 together with other relevant pervasive legislation. No adverse equality impact has been identified that cannot be addressed through existing mitigation measures relating to tolls and class of vehicle usage already in effect for the bridge.
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
18.	The proposals carry a low risk of Financial impact as they will likely result in a revenue increase. The proposals carry a low impact to Service Delivery as there is no direct impact to other Council projects. The proposals carry a moderate impact to Reputation given local interest in the Itchen Bridge Toll. However, the overall response to the consultation was not significant relative to the population of Southampton, and Southampton residents will continue to benefit from a significant discount on the toll via the Smart Cities Card.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
19.	The proposals are in accordance with the Southampton City Council's Local Transport Plan – Connected Southampton Transport Strategy 2040, specifically the Sustainable Growth section of the plan, which looks to reduce growth in the amount of traffic coming into Southampton and ensuring the transport asset is in a good condition and can accommodate the demands placed upon it.
20.	The proposals are also in accordance with the Southampton City Strategy 2015-2025 and the Southampton Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Policy 2019-2021

KEY DECISION?	Yes
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Section 22 of the Hampshire Act 1983
2.	UK Toll Locations and Charges
3.	Itchen Bridge Crossings during Peak and Off Peak Periods
4.	Summary of Consultation Feedback and Officer Response
5.	Consultation Response

6.	Public Notice
7.	ESIA

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	
2.	

Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out.	Yes/No
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Data Protection Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out.	Yes/No
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Other Background Documents

Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	
2.	