

CORNWALL COUNCIL

TAMAR BRIDGE AND TORPOINT FERRY JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a Meeting of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee held in the Council Chamber, Plymouth City Council, Armada Way, Plymouth, PL1 3AA on Friday 8 December 2023 commencing at 10.00 am.

Present:- Councillors: Worth (Co-Chair) and Hendy (Co-Chair)

Mark Coker, Dingle, Long, Tivnan, Toms and Williams-Pears.

Also in attendance:- Councillors: (None).

Also in attendance (virtual):- Councillors: Wakeham

Apologies for absence:- Councillors: Stoneman.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 2)

TBTF/44 There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2023

(Agenda No. 3)

TBTF/45 It was moved by Councillor Tivnan, seconded by Councillor Hendy, and

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting of the Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee held on 7 September 2023 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

(Agenda No. 4)

TBTF/46 Eight questions were received from members of the public and responses provided at the meeting.

GENERAL MANAGER'S QUARTERLY REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

TBTF/47 The Committee considered the General Manager's Quarterly Report (previously circulated), presented by the Governance and Finance Manager.

In response to comments and questions from the Joint Committee Members, Officers advised that:

1. The previous plan to replace the truss rocker and pendles, previously required full replacement, however an alternative maintenance plan had been devised with significantly lower impact on usage and cost with work having already started.
2. There was to be an upcoming cable and suspension system fire protection system introduced, with a number of options being considered which would help mitigate risks caused by fires. Two recent fires at other suspension bridges having caused significant damage and closures. Regular fire training was conducted with all staff on the bridge and ferries.
3. It was estimated that any alternatives to methods of tolling such as introducing ANPR tolling was a long term project, based on comparisons with its introduction at similar infrastructure.
4. The proposed toll booth refurbishment was an urgent and necessary piece of maintenance work.
5. Expanded statistics on journey time monitoring will be provided in the next General Manager's Quarterly Report.
6. Following a meeting with consultants, a proposal for a feasibility study of ANPR tolling had been received with feedback expected before the March Joint Committee meeting. National Highways would be engaged with the project as it progressed. There was still uncertainty about the degree of complexity and costs around introducing ANPR tolling, which Members would need to consider at a future meeting.
7. Recent toll increases had been incorporated within budget forecasts.
8. Broadly traffic levels had marginally increased since the recent toll rise. Where traffic levels had dropped, this disproportionately affected cash payments as opposed to tag payments.

It was proposed by Councillor Hendy, seconded by Councillor Williams-Pears and

RESOLVED that:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That an updated report be brought to the next meeting.

3. The recommended approaches for ferry office and toll booth refurbishment as described in appended business cases are approved.

BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23

(Agenda No. 6)

TBTF/48 The Committee considered the Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Report (previously circulated) by the Service Accountant.

In response to comments and questions from Joint Committee Members, Officers confirmed that:-

1. Existing budget forecasts had taken into account toll increases with a projected additional £200,000 in revenue. The impact of increased usage was hard to estimate due to the variety of price points.
2. More favourable financial projections were largely due to reductions in price and volatility of costs such as electricity, with increased traffic levels also playing a part. Estimated traffic flow continued to predict a continuation of overall 90% of pre-Covid levels, with small rises of medium and heavy goods vehicles and small decreases of cars and light vans in the year to date.
3. Forecasts did not provide certainty, with estimations of revenue recently being more accurate than estimations of costs due to a variety of external pressures such as Covid, inflation and energy prices.
4. There had been no noticeable impact from the recent closure of the A30 on traffic levels crossing the bridge.

It was proposed by Councillor Worth, seconded by Councillor Coker and

RESOLVED that:-

1. The revenue forecast and capital programme for 2023/24 be noted.

FUTURE FINANCING

(Agenda No. 7)

TBTF/49 The Motion Government Funding of Tamar Crossings and Abolition of the Tamar Tolls (previously circulated) which had been referred to the Joint Committee from the Cornwall Council meeting on 28 November 2023 was presented by Councillor C Martin and Councillor Frank of Cornwall Council.

Councillor C Martin spoke in support of the Motion, emphasising that the issues of toll revision and abolition should not be conflated and calling for the Joint Committee to work with its parent authorities to consider toll abolition with the debate on the Motion being brought back to a future meeting as a separate agenda item.

Councillor Frank also spoke in support of the Motion, emphasising increasing public support for its proposals and their importance to the local economy and environment in the long term.

During the debate a number of issues were raised, including:-

1. It was confirmed that the Motion had been referred to the Joint Committee as its subject matter was an asset jointly owned by Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council and the Joint Committee was the appropriate location for its consideration.
2. It was confirmed that debate surrounding the Motion did not require a separate agenda item and had been included with the Future Financing Report due to a similarity of issues relating to the two. It was clarified that debating the Motion could be deferred by Members to a future meeting and still be able to report back to Cornwall Council within six months of the date of referral.
3. The view was expressed that it would be more appropriate to have the Motion debated as a separate agenda item to the Future Financing Report at a future meeting of the Joint Committee.
4. The view was expressed that decisions taken relating to the Tamar Crossings had implications for residents of both Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council and the views of both parent authorities needed to be taken into account.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams-Pears, seconded by Councillor Hendy and

RESOLVED that

1. The Motion presented by Councillor Martin and supported by Councillor Frank be deferred to the 1 March 2024 Joint Committee meeting.

The Committee considered the Future Financing Report (previously circulated) presented by the Governance and Finance Manager and the Service Director for Connectivity & Environment, Cornwall Council.

The Head of Financial Planning and Deputy Section 151 Officer of Cornwall Council emphasised the Joint Committee's obligation to maintain a balanced and sustainable financial position, which Option A (as outlined in the report) would fail to achieve. It was not viable for the parent authorities to cover any shortfall, with no provision for this in medium term financial plans. This was supported by Officers from Plymouth City Council.

In response to comments and questions from Joint Committee Members, Officers confirmed that:-

1. The parent authorities had never considered Option A as financially unviable and had only been included as an option in the public consultation at the behest of Members at the previous meeting of the Joint Committee.
2. The view was expressed by some Members that any increase in tolls would unfairly penalise local residents.
3. The Joint Committee was able to approve borrowing for capital projects, but was not able to approve an operational budget deficit.
4. In discussion with Officers the Department for Transport had noted the significant discount given to users paying via tag discount compared with similar infrastructure nationally.
5. Toll increases broadly following inflation over time was considered financially sustainable.
6. It was only possible to apply to the Secretary of State for Transport for one proposed toll revision per year with the response expressed as either approval or refusal, making multiple option toll revision requests unviable.
7. The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Transport from Plymouth City Council advised that due to wider budgetary constraints and necessary reductions in other areas of spending, Plymouth City Council was not in a position to financially support operational overspend at Tamar Crossings and so no increase in toll levels was not viable from their point of view.
8. The Portfolio Holder for Transport from Cornwall Council advised that due to wider budgetary constraints and reductions in other areas of spending, Cornwall Council was not in a position to financially support operational overspend at Tamar Crossings and so no increase in toll levels was not viable from their point of view.
9. It would not be possible to vote for an increase to cash toll payments but leave the tag discount at its current rate as the financial implication of such a decision were unknown, with figures relating to this to be brought to the next Joint Committee meeting.

10. There was general support amongst Members for the view that there were no easy solutions to ensuring the financial sustainability of Tamar Crossings.
11. The view was expressed by some Members that any increases in tolls should be the smallest possible whilst maintaining the financial sustainability of Tamar Crossings.
12. The proposed increase in tolls would affect cash and tag users simultaneously, although the Joint Committee was able to autonomously adjust the level of tag discount.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams-Pears, seconded by Councillor Coker that

“2. Having considered the contents of the report, including the responses from the public consultation an application for a toll revision, based on £3.20 cash and £1.60 tag, be made to the Secretary of State in accordance with the applicable legislation.”

On a vote the proposal was lost.

It was proposed by Councillor Tivnan and seconded by Councillor Worth and

RESOLVED that

2. Having considered the contents of the report, including the responses from the public consultation an application for a toll revision, based on £3.00 cash and £1.50 tag, be made to the Secretary of State in accordance with the applicable legislation.

It was further proposed by Councillor Williams-Pears and seconded by Councillor Tivnan and

RESOLVED that

3. Officers incorporate the impact of the Joint Committee’s above recommendations into the revenue estimates and capital programme for 2024-25 to be presented at an extraordinary meeting of the Joint Committee on 12 January 2024.

4. The Tamar 2050 programme of activity be endorsed.

5. The Joint Committee will continue to lobby Government to provide funding for the bridge and the ferry, such lobbying to include a request for a review of the current legislation including the ability to apply RPI to tolls.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm.