

## MEETING OF TAMAR BRIDGE AND TORPOINT FERRY JOINT COMMITTEE

24th June 2022

### ATTENDING IN THE ROOM

Cllr. Coker (Plymouth)

Cllr. Drean (Plymouth)

Cllr. Patel (Plymouth)

Cllr. Tivnan (Torpoint, Cornwall)

Cllr. Toms (Looe, Cornwall)

Cllr. Worth (Saltash, Trematon, Cornwall)

### ATTENDING VIA TEAMS (and therefore not able to vote)

Cllr. Long, (Callington, Cornwall)

### APOLOGIES

Cllr. Philip Desmonde, Portfolio Holder for Transport, Cornwall Council

### 0:02:15 ITEM 2 ON AGENDA: TO ELECT A COUNCILLOR FROM CORNWALL COUNCIL AND A COUNCILLOR FROM PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL TO ACT AS JOINT CHAIRS

Cllr. Martin Worth of Cornwall Council nominated by Cllr. Armand Toms and seconded by Cllr. John Tivnan. No other nominations. Carried.

Cllr. Jonathan Drean of Plymouth City Council nominated by Cllr. Pat Patel and seconded by Cllr. Mark Coker. No other nominations. Carried.

Cllr. Drean (Plymouth) in the Chair.

### 0:05:35 Question 1 Scott Slavin (not present so question read out from the Chair)

The statutory notice published in the Evening Herald on 13<sup>th</sup> April and Western Morning News on 14<sup>th</sup> April were Plymouth-based newspapers. Should the Committee have made parallel efforts to reach Cornish residents in light of them being the population most significantly affected by the toll increase?

Answer read out by the Chair: The publication channels were agreed with the Department of Transport as adequate and appropriate. The notices were also accessible through Cornwall Live and in Plymouth Live websites. The Department did not make any request for further publication. It was

not considered appropriate to make additional preferential efforts to contact the population on one side of the Crossing. However, the application documents sent to the Department included the detailed feedback received from those members of the public in the consultation exercise in January 2022.

**Question 2 from Mel Pristen (not present so question read out from the Chair)**

Why was the 42-day period for members of the public to make formal representations not notified to Tag holders in the e-mail sent out by Mr. Andrew Vallance (Governance and Finance Manager of Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry) to all Tag holders on 14<sup>th</sup> April?

Response read out by Chair: The e-mail sent by AV to Tamar Tag holders on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, was solely in respect of change in the discount rates. The publication channels for the statutory notices regarding increases in cash tolls were agreed with the Department for Transport as adequate and appropriate.

**Question 3 by Lee Lidstone(not present so question read out from the Chair)**

I am concerned that adequate efforts were not made to ensure that the PUBLICATIONS most affected by this change in toll charges were not informed of their rights and the timescales for making formal objections. In light of this, does the Committee feel that the return of ZERO EMISSIONS representation is truly representative of the community feedback?

*(Note: on the recording Cllr. Drear says PUBLICATIONS and ZERO EMISSIONS. This should probably be POPULATIONS and 0%)*

Response read out by Chair: Legislation prescribes in the way in which our application to increase tolls has had to be publicised. The publication channels for the related notices were agreed with the Department for Transport as adequate and appropriate. The Department has also been given the detailed feedback received through the substantial consultation exercise undertaken earlier this year which addressed a representative sample of all users. The Joint Committee considers that the process followed gave adequate opportunity for the public in general and the local community in particular to make representations.

**Question 4, from Graeme Francis, councillor on Landrake with St Erney Parish Council (joined via Teams and read out his question in person)**

Graeme Francis: Our question is - will the Joint Committee and Cornwall and Plymouth City Councils negotiate with government to change the law regarding the Bridge, and to seek a long-term funding commitment from Government towards the operating costs of the Bridge and Ferry, thereby enabling removal, reduction or capping of costs for local users?

Response read out by Chair: Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council have for a number of years been engaging with Government to identify a means to address the tolling as the basic means for the maintenance and operation of the bridge, and of course the impact on the Torpoint ferries, with the ambition of a toll-free operation or to provide significant ongoing financial support from National Highways or the Department for Transport as the Bridge enables connectivity of part of the national Strategic Road network. These efforts continued during the Covid 19 pandemic, and at a meeting on the 12th of June 2020, the Joint Committee decided to continue to liaise with central government in that respect. At least 6 letters have been sent to central government on behalf of the Joint Committee since 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. I myself, as the Plymouth Joint Chair of the Committee in consultation with my Cornish colleague personally raised with Baroness Vere of the DfT, explaining

the strategic importance of the bridge, the crucial role it plays with both local and national haulage, and that the Bridge is in need of national investment and ownership as part of the future strategy for this crossing, as part of the Strategic Road network. I also took the opportunity of raising this with Transport Minister Andrew Stephenson MP at the sub-national transport body meeting in Birmingham on the 26th of May, of the vital importance of this link to be part of the strategic network receiving assistance. While responses to date have not been encouraging, the councils are working closely to put the business case to the government to look freshly and reassess their position, with a view to looking more favourably at a long-term support of the bridge and ferry crossings. This would address both your and our concerns aimed at reducing the impact on the local users and commuters.

**Supplementary question from Graeme Francis:** I was interested to see the efforts you have already made. What guarantee do we have that the Government would listen to any future business case you put together to try and encourage them to pay for what they should be paying for?

**Chair** (not reading from a script) : The short answer is 'none'. We've made representation to our local MPs, who continue to speak to the Department for Transport. The information they are telling us at the moment is that if there is a business case for it, it would strengthen the argument to take this process forward.

**Graeme Francis:** So it's a process we have to go through to even get any engagement?

**Chair:** At the moment – yes.

**Question 5 from Steve Miller (present in the room and read out his question in person)**

Steve Miller tried to make a statement as introduction to his question, but the moderator intervened saying that the Constitution stated this section was only for public questions.

**Steve Miller:** That's very untransparent, but never mind.

My question relates to an item which was discussed in March, and I know is on the agenda again today. Why should zero emission vehicle have a reduced toll? Their drivers are probably the least affected by the level of toll, and implementation and administration will be at an additional cost while the Authority has already foisted an unfair burden of reduced discount on Tag holders due to the funding crisis.

**Response read out by Chair:** Both councils have declared a climate emergency. The need to take action to minimise climate change is widely accepted and the role of Zero Emission vehicles have in assisting progress has similar wide-ranging support. The PROCESS additional discount supports the move to Zero Emission vehicles.

(Note: on the recording the Chair says PROCESS, but it should probably be PROPOSED)

**Steve Miller asked a supplementary question:** Regarding the Zero Emission vehicle situation, on what basis is it part of the Tamar Bridge Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee remit? The organisation has identified spare funding to implement an apparently unwarranted subsidy for Zero Emission vehicles. Wouldn't it be better to add that to the additional income from the earlier-than-expected cash toll uplift to recompense Tag users who have suffered the pre-emptive increase in payments? For example, allowing a comparable period at the old rate, rather than giving the money to people who don't even need it.

**Response from the Chair:** We're having a discussion on this later on today, and I want to hear a range of views. We have put the suggestion forward. We have the information in the report, and now we will be discussing it to see what the way forward is. I just would re-emphasise the climate emergency and the carbon reduction plans that both councils have agreed to do. We need to do something and we'll be having the discussion later.

**0:17:51 David List** (General Manager) commented on his routine quarterly report for 1<sup>st</sup> February to the end of April. Ferry availability is below target. Traffic volume is better than last year, but not as good as pre-Covid. We are forecasting traffic levels at approximately 90% of pre-Covid levels. At the Bridge, peak traffic availability was slightly below target, with the storms in February affecting service delivery. Bi-directional traffic monitoring has now been installed on the bridge. We are now starting to get reliable data, and an example of that has been tabled.

There has been a lot of activity in the Learning Centre.

Pre-application for a pop-up coffee concession in the car park has been approved.

At the time discounts were implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022 all account holders were informed of the change. It was obviously not welcome but necessary.

Now the resurfacing work on the bridge has been completed, journey times are back to normal.

There is a subgroup looking at commercial land-use opportunities, and a report from that consultant has been circulated. The consultancy on business efficiency and strategic and governance issues is being progressed, and I'd like to invite officers from Plymouth and Cornwall to give you an update on that.

**0:22:52 Andrew Trim** : Over the last recent weeks, as part of the procurement exercise, officers have held meetings with two different companies, who have expressed an interest in taking the brief forward. One of those meetings was this week, and we've yet to have a formal response, but we have not had a formal response and an expression of interest as a result of a meeting that was held earlier in the month. A meeting will be held with the Joint Chairs to review the responses.

**0:23:54 David List (TBTF)** : I'd like to talk with the two Joint Chairs after this meeting to discuss how we take this forward.

**0:24:50 Councillor Toms:** I would like to have it noted in the minutes of the last meeting that I voted against the toll rises. Queens University in Belfast has got £33 million funding to have zero emissions ferries. Because of that, they will have had two years of experience, and I am sure that the consultants you are bringing in should be liaising with Queens University, so that we can gain from their experience.

I also note that the report refers to wear and tear on the cables on the extensions to the bridge. Those extensions were installed because the bridge was hitting capacity on a regular basis. When they were installed a few years ago it cost £34 million. The side lanes were needed to cope with the additional traffic generated as a result of the Department of Transport putting the A38 along the bridge. traffic flow has increased, and there's even a possibility that we might need a second bridge in the future. I think we should ask the Department of Transport to pay for the wear and tear on the cables.

The Mersey bridges are now freeflow. I think freeflow would aid the businesses of Devon and Cornwall. You are working on a report, but how long before we will be able to see that report?

My last question is about EV cars. Can you tell me if an EV car is going to create less damage to the bridge than an ordinary car? I read a report the other day, that suggested that because of the traction and acceleration rates electric vehicles do more damage to the road surface than petrol cars.

**0:28:36 David List:** On the first point about the research at Queens, we'd expect any consultant to be familiar with the market situation. We would expect them to look at industry standards and evolving technology.

Your second comment was about the cables. They are an element of the structure. Maintaining the structure is expensive. Your comment that the wear and tear on the structure is a result of its loading is accurate. I agree with your comment that it is part of the cost of joining up the A38.

Freeflow has been discussed in workshops before. There are complications with it, as you pointed out. We have just updated our toll system, but it doesn't use freeflow. We are in close communication with operators who use freeflow, like Mersey and Dartford. The technology is developing and I do see a time when we will be switching to freeflow, but it won't be within the next few years.

**0:30:19 Andrew:** Freeflow is one of the items in the consultancy brief, so there will be a fairly light-touch review. But freeflow is not cheap – there are a lot of back-office resources required to check non-payment and deal with appeals etc.

**0:31:23 David List:** Electric vehicles are heavier than equivalent-sized petrol/diesel vehicles, and they do produce a lot of torque. But in the scheme of our overall traffic profile, I don't believe it's significant. It's heavy goods vehicles that cause the majority of damage to the bridge. In principle there is some marginal difference, but I don't believe it is significant in the scheme of the overall wear and tear. I'm sure there will be more research on that subject as we get more and more EVs on the road.

**0:32:24 Councillor Long:** I'm in California where it is two am. During your responses to the questions made by members of the public, a comment was made that the government response regarding the contribution to funding was not positive, but there was no elaboration on that point. So could someone elaborate on what was meant by that?

**0:33:18 Councillor Drean:** The last time I spoke to Sheryll Murray MP, she was of the opinion that with a positive business case, there might hopefully be some interest from government. So that is why we are trying to get consultants to write a business report for the future. We will then share it with MPs and go on to lobby the Department for Transport.

**0:33:54 Councillor Long:** Sorry. Perhaps I didn't make myself clear, but what I was asking was that I assume that both councils have been talking with the government about getting us to fund the Bridge as taxpayers rather than Highways England paying towards the cost to have a bit of road over it. What communication had you had with the government regarding that? Also: when you have spoken with government about Highways England, what has the response been? Negative or positive?

**0:34:54 Councillor Drean:** I would have to go back to the last letter we received, but I think they were asking for more information on the business case of the traffic and the usage, which we thought we had provided. Some MPs have been lobbying on our behalf in the background, and they have said this would be most helpful in trying to push this forward.

**0:35:36 Andrew Vallance:** Just to clarify: the response from Baroness Vere of Norbiton to our formal letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021 was published within the agenda pack of our October 2021 meeting, and is available to the public.

**0:336:02 Councillor Long:** That sounds fine, but I would have thought that given the importance of this, that we would be pressing continuously about it, not just referring to a letter from last year. Surely, we need to be looking at the inequality we are getting here with regards to the funding for the bridge. Rather than waiting for government to come back to us, we need to be pressing forward. We can't let this lie. We cannot just roll over and accept the fact that they don't like it. We need to be pushing our case forward.

**0:36:47 Councillor Drean:** I don't know if you heard the reply to question number 4, but I have had a web call with Baroness Vere making that very point. And as recently as 26<sup>th</sup> May when I attended the sub-national transport body conference in Birmingham, I also spoke to Andrew Stephenson MP to raise it with him. I spoke about the strategic importance of the bridge, and the way that we need assistance with either the maintenance or the fees.

**0:37:20 Councillor Toms:** I'm going to give you some information that might help you and Councillor Worth in your negotiations. On 22 March 2022, an extra £3million was given to the Hammersmith Bridge, which is not in public ownership, bringing the total they have received so far to £7million. This is just to keep it open so that pedestrians can use it. On 30 November 2021, Haverford West in Wales got £17.7 million, and as part of their funding there will be a signature bridge in their project. On 3 June 2022, the Tyne Bridge got £35.3 million from the DfT for the refurbishment of the bridge and roads in the area. This shows that bridges are being funded, but not the Tamar Bridge. Then we come to ferries. The Isles of Scilly ferry got £48 million of funding from the government. On 21 March 2022, there is a freeport in this country owned by a Dubai company that got £50million. The Isle of Wight ferry got £1million just to some extra toilets in their ferries. We are fighting to get funding. Other places are getting it, but not here. My submission to you, is that it is this sort of information that you need to be taking to MPs, and point out that they are funding others but not us. Ask them why. Things are supposed to be levelled up. There are free bridges into Wales. There are free bridges in Scotland. But not here. They put the A38 in. They put more traffic on to the bridge that we run. I got this information from a Google search I did a few nights ago. If I spent some more time, I could probably find out a lot more.

**0:41:09 Councillor Drean:** I know when Councillor Coker was also writing on the same topic when he was Chair.

**0:41:21 Councillor Worth:** We are part of this process at the moment, and I am pleased to hear that we have now got some progress. I am passionate about this, but also frustrated. At every opportunity, I want to reassure the public that we are going after the government. I have personally spoken to Michael Gove. I have personally spoke to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak. And the response I get is: 'Can we have the business case? We will look at it'. There is a willingness to take it on board. It's not a commitment to saying they will fund it, but we need that core piece of documentation to take it forward. We as a committee have been saying that. Actually, I'll be making a pain of myself, because if we look back even just a month ago at the last Cornwall Council meeting, I did in fact ask a very clear question of Councillor Desmonde. I took on all of the councillors, the officers and everybody else in demanding that support to get us that business case. I make myself quite unpopular with Sheryll Murray MP, because she is asking me, I'm going back. I can assure Members, and I can assure the public that it is my number one priority for her. I wake up every morning and think about how we sort out the bridge. And the ferry.

**0:43:18 Councillor Tivnan:** Picking up on the business case. It is frustrating to speak to local MPs and they say they want the business case. We have sat around in this Chamber for over a year now, and it is our responsibility to get it done. The frustrating part is that MPs are saying to us that they've been asking for this for over 18 months. So who is responsible for formulating the business case? Why has it not been done? And what steps are being taken? This is a matter of urgency. We've had 18 months. Let's pin it down and define who is responsible for producing the business case. And ensure that it is available for this committee by a certain date. That will enable us to move forward. Otherwise will be discussing the same thing again in 18 months' time. We seem to be going round a roundabout with no traffic lights.

**0:44:54 Councillor Drean:** That's a very good point. I thought we were nearly there last year. Mr. Trim, could I bring you in to give us an update, please?

**0:45:03 Andrew Trim:** Last year we had a company on board. They were keen to start work, but at an initial meeting it was determined that perhaps we didn't have the right company so we went back to the marketplace, which took about another 6 or 7 months. There were no bidders initially, so it was a very disappointing exercise for the Council. We went back to the marketplace again. The marketplace at the moment is very busy. There are lots of people looking for companies of this nature to do this type of work. We weren't fortunate. So we have engaged yet again, and this time we have gone directly to companies to get their views about whether they'd be willing to take on this brief. We are now in a position where we can take this forward. So, we haven't been waiting for 18 months. We have engaged. We lost that engagement initially for one reason or another. And now we are in a position where we can be positive that we will get back some kind of response to this brief and get the business case we are all looking for.

**0:46:37 Councillor Tivnan:** All councils work much in the same way. They produce a tender document to go out for consultation to the experts to then give us the necessary advice. I don't know about anybody else, but I have never seen this tender document – the initial document that goes out. We've had some good examples this morning of where other places throughout the UK have been able to go out, get the tenders and then get the money from the government. It needs to be given a higher priority. If we are finding that certain companies are not doing the job that we are asking of them, surely there is a government list of advisors? Or are we already doing that and getting no response? And if that is the case, are we then feeding back to government and saying that the companies are not giving us the advice that we want, or cannot give us the advice that we need? We are all here trying to do the same thing, but it feels to me like we are dragging our feet and not getting very far forward. I'm sorry. There is nothing personal here, but I just want something in concrete moving forward, and we don't seem to have that. Would it be possible to see the tender document, please? It seems that the Chairmen have seen it, but the Committee hasn't. That isn't right.

**0:48:50 Councillor Drean:** I'm happy to have the document shared. I think we are having a meeting after this to discuss this very point. I'll hand over to Mr. Trim, who has been leading on the talks on this.

**0:49:00 Andrew Trim:** The document you are referring to is the brief. This Committee delegated authority to the Joint Chairmen to prepare the brief and make sure it met the Committee's requirements. It has been through due process, and through due process for procurement. Additionally, we have gone to government and asked for their assistance with this. As a result, we had a meeting with the Local Government Association and Local Partnerships, who are funded by the Treasury earlier this week. They will work with us to prepare a bid for us in the next couple of

weeks. We've been on a journey, which has had a few hiccups along the way. We have engaged directly with companies, but they have said they don't have the resources at the current time to deliver this for us. So we haven't just sat around for 18 months. We've been engaged with companies in the wider context. We can only work with what we've got, and I think we can be reassured that within the next 12 to 15 weeks we will have a response from those companies in terms of the business case.

**0:50:55 Councillor Tivnan:** Thank you. Something as important as this should be shared by the whole committee, so could I emphasise the need for the complete Committee to see the brief. I cannot understand the reasons why we haven't had sight of it.

**0:51:23 Councillor Patel:** We would have been a lot further progressed. It is our own fault. One of us questioned the integrity of the provider that had been selected. They decided they would move away from the process because of the way the questioning came out. We had someone who was willing to do the work and they walked away from the table. That's the reason we are so far delayed. I'm sure the reputation got out there and people weren't willing to come forward. Hopefully things will progress now that we have put some distance between us.

**0:52:16 Councillor Long:** Cornwall Council and Plymouth City Council have massive experience in putting together business plans for bidding for funding etc. We have great officers. Why are we outsourcing a business case for something that appears very clear, and not using the resources we've got within both councils to create the business case?

**0:53:08 Vicky Fraser** (Cornwall Council officer, joining via Teams): the Joint Committee asked for an independent review of the Business Case. That is why we went to an external provider.

**0:53:18 Councillor Long:** I appreciate that. But why did the Committee ask for an external provider? This has led to delays. And if we are still struggling to outsource the task, why aren't we asking some of our own officers to prepare something? But my other question is around the impact of the toll increases. What procedures are you going to have to monitor whatever the negative impact is of the toll increases for regular users? I know of one large company that currently pays £52,000 a year in toll charges. They have seen a massive increase in their expenditure. How are we going to monitor the economic impact? My worry is that without monitoring we might not realise that in the long term there is a really bad impact on our income. Companies may move away from the area. Or move across the border. This would not be good news for the people of East Cornwall and the economy of East Cornwall.

**0:55:10 David List:** We will be monitoring traffic numbers. We'll be looking at the different segments of our User Profile in terms of vehicle type, such as private cars or heavy goods vehicles. But history has shown us that there has never been much change in usage rate following toll increases. Even after the 50% increase in 2010 there was not much change. But there will no doubt be an incremental effect on some businesses, who might change their routing of vehicles or change their logistics. We can't easily drill down to that level of detail to find out how individual companies are changing their operations in response to this. But the increase will have an impact on the long-distance haulage companies as well. It isn't feasible to drill down to the impact on individual businesses. Members may feel differently.

**0:56:28 Andrew Vallance:** It's going to be very difficult to isolate the effect of the toll increase, because there are so many other factors. We have the after-effects of the pandemic, the huge increase in fuel prices and the increase in home working, for example. It will be a difficult task to isolate that single element. As David said, in the past when we've had a toll increase in the middle of

a stable environment (in terms of fuel prices etc) we have seen very little difference in traffic volume. In the current environment we are likely to see some peaks and troughs because the external factors are so variable at the moment.

**0:57:25 Councillor Drean:** Just to go back to Councillor Long's question, originally 12 months ago when the decision was made to look into a toll revision, we were hoping that a business case would come forward to overview everything. And that a separate standalone company would look at it and give their view on whether we were doing the right thing or the wrong thing. That was the reason we were going to an outside agency or consultancy.

**0:58:03 Councillor Toms:** Regarding the tender, I think we need to make progress, so I suggest having an officers' report at the next meeting. We could have it as a standing item on the agenda. It doesn't need to be more than a couple of pages long, but it would be good know how far they have got. This would mean that all members are kept informed.

The impact is hard to quantify, but in your report, David, it says that traffic volumes are nearly back to 2019 levels in the peak times, although there is less traffic in the off-peak times. So that means the casual driver, someone who is shopping for instance, is probably the one who is hit the most. That will depreciate over time because of the cost of fuel. The cost of fuel is hitting many people in my communities. People are already telling me that they are leaving the car at home because they can't afford to drive. We need to monitor the off-peak times. The people that use it for work, will have to use it for work. They will cross the bridge no matter what. But looking at traffic volumes in the off-peak times might be a good way of monitoring this.

**0:59:48 David List:** As Mr. Vallance has said, there are lots of factors affecting people's behaviour, such as Covid, working from home and fuel prices. These are lots of dynamics we have never seen before. Ten years ago, we could predict income to within 1% because things were so stable. But we do have hourly, minute-by-minute data on the way traffic is behaving. You raise a good point, and we will give you more information about peak and off-peak traffic flows. The information will reflect the change in behaviour.

**1:00:24 Councillor Drean:** Just on the first point of your intervention, Cllr. Tom's: it's always been my intention to send an e-mail and update Members when we have a consultant actually commissioned and work has started. Obviously, we haven't got to that stage yet, which is why I haven't been able to send out that email.

**1:01:02 Councillor Coker:** I've got three questions. My first is that former councillor Geoff Brown (Cornwall Council) and I started discussions with the Department for Transport a few years ago. What confidence have we got even if we produce this report? In our time, the government used to change what they wanted every time! So I'm not sure whether the government are committed to this. Perhaps they are just stalling for time? My second question is that we talk about MPs' support, but members of the public don't know which MPs are supporting us and which aren't. It's fair to say that some are doing more than others. As the Committee, we should be giving members of the public the ability to challenge their own MP as to why they are staying silent.

I want to turn to some localised issues from the General Manager's report. I have in the past raised concerns on behalf of my residents who live on Pottery Quay and Ferry Road. They have told me that when it's busy they aren't able to get into their houses due to the queuing traffic for the Torpoint ferry. They have to join the back of the queue to enter their properties. There is no option for them to join the queue at the bottom of the road. You were going to come back to me so I could respond to my residents, but I don't think I have had a response. Also - the land adjacent to the landing place

by Pottery Quay is in private ownership. There are big, gaping holes in and around where the ferry lands. I have real concerns, because if that land gives way it will have a great effect on the ferry and its ability to operate as there will be a landslide.

**1:05:02 Councillor Drean:** Last year, with the Committee's approval, I wrote to all of the 3 MPs in Plymouth. I've received responses from two of the three, saying they would continue to lobby. Your first question was around the confidence we have. I think we need to re-engage. Hopefully, when Councillor Worth speaks in a minute he will be able to say what action he has had from the Cornish MPs. I know he wrote to all of them as well. I think we may need to form a Task Force, along the lines of the Rail Peninsular Task Force that was formed when we had the problems at Dawlish, so that we can form one lobby.

**1:05:54 Councillor Coker:** With due respect, Chair, you know and I know which MPs are supporting our case, but the public doesn't know. It's important to put some public pressure on MPs, not just the Plymouth and South East Cornwall MPs, but on all the Devon and Cornwall MPs.

**1:06:30 Councillor Drean:** Yes – I take your point. We can have a discussion on that.

**1:06:37 David List:** We are aware of the localised issues around Pottery Quay traffic. The marshalling area at Devonport is bigger than the one at Torpoint, but it does get congested from time to time. And because of the road geometry, if the traffic gets backed up beyond the marshalling point there is no other way for residents to get to their houses by vehicle. They are exceptional circumstances, and I'd be happy to give you a written answer that you can relay back to them. I'll ask the ferry manager to give me some data on how frequently that overload happens.

**1:07:59 Councillor Coker:** I'd be happy to receive your written response, but people who live in those houses have the right to get back into their homes. But we need to open more of a communication channel, especially as they have now formed an active residents' association.

**1:08:46 David List:** I will liaise with you. On the third point, we have had ongoing issues about the stability of the private land, and have chased the owners through Plymouth City Council. We will take a look and get back to you.

**1:11:11 Councillor Martin Worth:** I want to go back to a point that Councillor Long made around what it would mean if over 60 years the Tamar crossings were free. On a local basis, what would that difference be? With Councillor Long, councillors in the east of Cornwall have been working together on an economic basis. That is something we should develop, especially after the announcement of the Freeports in Plymouth and Falmouth. We need to bring that together with Devon and Cornwall, our MPs, Levelling Up deals and our Local Enterprise **Partnerships**.

**1:14:23 Jamie Wright** (via Teams) talked through the financial report under item 8 on the agenda

### **1:19:25 Future Financing**

**Recommendation 2:** That, if early approval is received from the Secretary of State of the toll revision application, authority be provided to the General Manager of the undertaking, in consultation with the Department for Transport, the relevant Strategic Directors from both parent authorities and the Joint Chairs, to determine what steps to take (if any) to implement revised cash tolls prior to January 2023.

**1:19:40 David List:** We have reduced the discount on Tag users while they applied for cash release. The application was submitted in April, and there have been no objections so the case is now with the Department of Transport for the Secretary of State to approve, or refuse, the toll application. If

we hear back from them soon, we can possibly get the cash increase sooner than expected, and there may be a shorter time frame than January 2023 for the start of cash toll increase, which could be increased sooner if members are so minded. This is an unusual position for us. The results are likely to be back from the Department of Transport in the late summer and we may or may not have constraints on the implementation date. It will give us flexibility to be able to respond.

**1:22:28 Councillor Patel:** I would recommend that the toll increase date is left to January 2023 regardless of what government comes back with, because as someone mentioned earlier there is a company paying over £50,000 and for that cash increase to be brought forward would play havoc with those large customers' budgets so it should be kept to January.

**Councillor Toms** said he would vote against introducing a rise, because he voted against the idea of any rise. He said that the bits that would stick in everyone's gullet would be that tag users are being penalised first, and that someone who can afford a 30K Zero Emissions car should get a discount where someone else who cannot afford a Zero Emissions car would get penalised.

The chairman said that those issues would be two separate issues of the electrical vehicles and whether or not cash payers' increase should be implemented sooner.

**Councillor Toms** said he would second the proposal from Councillor Patel to leave the implementation of the increase in cash tolls to January 2023.

The chairman invited Lia Mustoe-Shinton to clarify whether an earlier implementation of cash toll increase would leave the Joint Committee open to challenges from the community since it would be a different date to the one given in the consultation.

**1:24:42 Lia Mustoe-Shinton (legal officer with Cornwall Council):** in my view there would be a risk for challenge if the committee decided today to bring the date forward. She explained that this risk is the reason behind the wording of the draft recommendation, as it could give an alternative and enables a decision to be made at the point when there is a response from the DfT, taking into consideration all those risks. She suggested alternative wording for that recommendation if members decided today that they did not want to bring the date forward.

**1:26: 39 Andrew Vallance:** A company paying over £50,000 in tolls is probably doing so through the Tamar Tag account, which has already changed. I would expect any significant user to already have a tag account. The cash toll tends to be paid by more infrequent users.

**1:27:45 Councillor Tivnan:** I would like to second Councillor Patel's proposal that the increases start from January 2023 and are not brought forward, and that for the Committee to change their minds now and suggest that it may come earlier is not doing anybody's finances any good whatsoever. He therefore said he was strongly opposed to bringing this forward in any way, shape or form.

**1:28:37 Councillor Toms:** I'd like to ask Lia Mustoe-Shinton if in her view the rise in the Tamar toll for locals would be challengeable if it were introduced now?

Lia commented that the Tamar Tag discount reduction had already been implemented, and that the proposal under discussion was the timing of the increase to the cash tolls. She clarified that it was the increase to cash tolls, not Tags. She stated that since previous decisions had been predicated on a date of Jan 2023, which was also the date stated in the consultation, that there would be a risk if that date would be brought forward. She went on to state that this is the reason that the recommendation had been drafted to enable Members and officers to take the decision at the point they know whether the DfT decides that the implementation could be brought in sooner.

Councillor Toms said it was clearer in his mind, that he would continue to vote against.

**1:30:31 Councillor Worth** commented that assumptions were being made that the tag is a locals discount, but I've seen figures that suggest that is not necessarily the case. It isn't just people in Saltash or Torpoint - it is far wider than that. It's a question of balance. I've been lobbied strongly by people telling me that it's unfair that people who have chosen to pay by cash have or haven't got a discount within this period of time. Part of the argument which people have put is saying that it's unfair to put the Tag up, while the cash payers have longer discount. It's a balance between people who think that the Tag is a local discount, which I could question. The other thing I want to pick up on is conversations with hauliers, who are probably using the Tag, They like certainty and the ability to predict their business. If they are paying in cash, they will have made their budgets based on the indication that prices will go up in January. To bring that forward would upset some of their figures. So this is a difficult choice, where we will end up upsetting somebody.

**1:32:21 David List:** In May last year, new administrations came into both authorities and they were hit with the situation where Covid had hammered our income. Unfortunately, officers had to make a proposal in a situation which was urgent. In any normal circumstances, we would have recommended Tag and cash going up at the same time. But because of the statutory process for cash increase it was decided that the tag change could be made earlier. So to preserve our financial resilience, we recommended putting the Tag up earlier. The only reason was the urgency of the situation. In any other circumstance we'd have recommended they go together to keep the parity between cash and tag toll the same, which has been a principle this Committee has followed for more than 20 years. The Tag going up earlier is an anomaly because of the Covid situation. But we are now presented with a situation where that gap could be narrowed, and that is what the recommendation is asking you: if you want to narrow that gap between cash and Tag for reasons of parity or equity.

**1:33:36 Councillor Patel:** Just to come back to Councillor Worth. My understanding is that the cash toll is the baseline – there is no discount whatsoever. All the discounts are worked out from whatever we set the cash toll at.

**1:34:05 Councillor Drean:** Yes. I have another question for Lia. We have already set budgets for this year, and papers have gone to Cabinet. If it progressed further, and it was implemented before January, do we need to go back to the Cabinets?

**1:34:25 Lia Mustoe-Shinton:** If Members were minded to make the Recommendation as drafted at Recommendation 2, if we were told by DfT that a cash toll could be implemented sooner than January 2023, what would happen is the officers in conjunction with the Members would exercise that delegation, and would decide at that point whether or not to implement sooner than January 2023. If the recommendation was to implement it sooner, it would still be required to make a recommendation to the Full Councils of both parent authorities via their Cabinets because it would mean an amendment to the budget that has already been approved. Just a practical point to consider is that by the time that process is completed, in terms of earlier implementation, you might be looking at only a couple or just a few months. But if that delegation were exercised it would still require you to go back to the parent authorities to approve the budget.

**1:35:42 David List:** I agree with the points Lia just made, but just a few months could equate to half a million in revenue, which will improve the resilience of our finances. We've just been discussing all the variables in traffic behaviour, for example in fuel prices. We don't even know if we are going to

keep 90% traffic. So I just want Members to aware of the risk of their decision to our financial resilience.

**1:37:08 Councillor Tivnan:** Councillor Patel has proposed against bringing forward the increase in the cash toll, I have seconded that and we have had a general discussion. So as far as I'm concerned, that is what is on the table at the moment, and I ask that the Chair moves to a vote on that. Then we can move on to Recommendation 3.

**1: 37: 45 Democratic Officer:** Before we go to the vote, can I check with the proposer and the seconder that they are happy with the wording as suggested by Lia that: the Joint Committee reaffirms its decision that the increase in cash tolls be implemented in January 2023.

Councillors Patel and Tivnan confirmed that they were happy with the wording.

Vote: 4 in favour (Coker, Drean, Patel & Tivnan), 1 against (Toms) and 1 abstention (Worth).

### **1:39:11 EV Discount**

**Recommendation 3:** The proposed discount scheme for pre-registered zero emissions vehicles as set out in the report be approved. Authority be delegated to the General Manager of the undertaking in consultation with the relevant Strategic Directors for both authorities and the Joint Chairs to make further amendments to the scheme and to develop a public facing document explaining the scheme.

**1:39:19 David List :** At its meeting in March, the Joint Committee committed to implementing a toll discount scheme that gives additional discount to zero emission vehicles, and asked us to present a proposed scheme to this meeting. There are some bullet points about what we discussed, including a discount rate rather than free transit. We explained that to be workable it needed to be linked to Tamar Tag accounts so that we could control the system in a reasonably efficient way. We'd need to review it frequently, because the percentage of EVs in the country is going to increase over the coming years. We also discussed how we would control violation. So the outline proposal is set out in Paragraph 2.14, with the proposed discount level being set at 75% of the cash toll. The cost in this financial year would be around £40,000 because of the small percentage of ZE vehicles on our roads (only 0.5% of vehicles registered in Plymouth and Cornwall are zero emission) and also because we are already part way through the year. It is important to have an annual review. It would take a few months to get it implemented.

**1:42:49 Councillor Patel:** I have only been on this Committee for just over a year, but over that time everything has been around finances and how to balance them. You've been telling us that every bit of income is really important and here we are about to turn away some income that will impact on us for years to come. I'm going to vote against this and recommend that it is not approved, especially because there are a lot of subsidies available from the government for EV vehicles. And the cost of fuel going up is having a significant impact on motorists. So I don't think we are in a position to agree anything for EV drivers, regardless of the climate change. We won't impact on climate change by giving a discount because they will get the cars because they will get the cars anyway irrespective of whether they will get a small discount on the Bridge. I recommend this is brought back to the September meeting with some proper numbers and we will review it then.

**1:44:34 David List:** I don't think we'll have any other numbers for you in September – the situation will be the same. Helping the climate will sometimes cost something. In terms of how it will affect users, I think there will be an incremental impact. We've just been discussing the effects of toll changes on people's behaviour.

**1:45:19 Councillor Drean:** For my side I'd like to talk with our Climate Emergency Action Team. Based on that, I don't think we can make a decision today.

**1:45:47 Councillor Tivnan:** I'd be happy to second Councillor Patel's proposal. I admire the fact that we are all now fully aware of climate change, especially at Council level. It is something we should all move forward on, but I am against any form of reduction in tolls for EV cars. The people who can afford EV cars are not going to worry about having 50p knocked off their toll. There are no cars that are less than £30,000. 15% of people in Torpoint, the area that I represent, are below the poverty line, who have to have some form of transport to get them backwards and forwards to work. So to kick them in the teeth by raising their rates because they cannot afford to get a Tag. They have to pay as they go because they are that tight with money. They are losing already 30p come January. To see someone roll up next to them in a shiny, brand new EV car just smacks me in the teeth. I cannot support this in any way. If we were to promote EV cars then what does that mean for Plymouth City Council and Cornwall Council? Do we then give discounts off rates for people who have solar panels or thermal ground-heating sources. Those at the bottom end will be paying the most when they should be paying the least.

**1:48:32 Councillor Toms:** As David said just now, we are talking about the future finances of the Bridge. He also said that 25% of all the new cars coming through on the market are EVs. Therefore, looking to the future, it will mean less tolls. The reason I cannot support the EVs is exactly the same reason given by Cllr. Tivnan and Cllr. Patel. It's common sense. People who can afford an EV when it is nearly double the price of a normal petrol motor can afford the toll. It might sound good for ecological things, but I don't think it is good for this Committee. Because in the future when there are hundreds of thousands of new EV cars, we won't be getting the tolls from those cars. I will vote against a discount for EV vehicles.

**1:50:05 Councillor Worth:** I think this is all about timing and negotiation. I think it would be totally remiss of the Committee not to have considered options on EVs and the environment. I was given figures yesterday that suggest that river flows under our bridges could reduce by 82% by 2050. So it is important for us to at least consider things. But the timing of doing it right now in relation to the potential negotiations that are coming up is wrong. I think it is absolutely right that we have a button on the till for when we might need it, and the work that has been done to engage and look at our systems has been good, but right now I agree with Councillor Patel and Councillor Tivnan, and I'm against this.

**1:51:31 Councillor Coker:** This is a difficult one for me, because I've just taken on responsibility as the opposition spokesperson on climate and carbon reduction strategies. I've read the report, but it needs to be more informative. I feel it needs to have input from various organisations. Looking at the government website, there are financial incentives around climate change actions. So I would like to see a better report that takes in all options that we could look at to make a decision. Because if we can get funding for an initiative for the Bridge for climate change then we wouldn't need to be giving away any reduction in our income. We are all going to have to make some difficult changes in the future over climate change, but I think we should be doing is looking at all options. So at the moment I would recommend that we refer this and get a proper climate emergency options report for government funding. I can't support the amendment that Cllr. Patel has just put through. I think this Committee and both councils should reaffirm their commitment to climate emergency.

**1:54:55 Councillor Drean :** Thank you for your helpful intervention. I was just going to ask if there are any initiatives, and you've just said there may be from government, so I think we need to take

that on board. Councillor Patel: given what Councillor Coker has just said do you want to amend what you put on the table just now? Councillor Tivnan: did you want to listen to the same thing?

**1:55:06 Councillor Tivnan:** With the greatest respect, I listen to every member who speaks.

**1:55:10 Councillor Drean:** I beg your pardon. I meant to his revision.

**1:55:16 Councillor Patel:** I'm quite happy to amend to include wording around exploring all avenues for additional green funding initiatives before we reach a decision on a reduction in toll charges for EVs.

**1:55:46 Councillor Tivnan:** I have absolutely no problems with that. Thank you.

**1:55:51 David List:** Could I ask for clarification, please? We have delivered a report on the basis of the resolution of the previous committee. You committed to implement a toll discount scheme for EVs. We have submitted a report. You say you want a better report. I think it sounds like you want a different report. I want to understand the scope you want to look at in terms of green initiatives. We're operating two toll river crossings. Green initiatives cover the whole spectrum of public life. So I don't think it is reasonable to expect us to look at things like solar heating or insulating homes. It's got to be relevant to our crossings.

**1:56:40 Councillor Drean:** Key for me is information that the government would look on favourably for alternatives.

**1:56:47 Councillor Coker:** I was just using that as an example of what councils are going to have to look at over the coming years. Because we can't stand still. There are other options we can look at. Initiatives from government so that we get the funding to do it, and it doesn't come out of the tag income. We have an aspiration to promote EVs but it can't be at the detriment of other users. If we still have this report on the agenda I will vote against. We need to be showing the people out there that we are trying to protect the tolls but we are also trying to use every means possible to adapt to the climate emergency.

**1:59:22 Lia Mustoe-Shinton:** I was coming in to address the issue of timing. Councillor Patel has asked for the report to come back to the September meeting. I have a suggestion for the wording of the recommendation: *That the proposed discount scheme for pre-registered zero emission vehicles be reconsidered at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to specifically consider any relevant government green initiatives.* In the December meeting you will be agreeing the Business Plan and the budget. If this were to be approved at the September meeting it could be incorporated in to the proposals for the budget at the December meeting. So you wouldn't have to be going to Cabinet twice for approval for changes to an in-year plan.

**2:00:52 Councillor Patel:** Thank you for those words, Lia. They are perfect.

**2:01:06 Councillor Worth:** I just want to make the point that this really does highlight our dilemma. We should be encouraging the green agenda, but if we do it impacts our income.

Vote: Unanimous.