



Rt Hon Johnny Mercer MP  
House of Commons,  
London  
SW1A 0AA

February 1st 2023

Case References: ZA41287, ZA40832

CC: Right Hon Richard Holden MP, Under Secretary of State (Department for Transport)

Dear Johnny Mercer

Thank you for your email dated January 5<sup>th</sup> 2023. Also for correspondence forwarded on January 12<sup>th</sup> containing letter dated December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2022 from the Rt Hon Richard Holden MP, whom I copy here into our reply.

We are asking for your support in elevating the concerns raised in this letter with your colleagues at Westminster. We request that you lay out the difficulties these tolls pose for your constituents in Plymouth, also for residents of the wider Southwest in general. Plus, the injustice of the local population here having to fund the Tamar Crossings when the same is no longer practiced on much larger crossings around the United Kingdom. Other crossings that were both far more expensive to construct in the first place (at public cost in many cases) and continue to be so to maintain and operate. Yet still they are now toll free. The Tamar Toll Action Group's ongoing intention is to continue to raise the profile of this issue locally and nationally in order to ensure that it is politically untenable for MP's and Councillors from Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall not to support this cause.

We write to you to ask for your support in our campaign on behalf of residents and businesses of the Southwest who are being negatively impacted by the ever-increasing cost of the Tamar Crossings. Our members now number in the thousands with many of them resident in your constituency. As a veteran myself, I know this includes many veterans of varying ages and eras of service, the oldest of whom receive no pension at all for their military service (i.e. if it predates the AFPS 75 scheme and they served less than 16 years (officer) or 22 years (other ranks) post the age of 21). This meaning any increase in the living cost of those older veterans is significant. Even though the costs were recently increased to £2.60 for cash crossings at the beginning of January, we now understand that Plymouth City Council voted on January 30<sup>th</sup> in favour of applying for an amendment to legislation to permit them to raise the cost annually in accordance with the RPI. For the record, we strongly oppose this, as do our members. This will increase the financial difficulty experienced here not ease it. Please whilst considering that potential further increase, note our figures at Annex 1 on the levels of deprivation in Plymouth, areas in your constituency are particularly impacted. These as compared to Kent where the Dartford Crossing offers a far more favourable discount to local users despite far lower levels of deprivation.

Our position, and the position of our registered members, is that the recent and further proposed increases are unaffordable for people and businesses. Both of which rely on the two crossings as vital links to access critical services in education, health, leisure and retail on both sides of the Tamar. Whilst some areas of Devon and Cornwall may be further remote from the crossings, it is important for the benefit of the whole of the Southwest that residents from further afield also join our campaign, just as we support them. This is increasingly being recognised by Parishes and Town Councils much away with them voting in favour of supporting our campaign.

For information, we also include two tables at Annexes 2 and 3 to highlight what we consider to be an injustice in the way the Tamar Crossings have been historically funded, and continue to be funded. This in comparison to other large estuarial and sea crossings around the United Kingdom. Annex 1 details ferry costs and Annex 2 bridges. I am sure you can agree that our financial needs for central funding for the Tamar Crossings are fairly small compared to the investments that have been promised, or already made, to other communities around the UK. It is unacceptable that the communities of Plymouth and Cornwall have had to stand alone to fund construction of a bridge, it's subsequent widening, toll plaza improvements and bridge deck re-laying ; plus construction of two sets of three ferries since the early 1960's (with funding for a third set of three ferries now under discussion at the Tamar Crossings and Tamar Bridge & Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee) whilst other communities around the UK receive central funding for identical or similar services and platforms. By this token, are local taxpayers here not paying for similar services received by residents elsewhere in the country? For example, the cost of construction of the Prince of Wales Bridge (2<sup>nd</sup> Severn Bridge) and the Queensferry Crossing over the Firth of Forth (in particular) are staggering. Both however are toll free and therefore centrally funded through general taxation. Taxation that almost every resident of the Southwest will already contribute to as a tax payer. If we can pay for the infrastructure supporting the economy of other regions, why are we left to pay independently for our own identical critical infrastructure?

The reasons the Tamar Bridge had to be locally funded, as decreed by the Tamar Bridge Act 1957, are not the same today as they were then. The country is not facing the enormous cost of re-construction post World War II and the UK economy is now the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the world. Traffic levels have grown substantially since the Tamar Bridge Act gained royal assent in 1957 and local communities have had to fund all the cost of improvements necessary to the bridge and ferries to cope with that traffic. This despite not being responsible for said growth. Please ask yourself, and your colleagues at Westminster, had the bridge not been commissioned at local cost in the late 1950's, would it be acceptable today for central government to reject the construction cost as a local matter? Or as is more likely, would it be taken on as a centrally funded critical infrastructure project like many others of a similar nature have since?

We, as a group, would be very grateful if you could support our campaign by publicising its existence to your constituents and by sharing our goals and objectives with them. Also, by expressing your support and feelings on the matter at Westminster and raising these concerns with The Rt Hon Richard Holden MP. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person and discuss any points you may wish to raise or have clarified.

With Kind Regards

Scott Slavin, Vice Chair

[Vicechair@tamartollactiongroup.org](mailto:Vicechair@tamartollactiongroup.org)

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**Annex 1 to TTAG letter dated January 31<sup>st</sup> 2023**

**DEPRIVATION FIGURES FOR PLYMOUTH 2019**

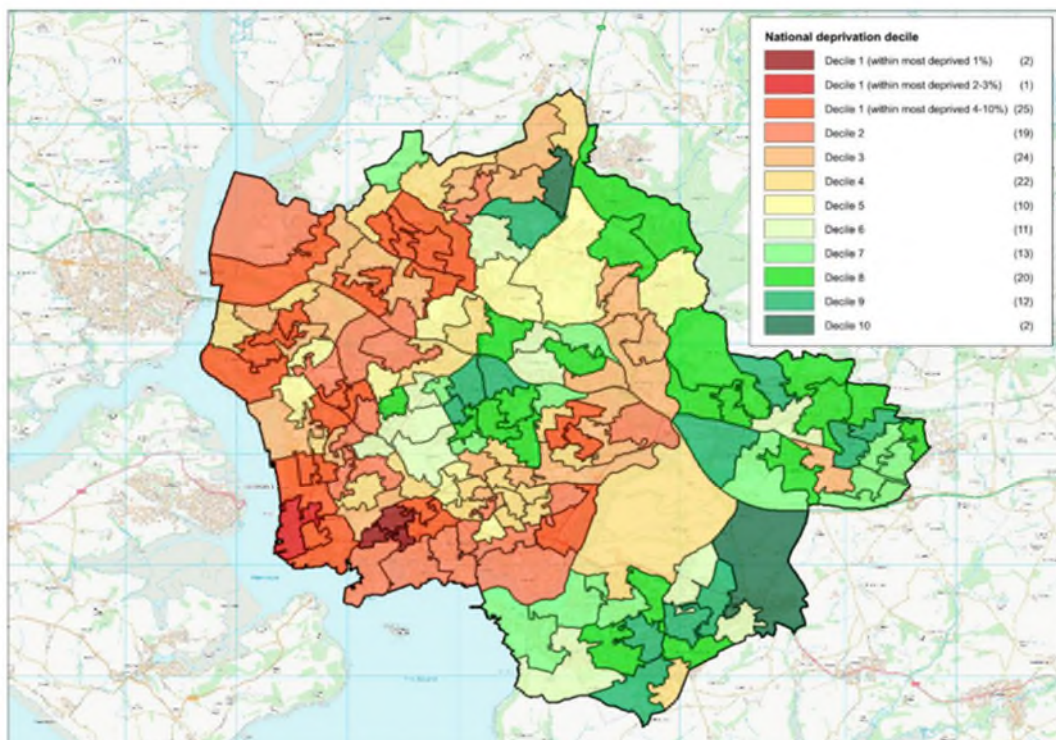
The English Indices of Deprivation (ID) are a **useful tool for targeting services to help tackle deprivation**. They provide a means of identifying the most and least deprived areas (LSOAs) in England and to compare whether one area is more deprived than another.

Plymouth has a population of 261010. According to the IMD 2019 Plymouth has:

- Two LSOAs (1.2%) in the most deprived 1% in England. These LSOAs have a combined population of 3,617 (1.4% of Plymouth’s population).
- Three LSOAs (1.9%) in the most deprived 3% in England. These LSOAs have a combined population of 5,418 (2.1% of Plymouth’s population).
- 28 LSOAs (17.4%) in the most deprived 10% in England. These LSOAs have a combined population of 46,075 (17.6% of Plymouth’s population).
- 47 LSOAs (29.2%) in the most deprived 20% in England. These LSOAs have a combined population of 78,048 (29.9% of Plymouth’s population). Figure 1 shows which national deprivation decile each of the 161 LSOAs in Plymouth fall within. Those falling within decile one have been further split to show the areas in the city that are most deprived nationally.

Figure 1: Plymouth LSOAs by IMD 2019 national deprivation decile Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights [2019]. Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database rights [2019]

**Figure 1: Plymouth LSOAs by IMD 2019 national deprivation decile**



The Pennon Group (SWWA) published a report (Jun 2021) titled 'Levelling Up the Great South West : a G7 Legacy' in which it looked at all the Constituencies in Devon and Cornwall. It looked at several indices within the deprivation list including crime, health and financial dependency in order to discover which constituencies were a 'levelling up priority'. Plymouth Sutton and Devonport was ranked as the top with Plymouth Moor View ranked third.

*The report states that Plymouth's high ranking is in line with a trend for 'high benefit dependency and low wages' in coastal areas nationally.*

*The report notes Plymouth comfortably underperforms the national average in terms of access to GPs, life expectancy, unemployment, crime, empty commercial properties, productivity, and deprivation.*

*Plymouth Sutton and Devonport's deprivation score is cited as 43% higher than the average for England and Wales, placing it in the top 10% of most deprived constituencies nationally.*

*Approximately 18.6% of children in Plymouth live in poverty, with that number rising to more than half in some more deprived areas of the city.*

<https://planetradio.co.uk/greatest-hits/plymouth/news/plymouth-tops-deprivation-table-in-new-levelling-up-report-2/>

The Pennon report has 5 aims the second of which is: -

- *Establish a Transport for the South West body with similar powers to Transport for the North, able to champion transport infrastructure projects across the region.*

*'On 11 May 2021, Her Majesty the Queen set out the Government's domestic policy agenda at the state opening of Parliament. Central to the speech was a plan to level up the country, allowing British people to "live local and prosper", no longer being forced to move out of their hometowns to find decent jobs with high pay. Levelling up is now the central commitment of the Government's policy agenda. While it doesn't have an official definition it is nevertheless aimed squarely at reducing regional inequality and boosting productivity outside London and the South East.*

*If the principles of this agenda were important before Covid-19, they are now essential. While much of the conversation around levelling up has focused on the so-called 'Red Wall' of formerly Labour-held seats in the north and midlands of England, in reality all regions outside London have specific socio-economic challenges impeding their economic growth which can be addressed by Government policy and all have been impacted by the pandemic. The counties of Devon and Cornwall are no exception. Historic government investment decisions based on national GVA (Gross Value Added) have meant both counties being overlooked for investment for a number of years. Over time, this has led to a widening and well-documented economic gap between Devon and Cornwall and London.*

If the Government's levelling up agenda is to have the impact necessary to transform economic growth and productivity in every nation and region of Britain then it cannot focus solely on post-industrial

areas of the North and Midlands. What is necessary is a comprehensive industrial and economic plan which caters as much for Devon and Cornwall as for places like West Yorkshire and the Tees Valley.’

<https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/siteassets/document-repository/formal-reports/levelling-up-the-great-south-west-final-compressed.pdf>

## DARTFORD CROSSINGS

Local residents only pay £20 per ANNUM for crossings. Dartford has 58 LSOA’s but has only one LSOA in the top 10%.

Kent is ranked within the least deprived 50% of upper-tier local authorities in England for 4 out of 5 summary measures of the IMD2019.

[https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/7953/Indices-of-Deprivation-headline-findings.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/7953/Indices-of-Deprivation-headline-findings.pdf)

**Table 1: IMD2019 and IMD2015: Kent & Medway LSOAs within the top 10% most deprived in England**

| Authority           | Total LSOAs in each Local Authority | Within the top 10% most deprived: IMD 2015 |     | Within the top 10% most deprived: IMD 2019 |     | 2015 - 2019 Change<br>Number of LSOAs |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|
|                     |                                     | Number                                     | %   | Number                                     | %   |                                       |
| Kent                | 902                                 | 51                                         | 6%  | 51                                         | 6%  | 0                                     |
| Thanet              | 84                                  | 18                                         | 35% | 18                                         | 35% | 0                                     |
| Swale               | 85                                  | 14                                         | 27% | 16                                         | 31% | 2                                     |
| Dover               | 67                                  | 4                                          | 8%  | 5                                          | 10% | 1                                     |
| Folkestone & Hythe  | 67                                  | 4                                          | 8%  | 4                                          | 8%  | 0                                     |
| Canterbury          | 90                                  | 0                                          | 0%  | 2                                          | 4%  | 2                                     |
| Gravesham           | 64                                  | 6                                          | 12% | 2                                          | 4%  | -4                                    |
| Maidstone           | 95                                  | 2                                          | 4%  | 2                                          | 4%  | 0                                     |
| Ashford             | 78                                  | 0                                          | 0%  | 1                                          | 2%  | 1                                     |
| Dartford            | 58                                  | 3                                          | 6%  | 1                                          | 2%  | -2                                    |
| Sevenoaks           | 74                                  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                     |
| Tonbridge & Malling | 72                                  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                     |
| Tunbridge Wells     | 68                                  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                          | 0%  | 0                                     |
| Medway U.A.         | 163                                 | 12                                         | 24% | 14                                         | 27% | 2                                     |

Table ranked by highest number of LSOAs in top 10% most deprived by IMD2019 Score

\* A minus change illustrates a reduction in the number of LSOAs within the 10% most deprived areas in England.

\* A positive change illustrates an increase in the number of LSOAs within the 10% most deprived areas in England.

Source: The English Indices of Deprivation 2015 and 2019, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Table presented by Strategic Commissioning - Analytics, Kent county Council

**Annex 2 to TTAG Letter dated January 31<sup>st</sup> 2023.**

**Ferry Investment Comparison Data.**

The Current Torpoint ferries were delivered in 2004 / 2005 and were built at Ferguson’s shipyard in Port Glasgow, the same shipyard building the two 103 metre ferries for the Scottish devolved Government at a cost estimated to be up to £350 million. The Woolwich ferry is approximately comparable to the Torpoint Ferries in design principles and service, but is completely free to users. Tolls abolished on it in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at the same time as tolls were abolished to cross the Thames via bridges further upstream.

| <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Commissioned by</b>                                     | <b>Budget / cost</b>                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Torpoint Ferry X 3 built in 2005. 73m long</b>                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>TB&amp;TFC funded through tolls on local population</b> | <b>£14.7 Million</b>                                                                  |
| Woolwich Ferry. Two x 60m diesel-electric hybrid vessels each with 210 metres (690 ft) of space for road vehicles over several lanes and dedicated cyclist accommodation. The vessels are licensed to carry 150 passengers. | TfL                                                        | £20 million                                                                           |
| Isles of Scilly. 3 x replacement ferries for passenger and cargo                                                                                                                                                            | UK Government                                              | £48.4 million levelling up grant announced in October 2021 budget                     |
| Fair Isle Ferry. 1 x Replacement RoRo passenger ferry for the Shetland Islands                                                                                                                                              | UK Government                                              | £27 million levelling up grant announced January 2023                                 |
| 2 x replacement 103m car ferries for Caledonia McBrayne servicing Scottish Islands. To carry 1,000 passengers, 127 cars or 16 HGV's. 1st ferry intended to serve Arran, the 2nd to serve the Western Isles                  | Scottish Devolved government                               | Original contract £97 million. Current estimate a further £250 million to completion. |
| 2 x 94.8-metre ferries will each have capacity for up to 450 passengers and 100 cars or 14 commercial vehicles. Replacement ferries for Caledonia McBrayne servicing Islay                                                  | Scottish Devolved government                               | £91 million                                                                           |
| 2 x 94.8-metre ferries will each have capacity for up to 450 passengers and 100 cars or 14 commercial vehicles. Replacement ferries for Caledonia McBrayne servicing the Little Minch routes to Lochmaddy and Tarbert       | Scottish Devolved government                               | £115 million                                                                          |



## Annex 3 to TTAG letter dated January 31<sup>st</sup> 2023

### Bridge Investment Comparison Data

The comparison is basic but of the bridges listed, only the Skye Bridge and Silver Jubilee bridge over the Mersey are of even remotely comparable small size as the Tamar Bridge. At a £1.35 billion build cost, the publicly funded Queensferry crossing is 4.26 times the length of the Tamar bridge, the £330million (1996) Prince of Wales bridge, nearly 8 times the length. Both publicly funded and free at the point of use. Further, those Bridges where tolls are applicable in each direction are all very substantially larger than the Tamar Bridge.

|                                              | Length x width                                                                             | Opened      | funded / managed by                                                                                                                                                             | Build cost                         | Tolls?                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tamar Bridge                                 | 642m x 15.2m                                                                               | 1962        | PCC & CCC. Entirely funded by local populations through levy of tolls.                                                                                                          | £1.5 million (1962)                | YES. TB&TFC currently applying to be allowed to increase them annually in accordance with the RPI |
|                                              | 642m x 27.2m                                                                               | 1998 - 2001 |                                                                                                                                                                                 | £34 million - Widening             |                                                                                                   |
|                                              |                                                                                            | 2006        |                                                                                                                                                                                 | £4.5 million Toll Plaza and canopy |                                                                                                   |
|                                              |                                                                                            | 2020        |                                                                                                                                                                                 | £6 million - resurfacing           |                                                                                                   |
| Severn Bridge                                | 1600m x 22m                                                                                | 1966        | Severn River Crossing plc. A Consortium of 2 x banks and 2 x engineering firms. Passed to State Ownership Jan 2018                                                              | £8 Million (1966)                  | Abolished December 2018                                                                           |
| Prince of Wales Bridge (2nd Severn Crossing) | 5128m x 34.6m                                                                              | 1996        |                                                                                                                                                                                 | £330 million (1996)                | Abolished December 2018                                                                           |
| Forth Road Bridge                            | 2512m x 33m                                                                                | 1964        | Toll collection to recoup build cost.                                                                                                                                           | £15.1 million (1964)               | Abolished February 2008                                                                           |
| Queensferry Crossing (2nd Forth Road Bridge) | 2736m x 39.8m                                                                              | 2017        | Transport Scotland                                                                                                                                                              | £1.35 billion                      | No                                                                                                |
| Erskine Bridge (River Clyde)                 | 1322m x 31.25m                                                                             | 1971        | Toll collection to recoup build cost.                                                                                                                                           | £10.5 million (1971)               | Abolished March 2006                                                                              |
| Tay Road Bridge (Firth of Tay)               | 2250m x 29.8m                                                                              | 1966        | Toll collection to recoup build cost.                                                                                                                                           | £6 million (1966)                  | Abolished February 2008                                                                           |
| Skye Bridge                                  | 570m x width not stated. 1 lane of traffic each direction + pedestrian pavement each side. | 1995        | A consortium composed of Scottish construction company Miller Construction, German engineering company DYWIDAG Systems International, and financial partner the Bank of America | £25 million (1995)                 | Abolished December 2004                                                                           |

|                                                                                                                                         | <b>Length x width</b>                                                           | <b>Opened</b>                     | <b>funded / managed by</b>                                                                   | <b>Build cost</b>                                    | <b>Tolls?</b>                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dartford Crossing consists of two bored tunnels and the cable-stayed Queen Elizabeth II Bridge. Figures quoted are for the Bridge only. | 2872m long. Width not stated, consists of 4 traffic lanes in a common direction | 1991 (Bridge only)                | Build managed by Dartford River Crossing Limited, a private company managed by Rodney Jones. | £120 million (1991) including approach road viaducts | Yes. Each direction, though not charged between 10 pm and 6 am.<br><br>Substantial local toll discount of £20 per year to local population for unlimited crossings. |
| Humber Bridge                                                                                                                           | 2220m x 28.5m wide                                                              | 1981                              | Currently managed by The Humber Bridge Board                                                 | £151 million (inc interest)                          | Yes (each direction)                                                                                                                                                |
| Mersey crossing (Mersey Gateway Bridge)                                                                                                 | 2200m x 30m                                                                     | 2017                              | Merseyflow                                                                                   | £600 million                                         | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Mersey crossing (Silver Jubilee Bridge)                                                                                                 | 482m x 16m                                                                      | 1961, repaired and re-opened 2021 | Merseyflow                                                                                   | £2.433 million (1961)                                | Tolls introduced in 2021, despite not having been tolled previously, to recoup construction costs of the Mersey Gateway Bridge                                      |