



**Richard Holden – Shadow Transport Secretary**

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**Presentation by Scott Slavin**

# Why do we need change on how the crossings are funded and what change is needed?



## Why?

- The toll to cross the Tamar has increased by 100% in the last 5 years. Rising from £1.50 in April 2020 to £3.00 in May 2025.
- Assessed over a longer period, users have experienced a 650% increase in the toll since 1992. Inflation over the same period was 124% (Bank of England figures) (see slide 17).
- The frequency with which Southeast Cornwall residents need to cross the Tamar is significant as there are almost no essential services available to residents on the Cornish side of the crossings.
- The cumulative impact on residents and businesses is very significant and much higher than is apparent from just the cost per crossing. Businesses based in Southeast Cornwall must factor this into their operating costs and often they pass them on to customers. A hidden cost of the toll.
- The ferries operate at a net loss of approximately £5 million per year. This loss is recovered through toll income from bridge users, negatively impacting the users of that crossing.

## What do we need?

- **Option 1. The preference:** Fund both crossings from the National Highways budget so that they become free to all users at the point of use. Potentially, there could be significant savings in staffing costs under this arrangement.
- **Option 2. The compromise:** A nationally subsidised local user discount scheme that supports unlimited use of both crossings for a low fixed price that is payable annually. The definition of “local” would need to be agreed and the Act amended accordingly.
- **Option 3. The bare minimum:** Paying off the £48.25 million capital debt to enable a toll reduction for local users; and providing a subsidy to support the operating cost of the loss-making ferries that we are told cannot be substituted by a more cost-effective bridge due to the access need of warships using the naval dockyard at Devonport.

# Why are the Tamar Crossings unique and therefore deserve Central Government funding?



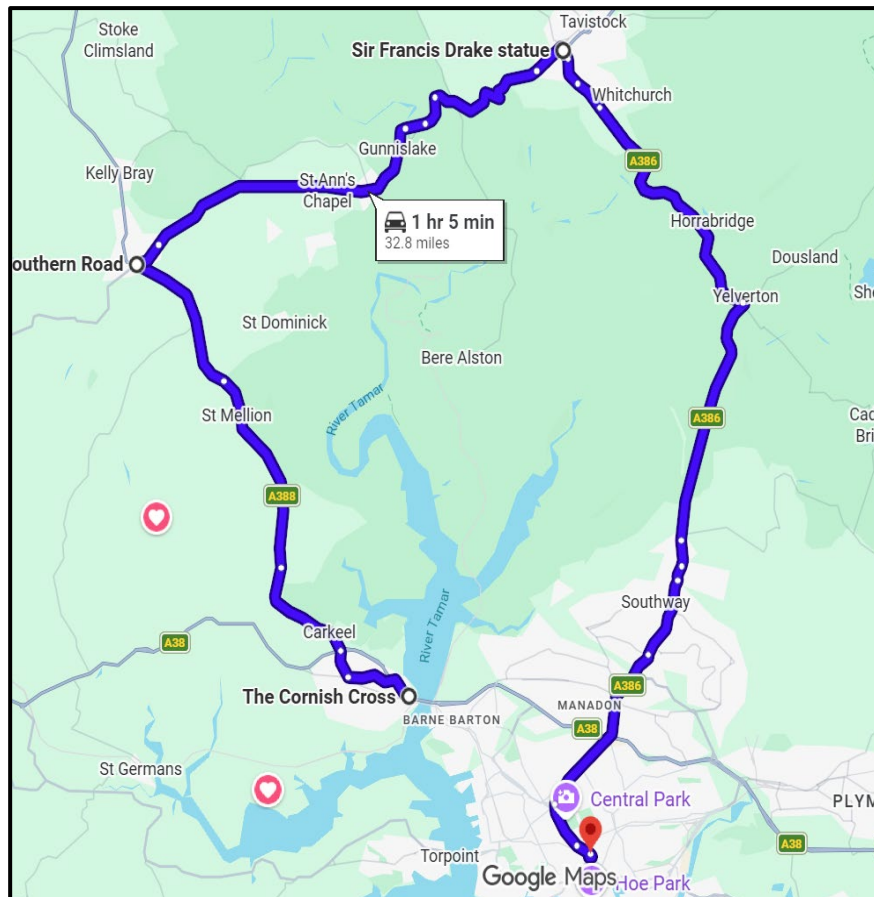
- **Health care provision** – Derriford Hospital is on the east side of the Crossings, all residents from Southeast Cornwall and some from North Cornwall must pay a toll to access it. Our [Freedom of Information Request](#) in 2024 showed 108,000 people reliant on the crossings for access to primary health care at Derriford hospital. ([see slide 22](#))
- **Alternative options for crossing the Tamar** – None that are viable. ([see slides 4 & 5](#))
- **Employment, Education, Leisure and Commerce** – These are all negatively impacted by the toll with costs passed on to residents. ([see slide 23](#))
- **Pollution** – Gunnislake, St Anne’s Chapel and North Road Saltash all experience additional congestion related pollution due to increased traffic flows caused by toll avoidance. The area was declared an [Air Quality Management area in 2014](#). (further details included in slide 23)
- **Other nationally funded road infrastructure projects** – These over previous decades have impacted the crossings by increasing traffic, in parallel this has increased the upkeep costs. ([see slide 6](#))
- **Deprivation** – The area has lower than average salaries, seasonal work and more part time staff than the national average. ([see slide 33 for further detail](#))

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# Alternative crossing options for Saltash & Torpoint ?



There is no other practical alternative to the Tamar Bridge to cross the Tamar by road. Particularly as the closest alternative route has a 16th century single track bridge enroute on the A390 at Gunnislake, it is also located in the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and within an Air Quality Management Area.



To avoid paying a toll to access essential services in Plymouth, residents in Saltash must take a 33 mile detour taking 1 hr 5 minutes. For residents of Torpoint the journey is 45 miles taking almost an hour and a half.

# There is no realistic alternative route



- Alternative routes not fit for purpose (A390 via Gunnislake)
- Significant impact on congestion and pollution on alternative routes

# Other Road Infrastructure Projects

Rerouting the A38 via Saltash and upgrading the road capacity under the below government funded infrastructure projects has greatly impacted the bridge and brought levels of traffic it did not have the capacity for as built. Note that as the A38 is part of the Strategic Road Network, the upgrades at the below bullet points were nationally funded.

As built, the bridge was part of a minor road for residents of Saltash to access Plymouth. Only after it was built was the A38 re-routed to move the main road into Cornwall from travelling via the ferries and Torpoint, to via the bridge and Saltash. This had consequences that were not properly considered at the time and are not reflected in any versions of the Tamar Bridge Act.

The below centrally funded road infrastructure projects contributed to increased use of the bridge and reduced use of the ferries, affecting the business model and profitability of the latter.

- |      |                           |       |   |
|------|---------------------------|-------|---|
| I.   | Plympton Bypass - 1971    | V.    | Liskeard Bypass – 1976                    |
| II.  | Ivybridge Bypass - 1973   | VI.   | Plymouth Parkway - 1985                   |
| III. | South Brent Bypass – 1974 | VII.  | Saltash Tunnel and Bypass - 1988          |
| IV.  | Ashburton Bypass – 1974   | VIII. | Marsh Mills Flyover and slip roads - 1992 |

**Because of these projects, tolls payers had to fund widening and strengthening improvements at a cost of circa £34 million at the turn of the century.**

# How did the crossings end up in so much debt?



- At the turn of the century, an EU directive dictated that bridges had to be strengthened to carry trucks of a Gross Vehicle Weight of 40 Tons. This necessitated a significant and costly strengthening of the Tamar Bridge.
- Despite the bridge being part of the Strategic Road Network, there was no financial support from the DfT under the previous Labour Government. Local toll payers had to fund strengthening and widening improvements at a cost of circa £34 million.
- This meant spending all the reserve funds that had been built up to replace the equally vital Torpoint Ferries, which were by then around 40 years old.
- To finance both projects, an arrangement had to be made to borrow the money from Cornwall Council to fund construction of the new ferries. Prior to that date there had been no borrowing since the bridge first opened in 1961.

# How did the crossings end up in so much debt? - continued



- The recently retired General Manager took the organisation from £14 million in the black to its current £48.25 million in the red over the course of his 27-year tenure\*. Overspends have continued year on year with some significant historic examples of unsatisfactory cost control. For example, the new Bridge Office building was delivered 43% over budget (£5m vs budgeted £3.5m). There are also loss-making services provided that are unconnected to maintenance and operation of the crossings\*\*.
- The debt repayment now accounts for around 1/3 of toll income annually. This is further compounded by additional borrowing that is planned for other works. Some of which is voluntary rather than mandatory.

\* These figures were confirmed by the then General Manager during the October 2024 public enquiry into the Toll revision request.

\*\* Visitor centre constructed 2017- 2019 and opened in May 2019. Construction was part lottery grant funded (£272,700, with a further 25% being funded by toll payers). Staff, maintenance, updates and operation of the visitor centre are all toll funded. Many residents are dissatisfied with this arrangement.

# Why campaign for both crossings?



- The bridge and ferry are conjoined by the Tamar Bridge Act 1957; the responsible authorities are common.
- The Torpoint Ferry and Tamar Bridge are important routes between Cornwall and Devon. Though the bridge is part of the Strategic Road Network (unlike the ferry), they both provide critical transport links to their respective local communities for many essential services. There is very heavy reliance on both by Southeast Cornwall residents and businesses.
- There is no viable alternative route for Cornwall based users of either crossing. As slide 4 showed, the only other route is a significant detour via a single lane 500-year-old bridge at Gunnislake - weakening the bridge and contributing to additional pollution in the Tamar Valley (which is an air quality monitoring area). Local residents from our campaign group report that this route is already seeing increased traffic, including HGV traffic.
- We consider that it is counterproductive to try and treat them as separate issues and campaign only on behalf of one. This would set the two communities at odds with each other with each lobbying their respective Councillors and MPs in different directions.



# What are our Labour MPs proposing and why do we think it is undeliverable?



Our Labour MPs that border the crossings are pressing the Tamar Crossings management to deliver “Cheaper Tolls for locals”. What they are not doing is providing any revenue stream to make that deliverable. As most crossings are by locals, artificially lowering the price for them without external funding risks make the crossings unviable financially.

It is also a significant U turn from one of them as when in opposition in 2022, he called for the then Conservative government to provide funding support.

The full detail of “Cheaper Tolls for Locals” has been requested multiple times from the three current Labour MP’s bordering the crossings. The key detail their constituents want to know is:

- Will this reduce our current toll rates? (Answer: NO)
- How will this work in practice?



# What are our Labour MPs proposing and why do we think it is undeliverable? - continued



It now emerges that their concept is to uplift the toll annually by RPI linked increases and, over a decade, increase the discount percentage for local users. The toll paid by locals will not therefore reduce, only increase more slowly than the headline rate. This is not “Cheaper Tolls” as the public is being led to believe, it is merely tolls that increase at a slower rate.

Nor in fact is there any definition of “local” and the legislation as written precludes creating one.

Anyone from anywhere can apply for a Tag Account. Unless ownership of a TAG account is restricted by geographical area, the number of them will proliferate over time and likely have the net effect of reducing income rather than increasing it. There are already more than 3,000 accounts that are remote from the crossings, this will only increase as the gap widens between the cash rate and the tag rate.

It follows that the “Cheaper Tolls for Locals” tagline is little more than a PR statement to gain favour. It was used prior to the 2024 General Election and has now resurfaced prior to the upcoming local elections in Plymouth. In opposition, the position of the MP championing it (Luke Pollard) was that the government should provide funding support. We quote *“I want to see the government step in and help fund the bridge.”*

# Other Major UK Bridges – The Precedents



Description	Length x Width	Construction Cost	Tolls?
Tamar Bridge	642m x 15.2m	£1.5 million (1962)	YES - All these upgrades have been locally funded <b>despite the infrastructure upgrades that made them necessary being centrally funded.</b>
	642m x 27.2m	£34 million - Widening	
		£4.5 million Toll Plaza and canopy	
		£6 million - resurfacing	
Severn Bridge	1600m x 22m	£8 Million (1966)	Abolished December 2018
Prince of Wales Bridge (2nd Severn Crossing)	5128m x 34.6m	£330 million (1996)	Abolished December 2018
Forth Road Bridge	2512m x 33m	£15.1 million (1964)	Abolished February 2008
Queensferry Crossing (2nd Forth Road Bridge)	2736m x 39.8m	£1.35 billion	Tolls in Scotland were abolished in February 2008, 9 years prior to completion of the Queensferry Crossing
Erskine Bridge (River Clyde)	1322m x 31.25m	£10.5 million (1971)	Abolished March 2006
Tay Road Bridge (Firth of Tay)	2250m x 29.8m	£6 million (1966)	Abolished February 2008
Skye Bridge	570m x width TBC.	£25 million (1995)	Abolished December 2004 after a 9-year campaign by a local group
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 TBC	£120 million (1991) including approach road viaducts	Each way, though not between 10pm and 6am. Populations of Dartford & Thurrock Councils pay £20 annually for unlimited crossings. 2021 Census = combined population of 292,800. Plymouth & SE Cornwall pop. in total = 355,233.
Humber Bridge	2220m x 28.5m wide	£151 million (inc interest)	Yes (each way). In October 2009, the government approved a £6 million grant for maintenance costs. It then settled £150 million of debt in 2010
Mersey Gateway Bridge	2200m x 30m	£600 million	Yes. Halton Residents can pay a £10 annual administration fee and then enjoy unlimited free crossings. Pop, 128,200 at 2021 Census

# Lack of similar support for the Tamar Crossings



## Tamar Crossings:

- Zero Government support or funding save for a small amount paid in 2020 in lieu of tolls that could not be raised until Covid secure methods of collecting payment were implemented.
- Toll payers have had to fund Bridge widening, the toll plaza construction, bridge re-surfacing, construction of new offices and the visitor centre. Amongst other things, the current additional borrowing costs are for: new toll booths, Ferry de-carbonisation study, Bridge fire protection and new ferry chain weight gantries.



# Where is the money raised?

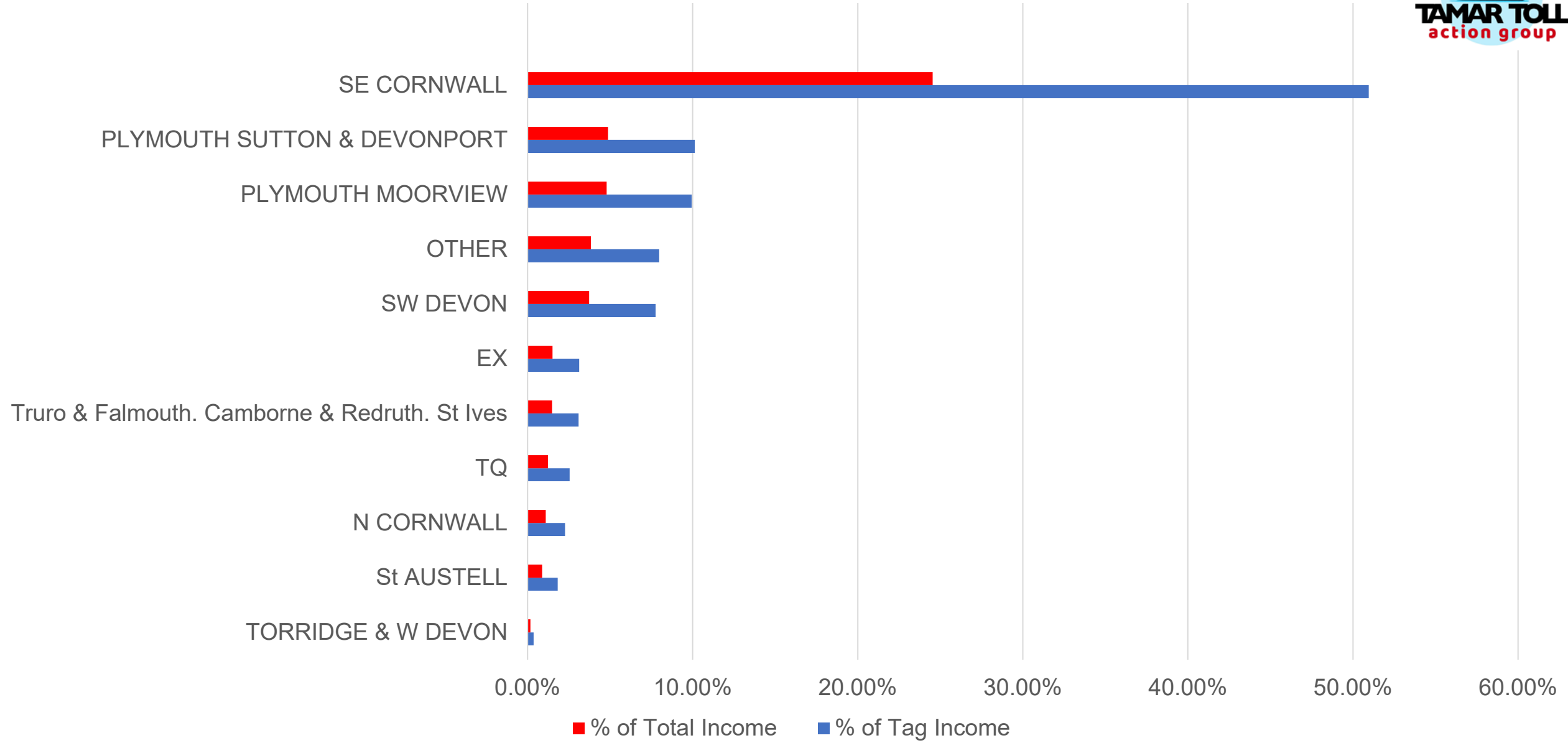
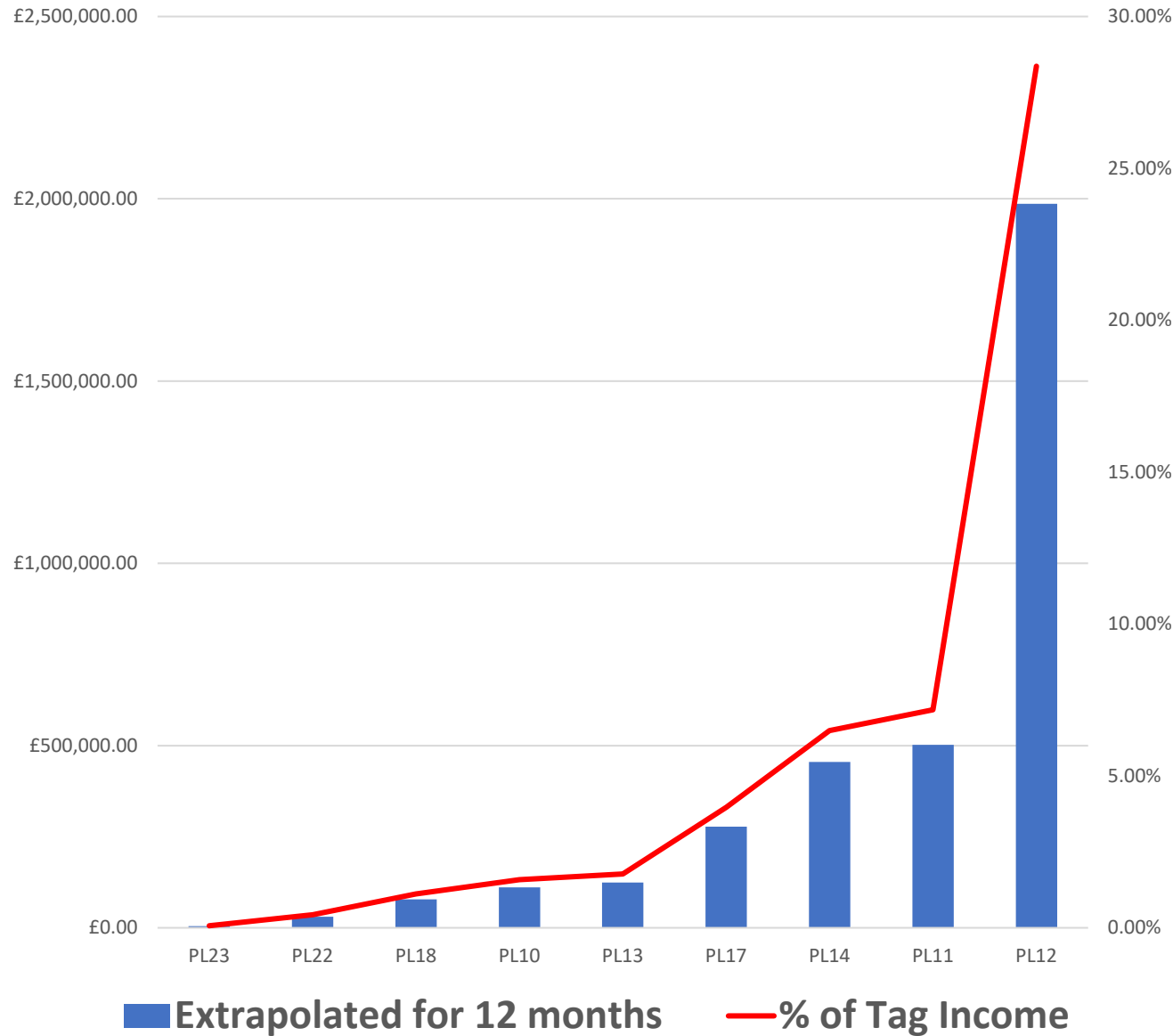
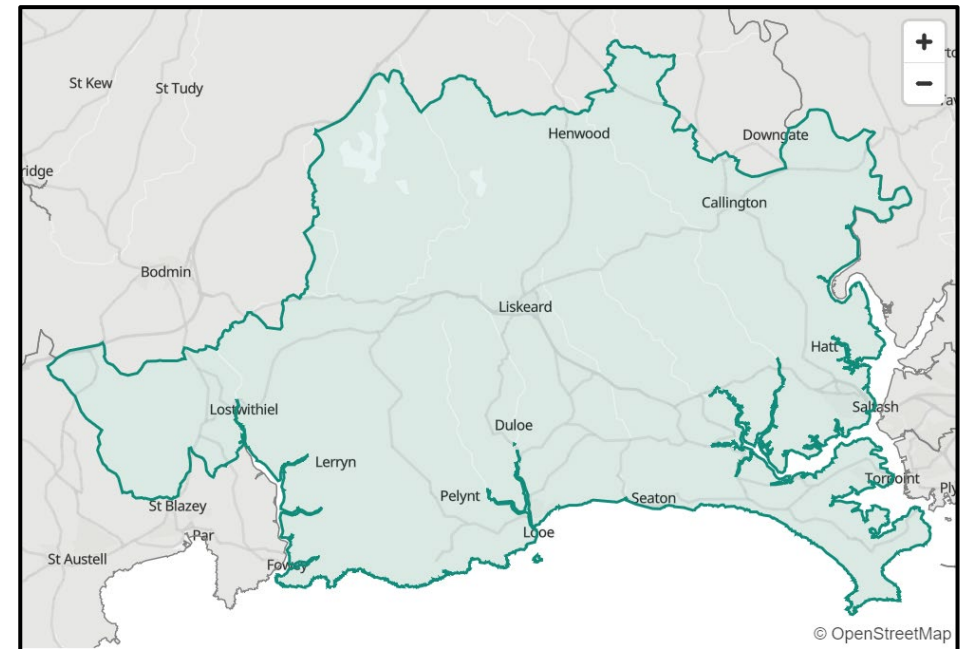


Table created from data provided by the Joint Committee in 2023. Numbers are real time data from January 2023

# Southeast Cornwall TAG Revenue 2023



- PL12 (Saltash) electorate 14,866 pays 25% of annual TAG income
- SE Cornwall burden is 51% of the total TAG income
- We estimate that a household regularly crossing the Tamar for work & leisure pays **£550 p.a.**

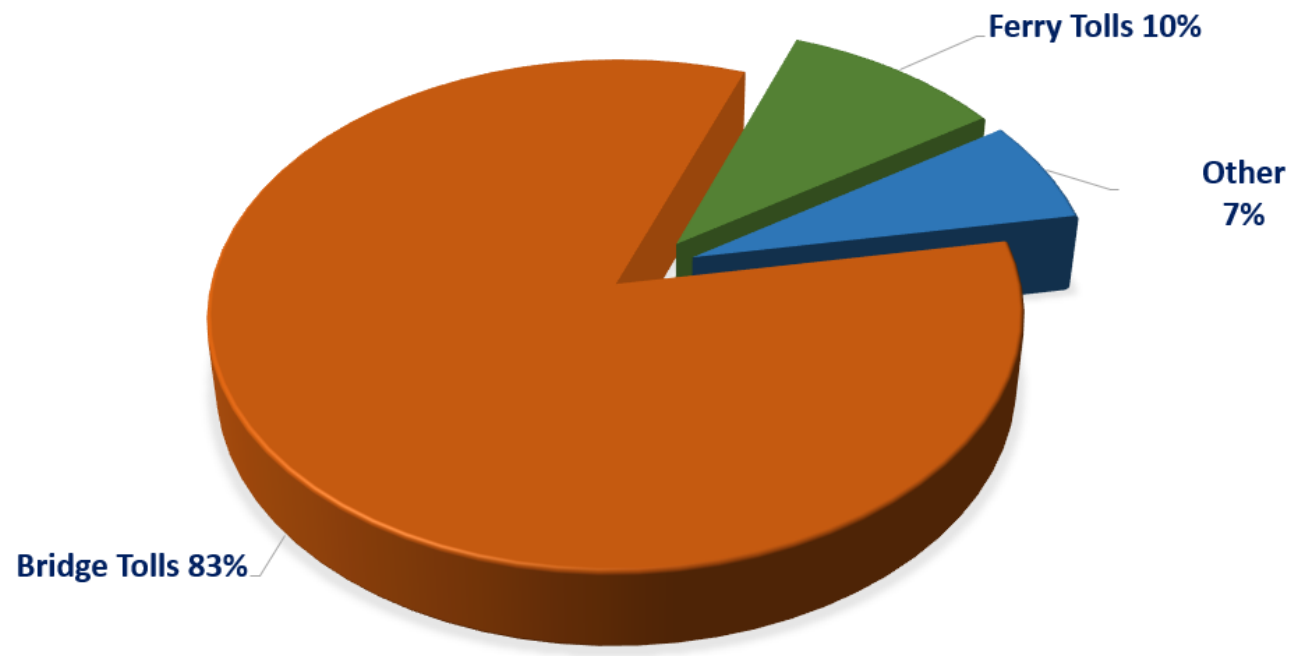




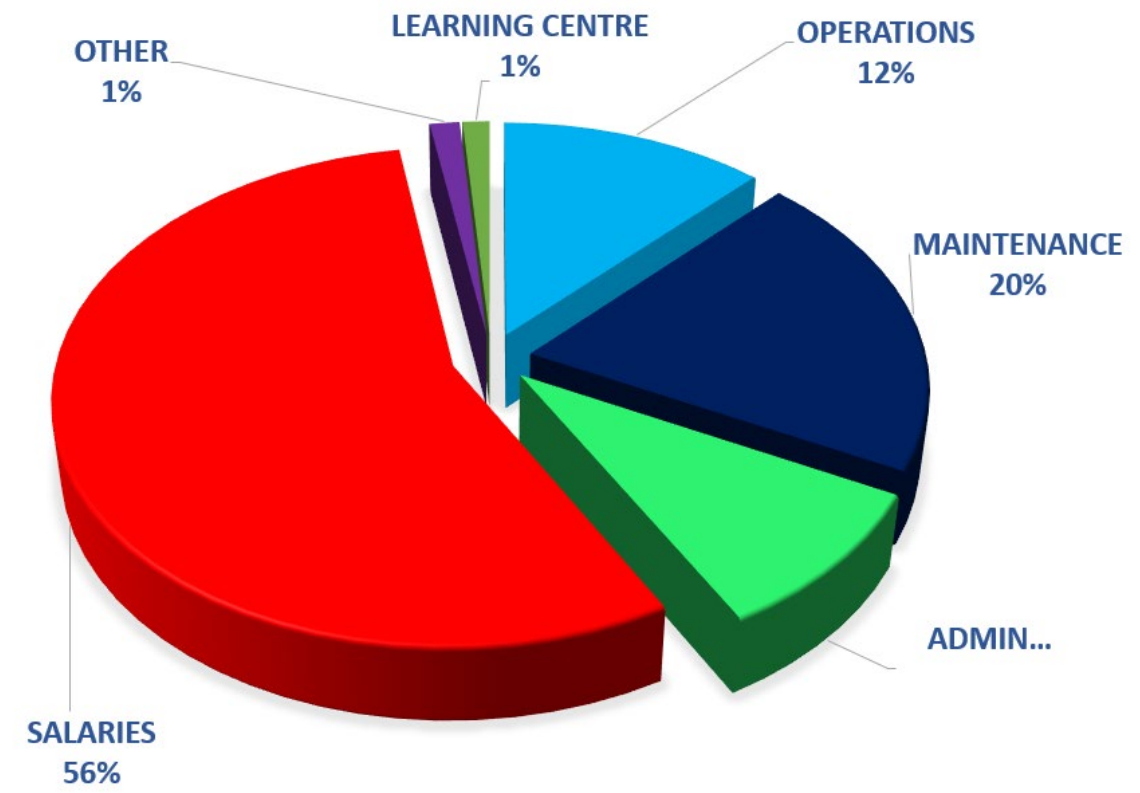
# How is the money spent?



### 25-26 TOTAL INCOME - £19.47m



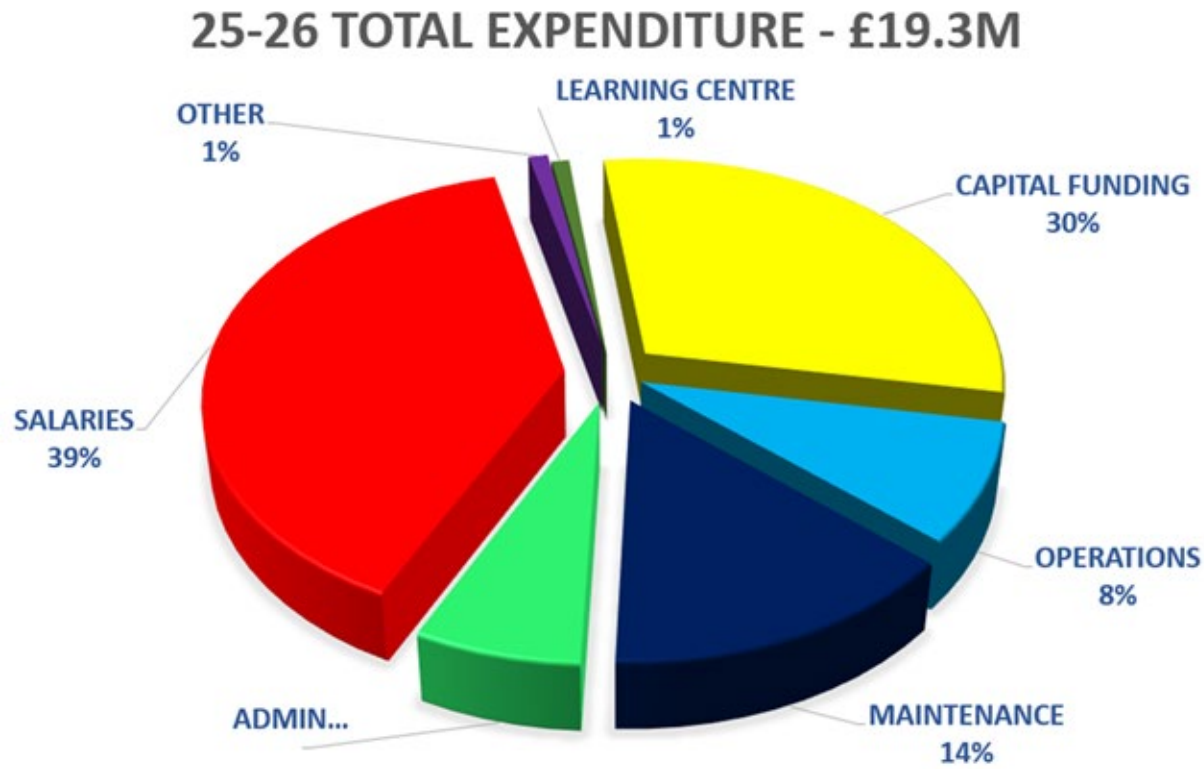
### 25-26 REVENUE EXPENDITURE - £13.57M



So, where's the missing £6 million?



# The full spending picture:



**30% of Toll income is consumed repaying the capital debt**

**How much revenue does each of the following generate annually: Tamar Bridge and the ferry crossing?**

For the 2024/25 financial year:

- Tamar Bridge toll revenue: approximately £14.2 million
- Torpoint Ferry toll revenue: approximately £1.6 million

Operating the crossings also involves significant costs:

- Bridge operational costs: approximately £5.8 million
- Ferry operational costs: approximately £6.7 million

# Where is the capital spending?

## Future:

- Ferry decarbonization project – £3 million
- Bridge Structural Fire Protection - £3.5 million
- Open road tolling via ANPR – estimated at £15 - £20 million.

## Completed:

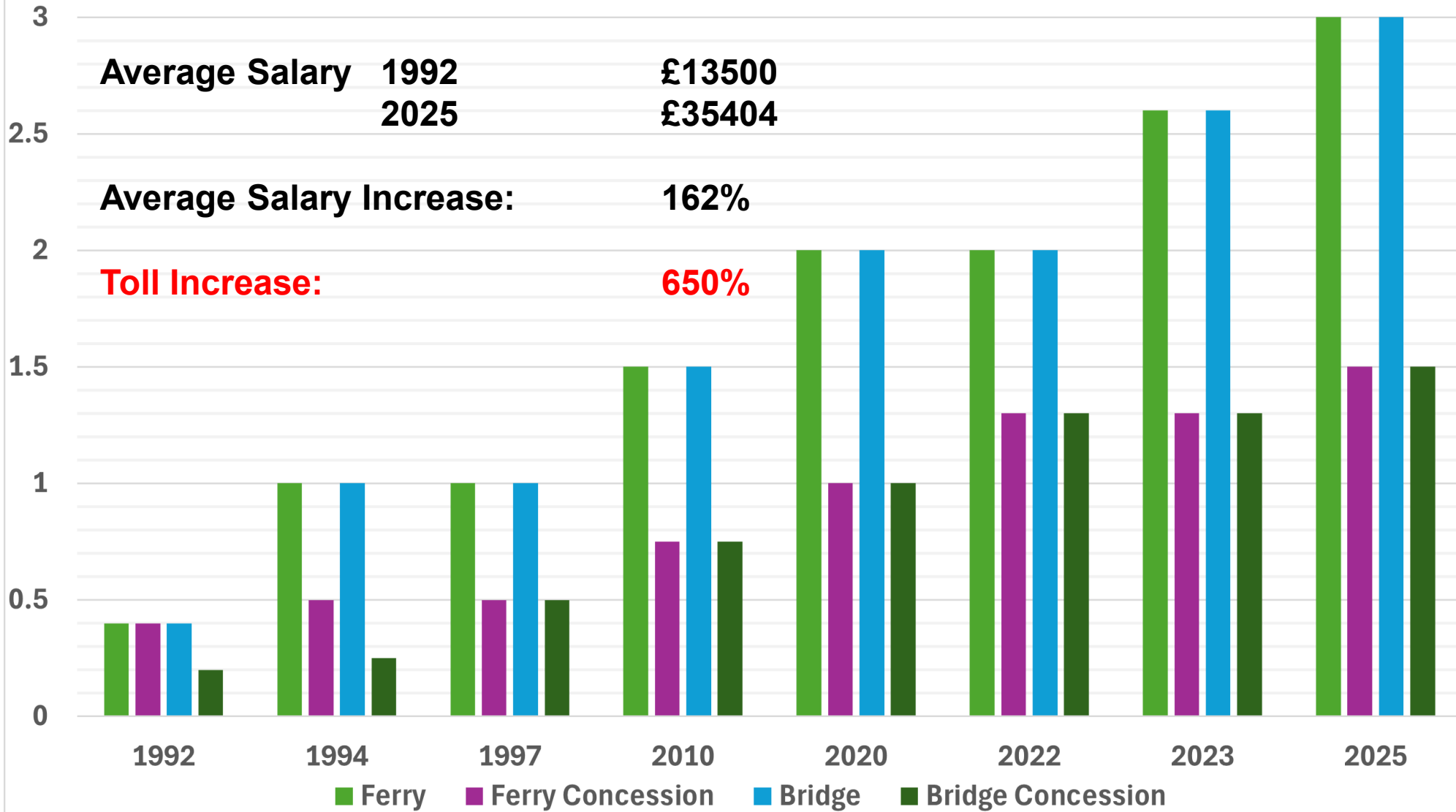
- Bridge Widening - £34 million (2001)
- Ferry Replacement - £14.7 million (2005)
- Toll Plaza canopy - £4.5 million (2006)
- New Bridge Office – £5 million (2018)
- Bridge deck resurfacing - £6 million (2021)
- Toll booth replacement – £400k (2026)



The 2024 – 2025 annual business plan stated £8.9 million borrowing forecast as required but didn't clearly define what for. We await details of how this may change under the new leadership.

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# Toll Increases 1992 - 2025



# Alternative options at other significant tolled crossings



**Mersey Crossing alternatives:** There are two bridges and two tunnels over / under the Mersey. All are tolled – but Halton residents enjoy a government funded discount scheme of £12/year for unlimited use of the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee bridges. The cost to the public purse of funding this scheme is £442.5 million over 27 years

**Humber Bridge Alternative:** The Humber bridge can be bypassed in around 50 minutes via the M62. There is no ancient single-track bridge en route, the alternative is via two motorways adjoining two major trunk roads. The Humber Bridge board had £150 million debt write off by the Coalition Government in 2010 to prevent a toll increase from being necessary and reduce their toll to £1.50 each way. This was in addition to a debt write off of £62 million in 1998

**Dartford Crossing alternatives:** Though smaller than the Dartford Crossing, the below options are capable of supporting two-way traffic simultaneously and though the tunnels are now tolled, the Blackall tunnel historically was free to use. The Blackwall and Silvertown tunnels (about 16 miles west) & the Woolwich ferry (about 14 miles west). Much public money (£1.2 billion to date) is being spent to offer an additional option (the lower Thames crossing). Like the Mersey crossings, despite their alternative options the residents of Dartford & Thurrock benefit from free crossing for a low fixed price of £25 per annum.

# Local User Discount Schemes?

Data from 2024 FOI requests by TTAG.



## FOI/7490 Dartford Crossings

- 29,235 registered under the Local Resident Discount Scheme (LRDS) plan.
- In the financial year 2022/2023 they made a total of 2,601,185 crossings.
- Accounting for the £20 charge, these crossings cost National Highways over £4.6 million in lost toll income.

## FOI/13943 – Merseyflow Crossings (see slide 19 for further detail)

- As of May 2024, there are 47,622 LUDS & HLUDDS Account Holders. In the financial year to May 2024 they made a total of 8,921,230 crossings in Class 2 vehicles eligible for the scheme.
- Accounting for the £10 charge, the lost toll income from those crossings was £17.366,240.00
- Government Grant to subsidise these crossings from the public purse totals £442.5 million payable over 27 years.

# TTAG F.o.I request 13493 to Halton Borough Council



Our FOI Request to Halton Borough Council in 2023 resulted in disclosure that there were 47,622 residents registered for free crossings on the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee Bridges

Collectively, they benefit from £442.5 million in public subsidy to enable this over 27 years from the date of opening of the Mersey Gateway Bridge (2017).

Year of operation	Amount	5-year parliament
1	£6,798,000.00	£39,670,000.00
2	£7,299,000.00	
3	£7,862,000.00	
4	£8,495,000.00	
5	£9,216,000.00	
6	£10,059,000.00	£60,361,000.00
7	£11,113,000.00	
8	£12,215,000.00	
9	£13,046,000.00	
10	£13,928,000.00	£83,774,000.00
11	£14,833,000.00	
12	£15,746,000.00	
13	£16,720,000.00	
14	£17,737,000.00	
15	£18,738,000.00	£105,433,000.00
16	£19,748,000.00	
17	£20,818,000.00	
18	£21,224,000.00	
19	£21,629,000.00	
20	£22,014,000.00	£116,688,000.00
21	£22,436,000.00	
22	£22,889,000.00	
23	£23,341,000.00	
24	£23,774,000.00	
25	£24,248,000.00	
26	£24,384,000.00	
27	£12,163,000.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£442,473,000.00</b>	

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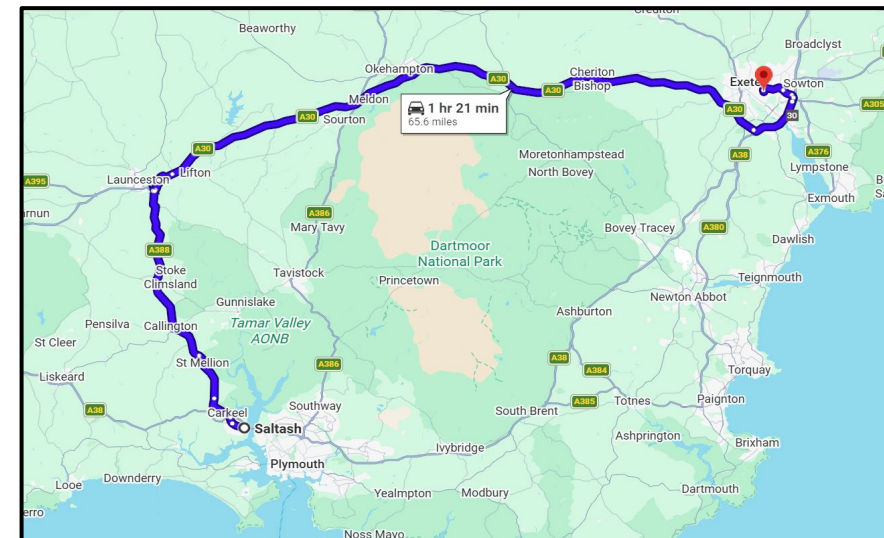
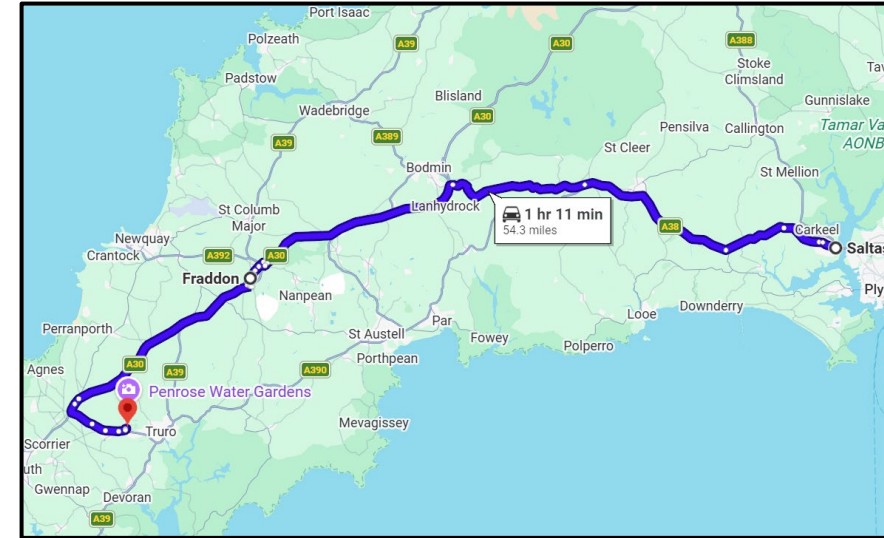
# Health care provision

The communities of Southeast and North Cornwall are heavily reliant on Derriford hospital in Plymouth for hospital and A&E services.

Increasingly, services previously provided at local GP's are also being provided instead at Derriford (bloods for instance).

There is no other hospital providing comparable services closer than Treliske in Truro or the Royal Devon & Exeter in Exeter. Treliske in Truro is 54 miles and The Royal Devon & Exeter 66 miles (if avoiding the bridge) from the two Cornish communities closest to the bridge and ferry (Saltash and Torpoint).

- Unlike the Humber Bridge
- Unlike the Mersey Gateway Bridge and Silver Jubilee Bridge in Merseyside.





# Employment, Education, Leisure and Commerce

Saltash and Torpoint are both small communities heavily dependent on Plymouth for employment, education (especially further education), leisure activities and commerce.

Similarly, businesses in Saltash and Torpoint are often reliant on Plymouth as a source of staff.

The communities either side of the Humber, Dartford and Mersey crossings are all large enough to be self-sufficient for these services.

Unlike the Humber, which has Multiple Enterprise Zones on both sides of the crossing, residents of SE Cornwall can only access better employment, training and education opportunities by crossing the bridge or ferry, a toll being due in either case.

## Pollution

Known pollution problems at St Anne's Chapel and Gunnislake (Air Quality Management Area) as this route is often used to avoid the Tolls. This is getting progressively worse as the tolls increase and locals report increasing use of the road by HGV's.

We receive complaints from residents of North Road in Saltash alleging they suffer pollution from queueing traffic caused by people trying to bypass the Saltash tunnel during periods of congestion.

The Dart, Mersey and Humber crossings do not have toll booths so do not cause traffic tailbacks and the resulting pollution.



# Summary



## Reminder of what we need.

- **Option 1. The preference:** Fund both crossings from the National Highways budget so that they become free to all users at the point of use. Potentially, there could be significant savings in staffing costs under this arrangement.
- **Option 2. The compromise:** A nationally subsidised local user discount scheme that supports unlimited use of both crossings for a low fixed price that is payable annually. The definition of “local” would need to be agreed and the Act amended accordingly.
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PRESENTATION ENDS