

Department for Transport

J L Elkins, Esq.
Clerk to the Company
The Company of Proprietors of
Whitchurch Bridge
20 Glynswood
Chinnor
Oxon., OX39 4JE

David Lamberti
Road Strategy Division
Department for Transport
Zone 3/03b
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DR

Contact: Dean Bolton
Direct line: 020 7944 6154
Fax: 020 7944 2195
GTN: 3533
dean.bolton@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Web Site: www.dft.gov.uk

6th April 2005

Sir

THE WHITCHURCH BRIDGE - PROPOSED REVISION OF CLASSIFICATIONS AND TOLL CHARGES

I am directed by the Secretary of State for Transport to refer to the application by The Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge (the Company) under the Transport Charges &c. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1954 (the 1954 Act) to revise the maximum tolls that can be charged for the use of the Whitchurch Bridge.

2. The existing classifications and tolls charged are as follows:

Current level of toll charges

Classification of Vehicles	Toll
1 Passenger vehicle constructed or adapted to carry not more than 8 seated passengers, excluding the driver; goods vehicle not exceeding 2 tonnes maximum gross weight.	10p
2 Passenger vehicle constructed or adapted to carry more than 8 but not more than 16 seated passengers, excluding the driver; goods vehicle other than in Class 1, not exceeding 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight.	40p
3 Passenger vehicle constructed or adapted to carry more than 16 seated passengers, excluding the driver; goods vehicle exceeding 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight.	100p

Proposed level of toll charges

3. The Company proposes to simplify the classification of vehicles by reducing the number of classes to two. The new classes and the proposed toll levels are as follows:

Classification of Vehicles		Toll
1	Vehicle not exceeding 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight	20p
2	Vehicle exceeding 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight	200p

4. The Secretary of State, in reaching his decision, has considered his obligations under the legislation mentioned above that he must

“...have regard to the financial position and future prospects of the undertaking and shall not make any revision of charges which in his opinion would be likely to result in the undertaking receiving an annual revenue either substantially less or substantially more than adequate to meet such expenditure on the working, management and maintenance of the undertaking and such other costs, charges and expenses of the undertaking as are properly chargeable to revenue, including reasonable contributions to any reserve, contingency or other fund and, where appropriate, a reasonable return upon the investment of the Company of the Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge in the bridge.”

5. As such, he has taken into account information supplied by the Company on past, current and future performance and future expenditure on the maintenance of the undertaking.

6. Since the last revision of tolls in July 1998, the Company states that specific conditions affecting the bridge operations have resulted in more significant cost increases, these are:

- significant increases in staff costs due to both changes in employment legislation and increased competition from other local sources of employment;
- significant increases in maintenance costs and capital expenditure in order to meet the highest standards of operation and safety expected;
- no increases in traffic volumes (as measured by the Company's traffic counter). Therefore, after taking account of all possible efficiency gains in toll collection the income of the Company is effectively capped subject only to approved toll increases;
- poor performance of stock markets over the last few years, resulting in lower investment income and lower expectations of future returns; and
- advice from consulting engineers on future maintenance indicating the need to build up funds for major refurbishment of the bridge between 2010 and 2015.

7. As well as simplifying the toll classification, the Company is seeking to improve its methods of toll collection and reduce the need for cash handling by encouraging regular users to take advantage of the discount prepay arrangements.

8. The Secretary of State has received one objection to the application. This objection was formally withdrawn so enabling the application to be considered without a public inquiry. However, the objector asked for his views to be considered when reviewing the application. The grounds of the objection were:

