

Whitchurch Bridge toll rising to 40p... unless you speak out!

The Whitchurch Bridge Company is planning to double the toll to 40p in July 2009 – this would represent a five-fold increase over the last six years. The only way to block the rise is for users to object in writing to the Secretary of State for Transport by 26 December, thus forcing a public inquiry. Are you on board?

KEY FACTS:

★ The Bridge Company claims that the cost of the planned replacement of the bridge in 2013 has risen from £0.97 million (2004 quote) to £3.22 million (2008 quote), thus tolls need to rise to cover the shortfall.

★ At the moment, regular users benefit from discounted crossings by using a Bridge Card. However, this discount is at the discretion of the Bridge Company, and can be changed or even withdrawn at any time without either approval from the Department of Transport or consultation with users. At February 2009 discounted rates, a user making one return journey a day across the bridge will pay £101 a year in tolls, compared with £120 vehicle tax (Band B) to use the entire UK road network. The Bridge Company projects that this would rise to £146 within four years. At 40p per crossing, this would come to £292 per year.

★ Transport infrastructure projects are normally paid for by shareholders, loans or the government. The Bridge Company wants current users to fund 80% of the rebuilding project before it starts in 2013.

★ The Bridge Company has increased its dividends to shareholders by 60% over the past three years and is planning to increase them further. There is nothing in the toll increase application to suggest that the Bridge Company is going to ask current shareholders to contribute to the cost of rebuilding the bridge, either by a rights issue or by inviting new shareholders to subscribe.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

★ The Bridge Company could freeze the tolls, get a larger loan and use income from tolls before and after 2013 to repay the loan.

★ A weight limit of 3 tonnes could be imposed to extend the life of the current bridge. The Bridge Company says that this would have a 'significant adverse effect on the local community'. Does the local community agree?

★ South Oxfordshire District Council or Oxfordshire County Council could adopt or purchase the bridge and remove the tolls.

HOW TO OBJECT:

To register your objection you need to write to **both** the following addresses **by 26 December**:

Secretary of State for Transport c/o Julian Smith Roads Strategy Division Department for Transport, Zone 3/05 Great Minster House 76 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DR	The Company of Proprietors of Whitchurch Bridge The Toll House Whitchurch Bridge Pangbourne Reading RG8 7DF
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For more information and copies of all the relevant documents, including a standard letter of objection, please visit www.tollfreeze.com

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