



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Louise Haigh, Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

Our Ref: RS01636

17 September 2024

Dear Louise,

Re: Tamar Crossings Toll Charges

I am writing on behalf of my constituents to express my support for the proposal to fund the Tamar Crossings through central Government funding, rather than through toll road charges. My constituents rely heavily on this essential transport link between Devon and Cornwall. I believe this change is not only necessary but also critical for the economic well-being of our region.

The Tamar Crossings serve as a lifeline for residents and businesses in both counties. As you are aware, many rely on using the crossings for employment, education, healthcare, and leisure. However, the toll system imposes an additional financial burden, which acts as a barrier to mobility and hinders economic growth. The proposed toll increase to £3.00, up from £1.50 in May 2019, represents a 100% rise in just five years. This exacerbates challenges at a time when many households and businesses are already struggling with rising costs.

The current toll regime places undue strain on residents, with those crossing just twice daily facing an annual cost of up to £1000, which can double for two-car households. For businesses, especially those requiring frequent crossings or operating larger vehicles, the costs are much more significant. This has a detrimental effect on local recruitment and business development, as the tolls deter potential employees and clients from engaging with businesses across the Tamar.

Commuters have had to face significant congestion issues related to outdated toll collection. The Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Joint Committee have also not taken adequate steps to improve efficiency or identify cost savings. These barriers to growth are unsustainable, particularly when wages in Cornwall and Plymouth have not kept pace with toll increases.

I would like to draw your attention to the precedent set by National Highways with the Dartford and Mersey crossings, where local residents benefit from heavily subsidised toll schemes. Similarly, the Humber Bridge received £150 million in government support under the coalition government to avoid a toll increase. These examples highlight the disparity in treatment between different regions of the UK and show that government intervention is both possible and justifiable.

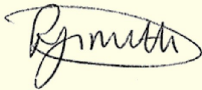
It is clear that the ongoing reliance on toll increases to fund the Tamar Crossings is no longer viable. The "user pays" principle is flawed in this context, as there are no practical alternatives for those crossing the Tamar. In contrast to other toll schemes, where users have a choice of routes, many residents in my constituency and beyond have no such option. A 32-mile detour through Gunnislake is neither realistic, environmentally sustainable, nor efficient.

Central government funding for the Tamar Crossings would alleviate the financial pressures on local residents and businesses, promote economic growth, and align with the government's broader objectives of supporting regional development. This proposal would also be extremely popular with commuters who have long felt disadvantaged by the current toll system.

I urge you to seriously consider rejecting the toll increase and explore alternative funding mechanisms for the Tamar Crossings, as has been done with similar infrastructure projects elsewhere in the country. This is a critical issue for the future prosperity of both Devon and Cornwall, and I believe your intervention is the most effective solution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, enclosed in a thin oval outline. The signature appears to read "Rebecca Smith".

Rebecca Smith MP
Member of Parliament for South West Devon