FORTH ESTUARY TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

The following is the response of the Forth Estuary Transport Authority (FETA) to the Capital Investment Committee’s call for views on the general principles of the Forth Road Bridge Bill introduced into the Scottish Parliament on 11 December 2012. This response is also made to assist the Finance Committee’s examination of the Bill.

FETA is the successor Authority to the Forth Road Bridge Joint Board (FRBJB) and is the Authority responsible for the maintenance and operation of the Forth Road Bridge (FRB). The background to the establishment of FETA and the FRBJB are well described in the Policy Memorandum accompanying the Forth Road Bridge Bill.

Consultations over the arrangements for the operation and maintenance of both the existing bridge and the new crossing have been ongoing between Transport Scotland and FETA staff since early 2011. Indeed, discussions over some of the technical issues concerning both bridges preceded that date.

These discussions have been open and extensive. Naturally, the Authority’s preferred option was to remain responsible for the maintenance and operation of the existing bridge and be delegated the responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the new Forth Crossing. The Authority considered that the experience of the staff and the involvement of locally elected members from the Constituent Councils in providing local accountability, had proven to be a successful model for managing the existing bridge and could be expanded to include the new crossing.

However, although that option was not selected by the Scottish Government, FETA are pleased that the principle of a single body having responsibility for both bridges has been included in the Bill and that the expertise of the FETA staff, and the resources of the Authority at South Queensferry, will be fully utilised.

The existing bridge has a large footprint in the existing communities on both sides of the Forth and FETA has good relations with these communities. The new crossing is likely to have a similar impact and FETA welcomes the setting up of the Forth Estuary Forum. This Forum will hopefully continue the work of the Authority in ensuring that the local communities are fully engaged with the management of these structures.

The Authority particularly welcomes the intention that all FETA Staff will be protected under the Transfer of Undertakings (Employment) Regulations and that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the transfer. In addition, the Authority is grateful for the work carried out by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to ensure that it will be a contract requirement that the appointed bridge operating company will be admitted to the Lothian Pension Fund thus allowing FETA employees to continue with their current pension scheme. This will be helpful in efforts to retain the unique
knowledge and experience that has been built up amongst long-serving staff at the Authority.

The Authority was concerned that sufficient funding for maintenance, essential repairs and strengthening works on Forth Road Bridge would be continued after the dissolution of the Authority. Each year FETA publishes a 15 year rolling plan for such capital schemes and the current programme of works include:

- Replacement of the main deck joints
- Suspended span under deck access refurbishment
- Suspended spans under deck gantry refurbishment
- Strengthening and painting of the suspended span truss
- Resurfacing of the orthotropic deck and approach viaducts
- Painting of the approach viaduct box girders

However, the Authority is pleased that the Scottish Government have recognised in the Financial Memorandum that these capital works are essential and will have to be funded whatever the arrangements are for future governance of the bridge.

The Authority is also pleased to note that the Scottish Government have recognised the importance of the existing byelaws made by FETA and that provision will be made to replace some of the byelaws using road traffic regulations.

FETA is an active member of associations and bridge groups in Scotland, the UK and internationally. The maintenance of these large bridges is a specialised area of expertise and close contacts with the owners and operators of similar bridges from Japan to the USA have been established by FETA. These associations have proven to be crucial during the inspections and major retrofitting works carried out on the bridge not least in the work done on the main cables. FETA would like to see that these associations are continued within the new arrangements proposed.

FETA’s 15 year planning cycle is a reflection of the long term nature of most the Forth Road Bridge’s inspection and maintenance requirements. The majority of capital projects are years in the planning and have to be carefully scheduled and prioritised in order to minimise the impact on traffic, manage interdependencies and make best use of resources. Therefore, any contract awarded for the maintenance and operation of these major bridges should be of a duration that encourages the operator to take a similar long term view.

FETA considers that to achieve this would require the minimum contract duration to be set at 10 years.

The priority of FETA has always been the safe and efficient operation and maintenance of the Forth Road Bridge. The Authority will continue to work closely with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government to make a success of the proposed new working arrangements to ensure that the level of service provided for nearly 50 years to users crossing the Forth is continued.
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23 January 2013