

# Tunnel tolls: MP calls for a 'Wirral Discount'

Esther writes to Chancellor after 'Mersey Gateway' decision

**E**sther McVey MP has written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer following the announcement that residents in Halton will be given free use of the new, second crossing, the so-called 'Mersey Gateway'.

The Wirral West MP is asking for the same consideration to be given to regular users of the Mersey tunnels, who, since the last rise in tolls, are paying

almost £850.00 a year.

Esther said: "The problem facing Wirral drivers will only worsen as the effects of the ill-thought out Mersey Tunnels Act 2004 ratchets up the costs to drivers.

"It cannot be right that Wirral's residents are being used as a source of income for Labour controlled Merseytravel to spend as they see fit on whichever pet

project is in favour at the time

"I have opposed the effects of the Mersey Tunnels Act from Day One and I believe that now is the time for us to look at this again."

The Mersey Tunnels Act, passed in 2004, sparked furious protests from across Wirral when it was revealed the Labour-controlled Merseytravel wanted the power to increase tolls on drivers, year after year.

## 2014 Oct Wirral West Conservatives newsletter

"In last month's West Wirral Observer, I reported that I had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, over the tunnel tolls.

This followed the announcement that residents in Runcorn and Halton will be given a 'discount' when the new, second crossing opens in three years. ...

While this is great news for people in Runcorn and Widnes, it does make the situation with the tolls on the two Mersey Tunnels even more unacceptable.

The tolls have long since gone from being a way of repaying the costs of construction and are, instead, an easy source of revenue for Labour-run Merseytravel to spend on their pet projects in Merseyside.

Following my letter to the Chancellor, I arranged to meet Mr Osborne to press the case for a similar discount to be given to Wirral residents using the tunnels.

During that meeting, I made it clear to the Chancellor that, had the majority of Labour MPs in Merseyside not changed the law in 2004, the tolls today would be less of a drag on our economic recovery.

Instead, we have the obscene situation where a handful of Labour councillors from St Helens, Liverpool and Knowsley can vote for an annual increase in the tolls, regardless of the impact it has on our economy in Wirral.

As well as making these points to the Chancellor, I also stressed that the tolls are damaging our economic recovery by adding to the cost of business and increasing the cost of living for everyone who has no choice but to use the tunnels.

Following our meeting, the Chancellor has agreed to look at what can be done. We have worked hard to turn around Labour's record deficit by working to our long-term economic plan which is securing a better future for Britain. There is still more to do and as the economic recovery continues, I want to make sure our area benefits from the economic recovery and is not hindered by this local 'tax on Wirral'.

2014 Dec 9 Wirral Globe story - "Wirral MP calls for tunnel discount for borough's residents as Merseytravel says toll increase would be 'justified'"

Wirral West MP Esther McVey says it is time to end the "merry go round" at Merseytravel and says a discount should be introduced for Wirral residents.

She said: "The only thing growing at Merseytravel is the bill they are charging the motorist.

"Thousands of people using the tolls will be flabbergasted that the councillors who preach their concerns about the 'cost of living' in their campaigns are, at the same time, planning to hit drivers hard through the tolls."

"This is yet another example of why it was wrong of those MPs who gave this power to Merseytravel, through the 2004 Mersey Tunnels Act.

"It's high time we ended this merry go round at Merseytravel - introducing a discount for Wirral residents, similar to the plan for the new crossing at Halton, would be a start."

2015 Mar Wirral West Conservatives newsletter

**Esther McVey's West Wirral Observer**  
Produced at no cost to the taxpayer    Delivered to 55,000 people    www.esthermcvey.com    March 2015

# Campaign forces Tunnel toll u-turn

**Anger from residents and commuters, criticism from Esther McVey MP and the looming General Election all combined to force Labour-run Merseytravel to drop plans for another rise in the tunnel tolls.**

The tunnels, which make massive profits each year, are run by Merseytravel.

11 years ago, when all four Wirral MPs were Labour, Merseytravel was given the power to increase the tolls each year.

Wirral West MP Esther McVey, pictured with toll protestors, said: "Over many years, Merseytravel has accrued vast tunnel toll surpluses, many of which have been squandered on pet schemes such as the £70 million on the failed tram scheme and the massive costs of its new offices at Mann Island.

"The proposed increase this year would have hit drivers, just as our local economy is growing again.

"While I am pleased that our campaign persuaded a 'rethink' on the increase, I have no doubt that Merseytravel will be back next year asking for even more.

"The only way to end this nonsense is for a permanent discount to be given to regular tunnel users, most of whom are from Wirral. If I am re-elected as MP for Wirral West in May, I shall continue this fight."

**NO TO TUNNEL TOLLS INCREASE**

**SAY NO TO TUNNEL TOLLS INCREASE**

2015 Apr 17 L'pool Echo "Wirral residents could be exempt from tunnel tolls under Tory review"  
Chancellor George Osborne is expected to announce a review into whether Wirral residents could be exempt from tolls

2015 Apr 17 L'pool Echo "Wirral tunnel toll review not dependent on Merseyside success"  
A review of Mersey Tunnel tolls that could see the fare axed for Wirral residents is not dependent on the Conservatives winning a seat in the region.

Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond said if the Tories won the General Election the party would work for everyone, regardless of where they held seats.

His comments came as he visited “first class” Bromborough-based aerospace firm Teledyne CML while backing John Bell’s campaign in Wirral South.

Asked whether a Tory victory on Merseyside was needed for the review to become reality, Mr Hammond told the ECHO: “It’s independent of where we win seats, we govern for all of the country not just where we win seats and I think if you look at our track record over the course of this Parliament you will see we have made huge commitments to parts of the country where we don’t have much political representation.”

His views were backed by Mr Bell, who welcomed today’s announcement by George Osborne that the Conservatives could review the Mersey Tunnel fare. A standard journey currently costs £1.70. Mr Bell, who said the announcement came following pressure from himself and Wirral West candidate Esther McVey, said he was aware “that the Mersey is a barrier between Wirral and the rest of the wider Liverpool region” and he was glad to hear the government was moving in the “right direction” over the tolls.

#### 2015 Apr 17 Wirral Globe “Will Chancellor's review see Mersey Tunnel tolls axed for Wirral drivers?”

WIRRAL drivers could be exempt from tunnel tolls under a review promised by Chancellor George Osborne.....

Welcoming the review, Ms McVey said: “After more than a decade of campaigning against this unfair tax on the people of Wirral I am delighted I have got the Chancellor to review this deeply unfair situation.

“The tolls have, for too long, been a tax on Wirral drivers to fund spending in Southport, Sefton and St Helens.

“With the new crossing at Halton, the time is now right to look again at the Mersey Tunnels.

“Ever since the outrageous Tunnels Act of 2004, backed by Labour MPs across Merseyside, the surpluses have stacked up at the expense of Wirral’s economy.”

The review will examine the idea of introducing a full exemption or the option of an allowance of a certain number of free journeys each year for Wirral residents.

It will be conducted jointly by the Treasury and Department for Transport.

#### 2015 Apr 21 Liverpool Echo “Tory chairman backs Esther McVey and believes party could win two seats on Merseyside ”

Tory party chairman Grant Shapps ....Speaking outside Hoylake Conservative Club, Mr Shapps said his party “absolutely” wanted her to win Wirral West and said: “She has been a brilliant constituency MP. You heard her talking about the tolls on the tunnel and I know how much she has lobbied on this issue.

“As she rightly said the tunnel tolls came in in 2004 under the previous administration. She has fought to get this review and that’s the type of campaigner she is, always fighting for her constituents.”

#### 2015 April Wirral West election leaflet “Good News for Wirral”

Esther McVey, who opposed the change in the law, back in 2004, has now won the agreement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to carry out a full review of the tolls, including their impact on the Wirral economy.

“...I believe it is time we introduced a discount for residents, along the lines of the scheme planned for the crossings at Runcorn” The Chancellor has agreed to Esther's call for a review and has confirmed it will be carried out by the end of this year.

2015 Apr 20 George Osborne in a BBC radio interview

The Chancellor was being interviewed at Runcorn and was asked about the bridge tolls and the Tunnels tolls. He spoke about residents not paying tolls at Halton and continued:

**"I am confident we will be able to create a similar scheme for residents on the Wirral so that they don't have to pay the tolls."**

2015 Apr 30 L'pool Echo "Tunnel tolls spark row between Wirral West front-runners"

Ms McVey told the audience she had been fighting for 10 years to get rid of the tolls. She said "thank goodness" Chancellor George Osborne has promised a review on the tolls.

2015 May 4 Wirral Globe "Chancellor promises to 'ease the burden' on Wirral motorists by cutting tunnel tolls"

CHANCELLOR George Osborne made a promise to 'reduce the burden' on Wirral motorists by announcing a review of Mersey tunnel tolls which could potentially see them scrapped. During a visit to Birkenhead this afternoon, Mr Osborne confirmed a Conservative government would cut tolls for Wirral residents and small businesses. He added that he was confident they could be scrapped altogether.

It follows 10 years of campaigning against the tolls by West Wirral parliamentary candidate Esther McVey.

...."I've listened to Esther's case. She's powerfully made the argument that the tolls are a real burden on families, working people, and it's also a burden on local businesses here.

"The ratcheting-up of the prices every year is just not acceptable. So I want to cut the tolls, potentially abolish them altogether, for Wirral residents.

"We'll have our review, but it's definitely going to happen....."

2015 May 4 L'pool Echo "General Election 2015: George Osborne vows to slash tunnel tolls in whirlwind Birkenhead visit"

The Mersey tunnel tolls will be cut and possibly abolished altogether for Wirral residents if the Tories win power, chancellor George Osborne today promised.

He told the ECHO that the tolls would be cut for Wirral residents and small businesses at the very least - and that he would look to have them scrapped altogether.

Mr Osborne said: "A Conservative government will cut tolls for Wirral residents and small businesses, which have become increasingly expensive since Labour's decision to allow Merseytravel to increase the tolls each year..."

2015 May 5 L'pool Echo "General Election 2015: General Election 2015: William Hague says Esther McVey could be future Prime Minister"

Responding to the chancellor's pledge on tunnel tolls Mr Hague said: "He's a careful man with money, he has looked at it very carefully, listened to people very carefully. He is very confident that can be done and it's a clear Conservative commitment.

People have been paying for the tunnel for a very long time, for decades now, and they never expected to be paying for it for so long.""

2015 May eve of election Wirral West election leaflet – see next page

Stop press...Stop press...Stop press...Stop press...

# Chancellor George Osborne pledges to cut the Mersey Tunnel tolls for Wirral residents

## The choice on Thursday for Wirral West: Higher tunnel tolls with Labour versus lower, or no tolls, with the Conservatives

The closing days of the 2015 Election Campaign saw Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, come to Wirral on Bank Holiday Monday.



Mr Osborne announced that, following lobbying by Esther McVey, he has agreed that the tunnel tolls must be cut and even abolished once and for all.

As revealed by Esther in her last newsletter, the tolls now make a massive £10 million surplus for Labour-run Merseytravel.

Mr Osborne said that the toll was acting as a barrier to better transport links which are vital to a strong economy in the region.

Esther said: "The tolls are a tax on Wirral. The surplus is not being used for the benefit of Wirral and the effect of the tolls is a drag on our local economy.

"I'm delighted that the chancellor agrees and has pledged to cut them and abolish them later."

Only the Conservatives will abolish the tunnel tolls. A Government led by Ed Miliband won't. The choice on Thursday couldn't be any clearer for people in Wirral.

**"During a visit to Birkenhead this afternoon, Mr Osborne confirmed a Conservative government would cut tolls for Wirral residents and small businesses. He added that he was confident they could be scrapped altogether."**  
WIRRAL GLOBE: 4th May

**George Osborne says Mersey tunnel tolls will "definitely" be cut by Tories**

LIVERPOOL ECHO: 4th May