

2nd February 2013

Dear Councillor,

At your Budget meeting on Thursday you will be considering the level of Tunnel tolls from April. We are contacting you to ask that you do not support any increase in tolls, though as the Authority's draft budget for 2013/14 assumes that there will be a toll increase in April it seems that someone may have already decided.

In brief the position is this -

- a) There is no legal requirement that the tolls payable be increased.
- b) With the planned tolls increase for 2013/14 the Tunnels profit will be £10,053,000. Without a tolls increase the Mersey Tunnels would still have a profit of about £7.4 million.
Despite apparently suggesting to the Daily Post that they are now more open, the Merseytravel budgets continue to fail to make clear that there is a profit.
- c) Without the tolls increase, the Mersey Tunnels are the joint fourth most expensive tolled crossing, with the increase they will be the joint third most expensive.
- d) It has been suggested that tolls need to rise in line with fare increases on passenger transport. This ignores the fact that there are massive subsidies towards the use of public transport while the Tunnels receive no subsidy.
- e) Liverpool and Wirral are two of the worst places in England for employment, and toll increases will not help.

These points and others are explained in more detail in the attached annex. Most of these points have been raised with members before, but there are some new members who will not have seen any of the previous submissions from us.

We have gone into some detail to try and show that we are not making unfounded claims, if you have any questions, and in particular if you believe that the MTUA has got the facts wrong, then please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Loudon
Chairman
Mersey Tunnels Users Association

Submission to MITA members from MTUA

THE LAW

1. It is usually claimed that the Authority has no choice and “*Under the Mersey Tunnels Act we are required to raise tolls in line with the retail price index except in exceptional circumstances.*” (The *Mersey Tunnels Act* is of course the 2004 one that Merseytravel managed to get through Parliament and the “*exceptional circumstances*” are matters of an “*economic or social*” nature in Merseyside.)
2. The 2004 Act was a short one and almost all of it dealt with tolls. Despite its brevity the sections are something of a jumble. Whatever Merseytravel may have intended it to mean, in our view, what this law actually says about toll increases can be summarised as -
 - a) Firstly, that under Section 91 of the 2004 Act, tolls “*may be levied*” (our emphasis) by the Authority at a maximum based on the level of tolls it was authorised to demand under the “*Tunnels (Revision of Tolls and Traffic Classification) Order 1991 (S.I. 1992/299)*”, as increased by the change in the RPI since November 1999.
 - b) Secondly, that under Section 92, the Authority can apply to the Government to allow an even bigger increase.
 - c) Thirdly, that if the tolls payable are to be increased under section 91 as above then under the provisions of section 92C subsection 2, any increase should have ““*regard to such matters of an economic or social nature within the county of Merseyside as the Authority considers to be relevant*” and if “*it is necessary or appropriate*” then it must exercise the power in subsection (1) of the section (see below).
 - d) Fourthly, that the Authority may reduce or remove any or all tolls as per section 92C subsection 1 -
 - "(1) The Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority may—
 - "(a) cease to demand, take and recover tolls in respect of traffic or any class of traffic passing through or into any of the tunnels;
 - "(b) resume demanding, taking and recovering such tolls; and
 - "(c) allow traffic, or any class of traffic, to use any of the tunnels without paying tolls or on payment of tolls at a reduced rate during such hours, on such

occasions or in such other circumstances as it may from time to time determine.”

3. It seems that Merseytravel believe that subsection 1 either has no meaning or that it only has meaning in the context of subsection 2. In our view such a belief would be wrong, for the following reasons:-
 - a) There is nothing in the 2004 Act which explicitly or implicitly indicates that the application of subsection 1 depends on any other part of the Act.
 - b) The heading of Section 92C is “**Power to cease demanding tolls, etc.**”, and the wording of subsection 1 is far wider than would be required to merely postpone toll increases. The wording is wider because this subsection of section 92C of the 2004 Act was not new, it replaced section 91 (2) of the County of Merseyside Act 1980* using identical wording except that the new section referred to the MPTA instead of the County. (* The 1980 Act mainly consolidated the local legislation that affected the County Council.)
 - c) This general power to reduce or remove tolls as far as we know is the only statutory basis for most and possibly all of these -
 - i) The lower toll for “tag” users,
 - ii) The concessions for disabled drivers,
 - iii) Certain drivers at certain times apparently not being expected to pay,
 - iv) Class 2 vehicles only having to pay class 1 tolls between April 2005 and March 2008; and class 4 vehicles only having to pay class 3 tolls between April 2005 and March 2006,
 - v) The tolls that were specified in the “*Tunnels (Revision of Tolls and Traffic Classification) Order 1991*” which is the base level for the current tolls being not applied in full till 1999,
4. Each year since the 2004 Act was passed, the Authority has made an Order increasing the “*authorised*” tolls to the maximum permitted under the RPI formula, and has at the same time included an “*Explanatory note*” which the Order says “*is not part of the Order*” (our emphasis). In this note it says that “*the tolls which will be charged*” are a “*discounted cash toll*” and a “*discounted toll for AVI users*” with the amounts of these tolls set out.. The law makes no mention of “*discounts*” and the Section 92C subsection 1 power could be exercised at any time for any reason.
5. It has been claimed that it was never intended that tolls would ever be removed. This is not so. Section 65 of the first Mersey Tunnels Act (1925) said that tolls could only be collected “until the expiration of a period not exceeding twenty years from the opening of the tunnel”. Since 1925 there have been numerous Acts which

have moved the goal posts until Merseytravel's Act of 2004, in effect took the goalposts away.

6. It has been said that the system for almost automatic Mersey Tunnel toll increases is the same as at some other tolled crossings. In fact if an increase is wanted, then at most tolled crossings an application has to be made to the Government and a public inquiry may be held to see if an increase is really needed. The only tolled crossing where there is an automatic annual increase is the Severn Crossing. The Severn Crossing is different from the Mersey Tunnels in that the higher the tolls then the sooner the point is reached where under the current law the tolls should be removed (though whatever Government is in power at the time may get the law changed, or as at Dartford use some other law to extend a toll). Toll increases on the Mersey Tunnels are not used to pay the debt off earlier, they just increase the surplus that is transferred to the Authority's general funds.
7. In the past Merseytravel have also said that the system for tolls increases at Dartford was similar to the Mersey Tunnels. It is correct that there was in theory such a system at Dartford up to March 2003 but what happened in practice was that there were no Dartford toll increases for cars between September 1996 and November 2008 (12 years). There have been toll increases since 2008 but they are not related to inflation, only to how much the Government of the day can get away with. (Though for locals on either side of the crossing there have been no toll increases as their 20 pence toll was introduced in November 2008 when the tolls for other traffic were increased.)

THE TUNNELS FINANCES

8. Members may have seen a recent (10th January) editorial in the Daily Post which started “*MERSEYTRAVEL is to be congratulated for setting out the financial position facing the Mersey Tunnels so clearly*”. It is not absolutely clear what the authority have now revealed to the Post but in the past even members of the Authority may not have been clear about the state of the Tunnel finances, particularly as it was said that Merseytravel “does not make a profit from the Tunnels.”
9. One example of the real state of the Tunnels finances being obscure is the Authority’s budget for the Tunnels which shows the Tunnels as breaking even, when in fact they make a large surplus - the budgeted surplus for the current financial year was £6,667,000. With higher traffic now expected and with the planned toll increase, the surplus for the year starting from April is £10,053,00. This feat of opaqueness is achieved by showing the amount that is transferred from the Tunnels to the benefit of the MITA general fund or the Ferries under the heading of “*Capital Financing*”. Another example is the leaflet that accompanies the Council Tax bills. Prior to April 2007 this leaflet showed the revenue surplus on the Tunnels, but since 2007, Council Tax payers have been given the wrong impression that the Tunnel tolls only just cover the expenditure.
10. The above is based on the budgets, so to what extent is the actual position in the final accounts different? The answer is that we don’t know. Up to March 2007, Merseytravel used to “publish” their accounts for the Tunnels, but at some point after then, it seems that the separate account for the Tunnels ceased to appear. Far from being open, it seems to us that what was actually happening was further obscured. We have asked for copies of the accounts, including those for the Tunnels, since 2006/07 and we are waiting to see what we get.
11. Though the budget and the Council tax leaflets do not show that the Tunnels make a surplus, a spokesman did at one stage admit that there was one but said that “*The Mersey Tunnels Act also requires us to invest surplus money into transport projects*” The real position is that the 2004 Act removed all limits on what Merseytravel could use the tolls for. The only constraint is a written undertaking that lawyers made to a Lords committee on behalf of the Authority. Not only will almost no one have seen this undertaking, it is fairly meaningless as the surplus from the Tunnels goes into the Authority’s General Fund, and the only purpose that can be identified is the money that goes to subsidise the Ferries (a payment which seems to have no legal basis). The rest of the money stays in the general pot and in effect helps to fund all the authority’s spending, not just “transport projects”.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

12. In previous years we have brought the “English Indices of Deprivation” to Authority members attention . There has been no new index published since the one for 2010 which was published in March 2011. That showed on the “Rank of employment scale” Liverpool was then the 2nd worst and Wirral was the 10th worst out of 326 authorities.
13. At a lower level of the indices, England was divided into 32 thousand “Lower Layer Super Output Areas” (LSOAs). On the Index for Employment, 26 LSOAs in Liverpool and the Wirral were amongst the worst 100 in England, even though the two authorities made up only 1.4 % of England’s total population. The 26 included the 4th, 5th, 6th and 10th worst LSOAs for employment in England. Several billion pounds of European and Government money over the last two decades should have made the Merseyside employment position less bad than it would otherwise have been, but who would believe that real new industry is going to be eager to locate in an area that not only has tolls but has escalating tolls?
14. At the 2010 meeting to decide on a tolls increase, members were told about a report commissioned by Merseytravel from consultants. It seems that the report was subsequently discussed by members at a private meeting. The report apparently suggested that tolls were good for the Merseyside “*regional economy*” and particularly good for Wirral where it was said that “*600 retail jobs*” would be lost if tolls were removed.
15. The view of the consultants on how tolls benefited Wirral was not shared by the businesses themselves. At the time that Merseytravel was getting its Bill through Parliament, there was opposition from the spokeswoman for the Birkenhead shops, the Birkenhead market traders and the Wirral Chamber of Commerce.
16. In the opinion of almost everyone other than Merseytravel and any consultants employed by them, tolls also harm the whole city region economy because they are a barrier (physical, financial and psychological) that restricts movement and “free trade”. They also tend to create a “Wrong Side of the tracks”, with most of the jobs and facilities concentrated on one side of the tolls barrier.
17. Reports on other area’s tolls have come up with an opposite conclusion to the report that Merseytravel commissioned, including -
 - a) In November 2012, a report was published on the effect of the Severn Crossing tolls. The report had been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly . The report says that removing the Severn tolls would mean an increase in productivity / “*gross value added*” in South Wales of £107 million a year

- b) The four local authorities who run the Humber Crossing commissioned a report which was published in October 2008. It concentrated on the effect of removing toll barriers to movement on “*agglomeration*” * benefits and said that the “*city-regional*” benefit of removing the tolls would sum to £1.1 billion for the period 2009 to 2032. There were two other reports on the Humber tolls that came up with similar conclusions.

* For those who may not be familiar with the use of this term, Wikipedia says that “*agglomeration*” is used in urban economics to describe the benefits that firms obtain when locating near each other ('agglomerating'). This concept relates to the idea of economies of scale and network effects. Simply put, as more firms in related industries cluster together, costs of production may decline significantly (firms have competing multiple suppliers, greater specialization and division of labor result). Even when multiple firms in the same sector (competitors) cluster, there may be advantages because that cluster attracts more suppliers and customers than a single firm could alone. Cities form and grow to exploit economies of agglomeration.

- c) When the charges were removed on the last tolled crossing of the Clyde in 2006, the Labour Leader of the council mainly effected (West Dunbarton) said that a study commissioned by his council and Renfrewshire Council had concluded that the removal of tolls would lead to the creation of 20,000 extra jobs. This may well have been an exaggeration, but at least he didn't make the amazing claim that tolls benefited the local economy.

SUBSIDIES

18. In the past Merseytravel have said that *“it would be unfair for taxpayers to subsidise the Tunnels”*. This has usually been said in combination with the Merseytravel claim that *“only 3% of the population used the Tunnels”*. (The 3% was initially supposed to be of the population of Merseyside, though someone went one better and said that the 3% referred to the population of the Wirral.)
19. So in the real world what is the position with the number of Tunnels users and subsidies? Almost all of the Merseyside population will at some time in the year cross the river between Liverpool and the Wirral. Apart from seagulls, boat owners and hardy swimmers, there are only three ways to make this journey - through the road tunnels, through the Mersey Rail tunnel or on the Mersey Ferry. About 80 per cent of these cross river journeys are made through the road tunnels.
20. The Tunnel Users have never been daft enough to believe that the Authority would ever subsidise the Tunnels, though the Councils that the councillors come from and the Government ‘subsidise’ every other road on Merseyside and you have to go a long way from this area to find any significant road that currently has charges on it.
21. We have indeed at various times made proposals to the Authority (which have all been rejected) but those proposals were all about how the profits on the Tunnels should be utilised to remove tolls at certain times e.g. evenings and weekends, or for certain vehicles i.e. buses, or about introducing one way tolls (the tolls for journeys to Liverpool would be doubled and there would be no toll the other way which would reduce congestion at the Wirral exits).
22. Motorists and operators of commercial vehicles that use the Tunnels are already used to being treated as cash cows by all Governments. They currently pay about one billion pounds a week in fuel duty and other taxes to the Government, with only a very small part of that being spent on road maintenance or construction. Tunnels Users believe that some of those taxes should be used to finance the Tunnels.
23. It has been suggested by Merseytravel that despite the taxes and the tolls, Tunnels Users are getting a good deal compared with public transport users. This ignores the fact that most public transport is heavily subsidised. The Authority’s draft revenue budget for 2013/14 has been summarised below by us to show how much finance Merseytravel had to cover spending net of service income and how it was to be spent. (We have had to base the figures for number of passengers on those in the 2012/13 budget, as the Merseytravel budget for 2013/14 seems to have omitted the usual ‘Service details’ which makes it harder for the public to know the facts.)

24. The levy on the districts for 2013/14 is to be £127 million, in addition to that the Authority has at least another £103 million (£93 million from ‘Special Rail Grant’ and £10 million from Tunnels profit). Where is this £230 million going?
- a) The Tunnels of course is receiving no subsidy.
 - b) Rail is to get about £100 million (not counting the “reimbursement of rolling stock lease”). Based on last year’s budget there are 40 million journeys a year by the rail services, so the rail subsidy is about £2.50 for each journey.
 - c) Ferries are to get about £3.5 million, though the budget is presented in a way which obscures the level of subsidy to the extent that the Ferries are shown as making a profit. Based on last year’s budget the Ferries have about 650 thousand passengers a year, so the ferries subsidy works out at about £5 a passenger.
 - d) Buses were to get as direct subsidies about £26 million. Based on last year’s budget this covered about 14 million passenger journeys, i.e. a subsidy of about £2 per passenger for those bus services that get a direct subsidy.
25. That leaves £100 million or so that we have not shown. This is accounted for by the spending on travel concession payments to the bus, rail and ferry operators and an amazing £40 million or so of other expenditure which Merseytravel does not allocate between bus, rail and ferries (though anything remotely to do with the Tunnels is charged there), so the real subsidy is even higher than the amounts shown above.
26. We have not mentioned the trams, because there are none. But it has been reported that Merseytravel spent £70 million on the scheme even though it could not be completed without massive Government subsidy which was not agreed. If it had gone ahead then the total subsidy per passenger journey might have been even higher than the subsidies on the other forms of public transport.

EFFECT OF TOLLS ON TRAFFIC

27. Merseytravel have claimed that tolls are needed to reduce traffic, and the report that it commissioned from consultants in 2010 said that "*Were the tolls to be removed, the traffic demand could increase by up to 40%*". Similar claims were made in Scotland before the last tolls were removed there and the claims were "proved" by traffic models. The reality when the tolls were removed in Scotland was that there was less congestion and traffic flowed more smoothly as there were no toll delays and drivers stopped making large detours to avoid tolls.
28. The current congestion in the Mersey Tunnels is due to three main factors – the tolls acting as a barrier to a smooth flow of traffic, the poor roads near the Tunnels exits in Liverpool and the frequent and we believe badly timed Tunnels closures. The solution to this congestion is not higher tolls.
29. That the Tunnels without tolls would not be a bottleneck is we believe demonstrated by various things including -
- a) The Runcorn bridge with 4 lanes carries as much traffic as the 8 Tunnels lanes.
 - b) A report in October 2010 from Tom-Tom (the sat-nav firm) named the most congested roads in Britain. The second worst was the Wallasey Tunnel approaches, and the third worst was the "*B5159 in Warburton*" which is the approach to another toll barrier at a bridge crossing the Manchester Ship Canal.
 - c) In the 1960s there used to be almost total gridlock in Liverpool City centre during the evening peak. Even before the opening of the Wallasey tunnel that gridlock was removed. The way that they did it was that they removed the toll collection on the Liverpool side, so that all collection was on the Birkenhead side and vehicles queuing to pay the toll were no longer clogging Liverpool city centre.
 - d) Almost all people on the road in peak periods are travelling then because they have no choice. In most cases they will also have little choice about their method of transport in terms of their destination and when they need to be there. Tolls do deter some traffic or encourage it to use a longer route (in the case of the Tunnels, they may use the Runcorn bridge), tolls will even encourage some people and businesses to leave the area, but most of the people deterred will be those making optional journeys which are usually off peak.

DEBT

30. It is sometimes suggested that tolls can not be reduced or removed because of the Tunnels “debt”. Arguably all of this debt is artificial. No other roads in the area from motorways to the smallest street have any debt, this is because their costs were either met by the Government or local authorities or because the debt was treated as a general one and not specific to a particular road.
31. The Tunnels “debt” is little, if anything, to do with the cost of building the Tunnels. The Birkenhead Tunnel cost £7 million to build. The cost of building the Wallasey Tunnel was £37 million.
So far the tolls collected on the Tunnels comes to over £800 million. This could have covered the £44 million cost of building the Tunnels many times over.
32. According to what was in the Daily Post on the 10th January, they were told by Merseytravel that there is - “£59m still owed on tunnels”. This is more than the £44 million cost of building the Tunnels. Why?
- a) From 1971, when the Wallasey Tunnel opened, the Tunnels operated at a loss and instead of either the Government providing money or the tolls being raised to a level that would have covered expenditure or the loss being charged to ratepayers, the Government for a long time allowed the loss to be met by yet more borrowing and the debt spiralled up.
 - b) At last from 1988 the Government stopped further borrowing to cover losses. And though the tolls were increased in 1989, there were still losses which had to be charged to ratepayers and Council tax payers. The result was that from October 1988 to March 1992 the rates etc bore about £27.5 million of losses. There was a further toll increase in 1992 - to double the level of those payable in 1988, and the losses stopped. Later Merseytravel got a legal opinion which they said meant that they could charge these losses back to the Tunnels. Though the losses had been charged to ratepayers and Council tax payers, Merseytravel said that it had borrowed the money from the District Councils. They also added interest to these charges - at 9%. In our view Merseytravel’s action was clearly against what was allowed in the various Tunnels Acts, but between 1994 and 2004 they charged about £22.5 million to the Tunnels.
 - c) Though Merseytravel said what they were doing from 1994 was legal they included authorisation for it through their Tunnels Act 2004 (it is in the written undertaking that Merseytravel’s lawyers gave to the Lords). In any case, the Act effectively gave them carte blanche to take more money from the Tunnels. As at the moment we have not seen the Tunnels accounts for the period since 2006/07, we have had to calculate the amount that Merseytravel has taken from

the Tunnels since 2004 from the ‘revised estimates’ in each year’s budget. These indicate that from April 2004 to March 2013, Merseytravel will have taken just over £58 million from the Tunnels. Bizarrely though Merseytravel since it started taking money in 1994 have received over £80 million (22.5 plus 58), it seems that the Tunnels still owe Merseytravel part of the £27.5 million borne by the ratepayers etc. You may also have noticed that by coincidence the amount of £58 million that Merseytravel has taken since 2004 is about the same as the £59 million total Tunnels “debt” outstanding.

- d) The Tunnels have had to bear not only all the maintenance costs but the cost of toll collection and administration. Also unlike every other road in Britain - including tolled crossing - the Tunnels have been charged with the cost of policing since 1936 when a private police force was set up. We estimate that this policing cost alone has totalled more than the “£59m still owed on tunnels”.
- e) Money and assets that belonged to the Tunnels were at various times taken, particularly when the County Council was in charge, though the amounts taken then are dwarfed by the £80 million that Merseytravel has taken..

33. In summary the so called “debt” of the Tunnels is to a large extent a reflection of the way that Tunnels funds have been taken, monies transferred to Merseytravel and the Tunnels saddled with costs that anywhere else would not have been charged against tolls.

REQUESTS FOR GOVERNMENT HELP

34. The meeting of the Tunnels, Ferries and Visitor Economy committee on 10th January resolved to “*Request officers to question Government in relation to current thinking on the integration of the Mersey Tunnels into the national road network, in time for the ITA meeting on 7th February 2013, if possible.*” In the context of the short time available and the previous track record of the authorities this will not be taken seriously by anyone.

35. Statements implying that the authorities were asking for help are not new.

- a) At the Authority’s budget meeting in 2011, the chairman said that he was willing to go to the Government and ask them to pay off the “*debt of £65 million*” “*and we will take it*”.
- b) About the same time Merseytravel said that for 13 years Merseytravel had been making appeals to the Government, It said that the appeals “*to have the tolls abolished were unsuccessful*”. “*This organisation, or its predecessor, have tried three times and been told by government where to go basically*”.
- c) Similar claims were made on behalf of Wirral Council before 2006.

36. What is the reality?

- a) Any appeals to the Government by Merseytravel's “*predecessor*” would have to be before 1986 i.e. over 27 years ago. It seems to be a reasonable guess that any attempt made by Merseytravel itself was also very long ago and it is doubtful that after the Labour Government took office in 1997, Merseytravel ever tried to get help to reduce or remove tolls.
- b) In 2005 we made a Freedom of Information request to Wirral Council for documents showing that they had asked the Government for help. We were told in January 2006 that the relevant file “*had in fact been destroyed a couple of years ago because all of the information on it was more than 10 years old*”. We were supplied some later documents. It seems that though the Council did ask for the tolls to be lifted, it (together with Merseytravel) was more concerned that the Government was going to stop Merseytravel from borrowing to cover losses. The documents included a letter to the Government in September 1999. It indeed asked that the Government consider making the Tunnels “*toll free*”, but the main purpose of the letter was to back the Bill that eventually became the Tunnels Act 2004 and gave Merseytravel more power to increase tolls and a new power to use them for its own purposes.

BRIDGES AT RUNCORN

37. Calling the planned new bridge at Runcorn the “Mersey Gateway” is odd but not as crazy as that when it goes ahead there will be less traffic crossing on two tolled bridges than there is now with the one untolled bridge.
38. Merseytravel have been involved with this scheme for a long time. Their main interest presumably was to make sure that if a new bridge was built then it would be tolled. It must have been a bonus for Merseytravel that as part of the scheme the existing bridge will also be tolled making it impossible to avoid a toll barrier that will stretch from Liverpool almost to Warrington.
39. Merseytravel will also be pleased that the Coalition Government in the “River Mersey (Mersey Gateway Bridge) Order 2011” allowed for tolls even higher than the Mersey Tunnels, e.g. whoever is operating the bridges is allowed to charge cars within a “toll range” of £1.00 to £2.50 at April 2008 prices. There may be toll waivers or discounts for residents of Halton, but this is not definite.
40. The Runcorn scheme is in effect a “Private Finance Initiative” scheme with a private firm responsible for the new bridge who will also take over the existing bridge and toll it. In theory the finance is private but since 2008 the prospects of a private company taking the risk are almost zero. Under both this Government and the previous one, the Bank of England has flooded the banks with so much free money that in theory they should in turn be lending it for next to nothing to whoever will take it. In practice this has not helped the Runcorn scheme, as the banks are reluctant to risk even free money. So the present Government is going one step further, there is an Infrastructure Bill going through Parliament which will guarantee the private companies and the banks that they can not lose if they take on schemes like that at Runcorn.
41. The tolls report that members are considering says that *“A decision in relation to the Mersey Tunnels tolls is also no longer made in isolation. The proposed Mersey Gateway crossing toll will have a link to the Mersey Tunnel toll levels and therefore applying high levels of discount against the authorised toll levels will impact on the Mersey Gateway business plan significantly.”* So it seems that not only are the Coalition providing money and guarantees to make sure that the toll barrier along the Mersey is extended, Merseytravel is also going to help the bridge operators to make as much money as possible (some of which may be used to give discounts to Halton residents) by setting the Mersey Tunnel tolls higher than the Authority might otherwise decide was appropriate.

WHAT HAPPENS ELSEWHERE IN BRITAIN

42. When the Tunnel Users Association was formed ten years ago there were tolls on the Clyde, Forth and Tay rivers and “over the sea” to Skye. The last of those tolls went five years ago. Needless to say, none of the tolls would have gone if it had not been for pressure from local politicians. As well as there now being no tolls in Scotland, there are none in Northern Ireland and almost none in Wales.
43. In England, there are about 15 tolled river crossings, and the Mersey Tunnels before the planned increase already has the joint fourth highest charges. The highest tolls for cars is on the Severn Crossing into Wales. The Dartford Crossing which has become a cash cow for the Government now has the second highest tolls (though residents of the local authorities on either side of the crossing only pay 20 pence and no one pays at night between 22.00 and 06.00). The Tyne Tunnel has the third most expensive car toll. It is the only other crossing run by a transport authority and they have been allowed to rack up the tolls in recent years to pay for a new privately built tunnel with the private firm also taking over the old tunnel.
44. Because like the Wallasey Tunnel it was built at a bad time, the Humber bridge had large debts that as with the Mersey Tunnels were multiplied by the practice of borrowing to cover losses, so the local authorities there applied for help. Between 1992 and 1998 they were given grants of £320 million which wiped out about half the debt, for the other half the Government substantially reduced the interest that was payable. Following continuing representations from the local people, councils and MPs, there was another small grant made in 2010 and last year another £150 million of debt was wiped out by the Government, as a result the tolls for cars were halved in April 2012.
45. In 2011 a new tunnel was opened as part of a remodelling of a section of the A3 at Hindhead. It is just over a mile long and like the Wallasey Tunnel it is twin bore. It is toll free, but then so of course are almost all roads.

Thank you for reading all of this.

END