

Revising the Charges at the Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing - DfT Consultation

BRIEFING NOTE



Prepared by Rob Smith, Senior Transport Planner, Planning and Environment

21 July 2011



CHARGING AT THE DARTFORD-THURROCK RIVER CROSSING

TOLL CHARGES WERE LEVIED ON THE DARTFORD-THURROCK RIVER CROSSING UNTIL 2003 WHEN THE DEBTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRIDGE AND TUNNELS HAD BEEN FULLY DISCHARGED. SINCE 2003, A ROAD USER CHARGE HAS BEEN COLLECTED USING POWERS UNDER THE TRANSPORT ACT 2008 AND DETAILS ARE SET OUT IN THE A282 TRUNK ROAD (DARTFORD-THURROCK CROSSING CHARGING SCHEME) ORDER 2008.

In Autumn 2010, the Coalition Government announced an increase in charges at the Dartford Crossing for 2011 and 2012. The Department for Transport (DfT) is now seeking views on increasing the charges through a consultation document which also identifies a number of short, medium and long term measures to be taken forward in this spending review period. The consultation will end on 23rd September 2011.

The Charging Proposals

The Government proposes to increase the charges at the Crossing in two successive steps while retaining the existing discount levels for those choosing to pay in advance using Dart-Tag (see Table 1). DfT estimates the first increase to take place in late 2011 and the second increase in spring 2012. A comparative assessment of the alternative options shows that these charge increases would generate more revenue for transport investment than could be gained from increasing charges in line with the Retail Price Index

Discounts for Local Residents

The DfT proposes no changes to the current number of free crossing trips available to residents (50 per annum), no change to the current levels of discounted charge and no change to the annual £10 admin fee.

Suspension of charges at times of severe congestion

The suspension of charges is an option when, for example, level of congestion may constitute an emergency and collection of the charge at the booths is adding to the delays. The Highways Agency have developed an operational protocol¹ which states that an emergency exists when there is severe congestion, defined as:

“queuing traffic (stationary or slow moving traffic, travelling < approx. 10 mph) which extends continuously from the Dartford Crossing to M25 J28 centre (A12 junction) for southbound traffic or to M25 J4 centre (A224) for northbound traffic”.

(= queue length of approx. 10 miles in each direction)

Table 1. Dartford Crossing Day Charges

	Current	2011	2012
M'bike	Free	Free	Free
Car	£1.50	£2.00	£2.50
2 Axle Goods	£2.00	£2.50	£3.00
Multi Axle Goods	£3.70	£5.00	£6.00
Dart-Tag Charge			
Cars	£1.00	£1.33	£1.67
2 Axle Goods	£1.75	£2.19	£2.63
Multi Axle Goods	£3.20	£4.33	£5.19

The decision to suspend the charge will be taken on a case by case basis when the charge could be suspended in either one or both directions until such time as traffic conditions return to agreed levels. The protocol is to be trialled for six months from 1st July 2011.

The use of newer charging technology

The Highways Agency is developing options and the business case for the implementation of newer technology for free-flow charging using automatic number plate recognition by the end of 2013.

Future Additional Crossing Capacity - the DfT plan to look at three potential crossing options 1). at the existing crossing 2). between the Swanscombe Peninsula and the A1089 and 3). between east of Gravesend and the east of Tilbury. DfT will develop the potential crossing options to assess their potential costs and the merits in terms of the benefits brought by the provision of additional capacity, an economic appraisal and the impacts in terms of adverse repercussions on the environment and potential increases in carbon emissions. The first phase is planned to take 12-18 months and will lead to public consultation.

1. http://www.highways.gov.uk/roads/documents/Dartford_Crossing_Charging_-_Suspension_Protocol_Rev_A.pdf