

FAILURE TO DELIVER ON COMMITMENTS THREATENS FORTH ROAD BRIDGE'S USE AS A 'PUBLIC TRANSPORT CORRIDOR'

Members' Policy Briefing

Tuesday 13 February 2018

Failure to deliver on commitments threatens Forth Road Bridge's use as a 'public transport corridor'

With the media excitement over the Queensferry Crossing slowly fading away, attention has turned to other projects which were promised as part of the £1.35 billion development.

Last month saw the official relaunch of the Forth Road Bridge as a public transport and active travel 'corridor', with the bridge now open exclusively to buses, taxis, bikes and pedestrians. This is certainly a cause for celebration: Buses will no longer be delayed by single-occupant cars on the bridge, whilst pedestrians and cyclists can enjoy a more relaxing journey across the Forth.

However, once you're off the bridge, things don't look so good for sustainable transport. As part of the Queensferry Crossing development, a range of commitments were made to improve the public transport offering between Fife and Edinburgh. Back in 2009 the Forth Replacement Crossing Public Transport Strategy (PTS) - a collaborative process headed up by Transport Scotland and involving local authorities and transport operators - was launched to oversee improvements for public transport in the area. When the PTS was revised in 2012, it set out eighteen actions to improve public transport infrastructure, such as bus priority measures and new Park & Ride facilities. However, our research published late last month found that the vast majority of the commitments made have not been delivered -- over eight years after the commitments were set out. Staggeringly, only three of the eighteen infrastructure improvements promised have been complete as far as we can tell. At least ten of the projects have not been completed, whilst the status of the remaining projects simply isn't clear.

There appears to be very little publicly available information on the state of the infrastructure projects, or what the next steps are. The group has met less than twice a year since its formation. A meeting was held in October last year, but we are unaware of any subsequent progress resulting from this meeting. It simply isn't clear how the outstanding actions in the PTS will be progressed in the future.

The Scottish Government's response to our findings didn't instil confidence that these projects will be prioritised in the near future. Indeed, they suggested that some of the projects were even going to be dropped. A report will be published at some point this year outlining the future steps for the public transport improvements, but it isn't clear what the future holds for public transport investment between Fife and Edinburgh.

The news that some projects look set to be dropped is unacceptable, especially given the much-reported underspend on the Queensferry Crossing. The £250 million underspend means there's no shortage of money to deliver the commitments made on public transport. The question is whether the Scottish Government will choose to invest this money wisely by providing better bus and rail links between Fife and Edinburgh as promised, spend it on yet more projects which incentivise the use of

private cars, or simply take the cost-saving. If the Government fails to deliver on the commitments made in the PTS they risk losing the benefits of the Forth Road Bridge by simply forcing buses back into queues of single-occupant cars once off the bridge.

We've written to Keith Brown MSP (the Economy Secretary) and Edward Mountain MSP (the Convenor of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee) to express our concerns. We're hoping that the Government and the REC Committee will look into these serious failures and take steps to improve the public transport offering between Edinburgh and Fife as promised. With a growing population in Edinburgh, increasing problems with congestion in and around the area, and rising house prices in the capital making commuting from Fife an increasingly attractive option, one thing is for certain: Public transport has to take priority.

Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

Transform Scotland
5 Rose Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PR
t: 0131 243 2690
e: <info@transformscotland.org.uk>
w: <www.transform.scot>

transform
scotland

We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).