

## **MTUA Press Release – Tolls and the Liverpool Mayoral election on Thursday 4th May 2017**

On Thursday we will have the first ever direct election for a Mayor for the whole of Merseyside and Halton. Part of the new Mayor's responsibilities will be the Mersey Tunnels and users of the Tunnels are concerned that the impact of tolls on families and businesses has not been a major election issue.

The Mersey Tunnels Users Association say that this omission is particularly odd as within the last year the Tunnel tolls have passed the billion pounds mark with the authorities having collected over one billion pounds in tolls from drivers since 1934. John McGoldrick for the MTUA suggests that the amount of tolls collected is an indication of the extent to which drivers have been "unfairly treated as cash cows, with tolls money wasted or spent on things which have nothing to do with the construction or essential maintenance of the Tunnels". He says that the building of the Birkenhead Tunnel cost £7 million and the Wallasey Tunnel cost £37 million, and the authority are now collecting almost as much as that in tolls - every year.

The MTUA say that this situation will become even worse later this year as what they call "the tolls regime" is due to spread to the bridge crossing between Widnes and Runcorn, splitting the Liverpool City region into two with drivers having to pay a toll whenever they cross the Mersey within the region.

Of the seven election addresses sent to voters by the Returning Officer only two mention the Tunnel or bridge tolls.

One candidate who mentions tolls is Roger Bannister, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition candidate. He says he wants "to cut tolls". The MTUA say that it is not clear what this means, but that he has elsewhere (Sunday Politics show) said that he wants the Tunnel and bridge tolls to be scrapped.

The other candidate who mentions tolls in their election address is Paula Walters for UKIP who says that she is "in support of UKIP's long standing drive to scrap .. charges for using the Mersey Tunnel, the Runcorn/Widnes bridge and the new Mersey Gateway bridge ... our bridges and tunnels should be ... part of the road network and (financed) through the taxes that we already pay".

Dave Loudon, the Mersey Tunnels Users chair, has contacted the candidates asking in particular what they would do about the profits that are made from Tunnels tolls. The MTUA say only two candidates gave them any sort of reply.

Steve Rotheram, the Labour candidate, did not answer Dave Loudon's question but his Communications Officer sent a copy of Steve's manifesto. The MTUA say that it is clear from the manifesto that the Labour candidate recognises that the Tunnel tolls and the new bridge tolls are a barrier, but say that all he intends to do about it is to reduce the Tunnel Tag tolls by 20 pence.

According to the MTUA, this would leave Merseytravel still making a vast profit from the tolls and have no effect on the planned bridge tolls.

The other reply that the MTUA chair received was from Paula Walters, the UKIP candidate who told the MTUA - "I have been campaigning for three years to scrap the tunnel tolls, it comes at the top of my priorities. The loan will not be paid off for years as the money is diverted elsewhere. I am concerned that when the Gateway bridge is open the Runcorn bridge toll will be £2 and our tunnel fee will probably rise in line. If elected I would make the tunnel and Runcorn bridge free...."

Though the MTUA say that both the Labour run City Region and the Tory Government reneged on the promises made before the 2015 General election, they are still hoping that all Mayoral candidates will as a minimum promise to stop the Tunnels being used by Merseytravel to subsidise their other schemes.

The MTUA conclude "If a candidate doesn't promise to stop the profit taking but the people of Merseyside and Halton still vote for them then voters will only have themselves to blame when the increasing tolls barrier leads to further division of families and friends and economic decline."

Ends

**Notes:**

Dave Loudon contacted the candidates on 14th April by email.

The election addresses were received by all voters on or around 21<sup>st</sup> April.

Breakdown of the Billion pounds in tolls paid between 1934 and 2017

<http://www.tunnelusers.org.uk/Mersey%20Tunnels%20Toll%20income%201934%20to%202017.pdf>

Full text of the little that is in the election addresses about tolls

Roger Bannister, 'Trade Union and Socialist Coalition'-

"Profits from local public transport should be used to improve our transport network, to cut tolls or to introduce trams."

Paula Walters, UKIP -

"I continue to actively and vigorously campaign in support of UKIP's long-running drive to scrap the current and planned charges for using the Mersey Tunnel, the Runcorn/Widnes bridge and the new Mersey Gateway bridge: our bridges and tunnels should be treated as simply part of the road network and, as such, The Government should fund them through the taxes that we already pay. The current and planned tolls amount to a completely and unfair tax on local jobs, tourism and travel – all paid for by residents on both sides of the Mersey. The Labour Party has failed to take any action to end this stealth tax on us, the people of Merseyside. Local motorists should not be treated as cash cows."

"If you elect me, I will work hard to address areas of need, including ..... Scrap fees for Mersey Tunnels and Runcorn Bridges."

Steve Rotheram's election manifesto

A copy of what was sent to the MTUA, is here -

<http://www.steverotheram.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FINAL-Steve-Rotheram-Our-future-together-Screen-min.pdf>

There are three mentions of tolls in Steve's manifesto. Under 'Connected' he says on page 21 "... we are the only City Region in Europe where in the future all cross-river traffic movements will be subject to expensive tolls ..... We also need to ensure that our river ceases to be a barrier to movement and commerce and find imaginative and sustainable ways to alleviate the burden of tolls."

And on page 22 Steve says "We are the only City Region in Europe where there will be no free cross-river road routes for residents and businesses. We need to be more flexible and creative in finding ways to remove burdens and barriers to travel and support business growth and ease of movement. This will include plans for a reduction in the fast-tag tunnel fare to £1 and lobbying Government to review the unfair and detrimental impact of current tolling proposals for the Mersey Gateway Bridge."

(MTUA's view on what is in Steve's manifesto is that reducing the Tag toll from £1.20 but leaving the cash toll for cars at £1.70 would leave Merseytravel still making a vast profit at the expense of users of the Tunnels and we have again written to Steve Rotheram asking what he would do about that. We have not had a reply.)

Liverpool Mayoral candidates on BBC Sunday Politics show 30 April (starts 37 mins 30 secs in and the main part about tolls starts about 55 minutes in)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b08n3sv3/sunday-politics-north-west-30042017>