



8 February 2016

Dear Councillor,

Before the Budget meetings of the Merseytravel Committee last Thursday and of the authority last Friday, the MTUA asked that you honour what was said last year about stopping Merseytravel from making profits from users of the Tunnels. We asked for changes that would reduce the tolls burden on all drivers.

The authority ignored all that we said. Of the £16.219 million profit before any toll changes, the authority are taking £12.747 million of it, with the rest going on the changes recommended in the Merseytravel report: £3.231 million on increased Tag discount, £190 thousand on lifting tolls from emergency vehicles and a paltry £51 thousand on the Xmas Day concession.

At the Merseytravel Committee meeting there was boasting about what it was claimed they had done for Tunnel users followed by an attack on the Government for doing nothing, but on Friday this was contradicted by a claim that the toll changes were because the Devolution deal had given the authority greater control of the finances of the Tunnels. If you read my last letter to you, then you will know that nothing has been published to indicate that there have been any changes agreed by the Government. This is not surprising as the authority already has full control over Tunnels finances and toll levels.

There were repeated claims that the Tag discount was in effect a Local User discount and would benefit most users of the Tunnels. As I pointed out in my last letter this is not so. Cash use accounts for nearly 60% of journeys, and of those Merseysiders who at some time use the Tunnels, most will pay cash.

Though it was claimed that 'Fast Tag' equated with "Local", it was also said that many people with Fast Tags did not live in the region but it was important that they get a discount as they might work or shop in the area! It is obvious that it is the Fast Tag discount which is important to the authority and they do not care about anything else including that the well off non 'local' drivers in Mercedes and 4x4s may have a Fast Tag whereas many poorer 'local' drivers will pay cash.

The usual claim was made at the Merseytravel meeting about how the authority had tried to get Governments to take over the Tunnels. The authority have never been

able to produce evidence that such efforts have been made apart from three years ago, when there was a derisory attempt *. The reality is that the authority's main aim has been to make a profit from the Tunnels and the last thing that they have ever wanted is to lose their power over the Tunnels, its users and the tolls.

* <http://www.tunnelusers.org.uk/letterfrommttodft17jan2013.pdf>

What happened at last week's meetings confirmed our view that it seemed that a decision had been made about the tolls before the meetings. We will be making a complaint about that and other matters. We also noticed that at Friday's meeting, after the tolls were nodded through, Halton said that they wanted it recorded that they had abstained. Last year the authority said that Halton could not vote on the tolls and someone must think that Halton abstaining helps to keep up this fiction, but you can't abstain unless you could have voted.

At the Merseytravel meeting, at the end of the tolls item there was an attack on the fares charged by bus companies. Merseytravel seem to have forgotten that they rejected the MTUA suggestion that buses should not have to pay tolls. They also do not seem to realise that if bus passengers were as heavily subsidised as users of rail and ferries, then the buses could probably be run *without any fares*. At Friday's meeting we also heard that the authority was hoping for spending of many hundreds of millions on transport locally and across the 'North'. It seems that almost all of this Government and authority money is to be spent on rail and almost nothing on roads. The vast bulk* of travel is by road or on foot, yet it seems that almost all of the spending promoted by the authority is to be for the benefit of rail passengers.

*The National Travel Statistics (2014) show that rail (inc. London Underground) accounts for only 3% of trips in England and 10% of the distance travelled.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/457752/nts2014-01.pdf

We again invite you to tell us if you think that anything we say is untrue, inaccurate or misleading.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Loudon
Chairman
Mersey Tunnels Users Association

To Council Leaders who are full members of the Combined Authority
To Councillors on Merseytravel Committee