

## Press Release – Politicians abandon promises on tolls

Yesterday Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor for the Liverpool City Region proposed the introduction of a '£1 off-peak fast tag' which would apply between 7pm and 7am Monday to Saturday and all day Sunday. The Metro Mayor said that this "would fulfil one of" his "key election pledges".

This may seem like good news, but it has angered users of the Tunnels. John McGoldrick of the Tunnels Users Association and of Scrap Mersey Tolls claims that far from fulfilling their promises, the statement from the Mayor shows that Steve Rotheram and the other politicians have gone back on what has previously been said and that their main aim is to "loot" the Tunnels for as much cash as they can get.

The Tunnels have collected over one billion pounds from drivers and before the 2015 General election, Joe Anderson - the City Council Mayor, said at a City Region meeting that there should be an end to this profit taking. The mayor told the other leaders from the region "I think that's fundamentally wrong. I think that all the profits that are made from the Tunnels should go into driving down the Tunnel tolls costs." The Tunnels Users say that if the profit taking had been stopped then all car tolls at all times could have come down to about £1.00.

John McGoldrick says "Instead of stopping the profits, by the time that the City Region election took place last May, that promise had been watered down so that Steve Rotheram's election address only said that he would reduce the fast-tag tunnel fare to £1.00. Now even that has been further watered down so that it is only Fast tag tolls at night and on Sundays that may be reduced. There are even suggestions that the cash toll for cars of £1.70 may be increased in April."

At a public meeting in Widnes last week Steve Rotheram was asked about Tunnels tolls and tolls on the new Mersey Gateway. Members of Scrap Mersey Tolls were at the meeting. The Metro Mayor told the audience that "I don't agree with tolls at all". But the Mayor then tried to justify tolls by telling his audience that tolls were spent on things like concessionary travel and £460 million for new trains. Tolls protestors say that the politicians should not be "robbing" the people that use the Tunnels to pay for other services. They say that Merseytravel and the City Region waste a lot of money such as the £60 million that was spent on the abandoned Knowsley trams scheme. They also say that some of these services should be financed in other ways. "Everywhere else in Britain, the trains are provided through 'Rolling Stock Operating Companies', with the cost recouped from fares and from train operating grants from the Government. The politicians in our region should not be using tolls to buy trains."

Also raised at the Widnes meeting was the point that the new Gateway tolls are even higher than the tolls on the tunnels. Campaigners are concerned that the politicians may want to keep the Tunnels tolls high in order to protect the Gateway tolls. John McGoldrick of the Tunnels Users Association and Scrap Mersey Tolls said "Tolls are a blight on our region. As the Metro Mayor put it in his election address - "We are the only City Region in Europe where in the future all cross-river traffic movements will be subject to expensive tolls". We agree with what he said then and we urge everyone to lobby Steve Rotheram and other local politicians to try and get all the Mersey tolls scrapped."

Ends

Contact numbers – John McGoldrick 0151 678 5706 or 0774 269 5699

Scrap Mersey Tolls group covers the Tunnels but is mainly concerned with Gateway tolls -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/scrapmerseytolls/>

Notes:

A. 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>

B. Steve Rotheram's election manifesto -

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

There are three mentions of toll 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."

C Account of public meeting in Widnes lasat week -

<http://www.notolls.org.uk/smtpdfs/MetroMayorMeetingWidnes16Jan2018>

D. What Joe Anderson the Liverpool Mayor said on 13 Feb 2015 a the meeting that set the tolls and budget for coming year

"I think, Chair just asking the members to support this, I think it is absolutely right that we look at the Tunnels and we argue as we have done, you I and each and every local authority member here for the discrepancy between investment in transport infrastructure in the South of this country compared to the North. And for me I think it's something that we have to actually force home, how we believe that the tolls that we have been paying, people have been paying Tunnel tolls for decades now and we still have not been able to eradicate the debt.

There are two issues.

One for me is that we need to address, as a Combined Authority, how we take money from the tolls and invest that in infrastructure. I think that's fundamentally wrong.

I think that all the profits that are made from the Tunnels should go into driving down the Tunnel tolls costs. So I am asking for a review of that by this Combined Authority.

And also plus to take into the heart of the negotiations with Government on further devolution, how

we can remove the Tunnel Act itself, or renegotiate the Tunnel Act.

We all accept that there has to be investment in terms of being able to maintaining and keeping operating, and also the staffing costs. So a renegotiation of the Act, or an ability for us to change the Act, is what we should be aiming for. So that is all it's calling for. A task group to be set up, including the chair of Merseytravel itself and the Chief Executive of Merseytravel and the Combined Authority members to look at ways forward...”