

SCRAP MERSEY TOLLS PRESS RELEASE - TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF NO TOLLS IN SCOTLAND - WALES FOLLOWING THEM, AND ENGLAND LEFT BEHIND

On Sunday 11th February, Scotland will have been totally free from any form of tolls for ten years.

The abolition of Scottish tolls was only achieved after campaigning by local groups and the National Alliance Against Tolls. John McGoldrick from Scrap Mersey Tolls was involved in Scotland, he said "Within two years we expect that Wales will also be toll free. Some of the smaller Welsh tolls have already gone. The tolls on the Severn Crossing should go at the end of this year. That only leaves the toll on the Cleddau bridge at Milford Haven and the Welsh Government intend to remove that by 2020."

"There is no sign of any of the tolls in England being removed and in fact the flow seems to be the opposite way to Scotland and Wales. With the Mersey Tunnels we have one of the oldest tolls in the country as the Birkenhead Tunnel has been tolled since it opened to traffic in December 1933. There are few still around who remember the promise that the Tunnel tolls were only for a limited period."

"The situation in our area was made worse last October with the new tolls to cross the river between Runcorn and Widnes. This was the first instance in Britain of a toll being placed on a previously free crossing, one which had been toll free for over half a century."

"Tolls are divisive, unfair and damage our local economy. It is time that our area joined Scotland and Wales in removing this tax inflicted on highway users by modern day robber barons."

Ends

Background in Scotland

The Scots used to have the most expensive bridge tolls in the UK as the bridge to Skye charged nearly £6 in each way in the summer months. But following a long and bitter campaign the bridge tolls over the sea to Skye were removed at the end of 2004. That left three tolled bridges.

The tolls to cross the Clyde over the Erskine bridge were the next to go, they were removed in March 2006. But the Labour / Lib Dem coalition that governed Scotland strongly resisted the removal of the remaining bridge tolls over the Tay and the Forth.

The issue was decided in May 2007 when the SNP campaigned on the promise that they would remove all tolls. They beat Labour by just one seat and formed a minority Government. Their first legislation was a Bill to give the power to abolish all tolls. The Bill was passed by the end of the year and there were no tolls with effect from 11th February 2008.

There had been dire predictions before tolls were removed that there would be traffic chaos. There was indeed a temporary problem because the authorities commemorated the abolition of the tolls by starting works that closed bridge lanes. But once the works were over it was clear that traffic was flowing more freely than before.

Those who regard drivers as nothing more than a potential source of revenue still hanker after the days when they could demand money from drivers. Only this last week Glasgow Council has been urged to introduce a toll on the Clyde Tunnel. This crossing was not tolled, even before the 2008 Act, and it seems most unlikely that the SNP who run Glasgow Council as a minority administration will go back on the position that the party adopted in 2007.

While Scotland had the tolls it was claimed that they had a negative impact on the local economies and there were studies that said removing the tolls would create thousands of jobs, but no one has published any study on what the actual impact of removing tolls was- though it certainly made drivers and businesses happier.

Background in Wales

The minor tolls have already gone- Porthmadog Cob in 2003, Barmouth Bridge in 2013, Pont Briwet in 2015. The Severn Crossing tolls are due to be removed by UK Government at end of 2018. That leaves the Cleddau bridge at Milford Haven and the Welsh Government have said that the tolls there will be removed in 2019/2020.