

# Warburton Toll Bridge Consultation

## Friends of Carrington Moss Response



### Introduction

The Manchester Ship Canal Company Limited (MSCC) is applying to the Secretary of State for Transport under section 6 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 to secure their Rixton and Warburton Bridge Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO).

The primary purposes of the draft TWAO are to enable the MSCC to:

- increase the tolls which they may charge for the use of the Rixton and Warburton Bridge
- make new byelaws in relation to the good management and use of the Bridge in order to safeguard the navigation of the Manchester Ship Canal
- transfer the Rixton and Warburton Bridge Undertaking from the MSCC to the Rixton and Warburton Bridge Company Limited.

This document is the response to the formal consultation by the Friends of Carrington Moss, a formally constituted community group which acts as the voice of residents and users about issues that impact the Moss. We have over 2,200 residents on our facebook page, over 500 followers on twitter and over 700 residents who are subscribed to our regular email updates.

### Background

There are, in fact, two bridges at Warburton. The original Warburton Toll Bridge built around 1863 (which spanned the River Mersey before it was diverted for the Manchester Ship Canal) and the new cantilever bridge, known as the Rixton and Warburton Bridge built around 1890, which spans the Manchester Ship Canal.

It is our understanding that the toll actually applies to the original 1863 Warburton Toll Bridge and that, currently, the maximum toll that can be charged in respect of the Bridge is 12.5 pence (one way).

Whilst we understand tolls can legally be collected 24x7, they have typically currently only been collected during rush hour periods on a morning (including Saturdays and Sundays).

Given that the Toll Bridge is already considered to be “very heavily trafficked” (paragraph 5.2.11, Transport Locality Assessment GMSF 2020), significant funds should have accrued to date and should be readily available to maintain the bridge, despite the operating costs.

Future significant increases in toll collection are also secured. The proposed New Carrington development in Trafford will see 5,000 new homes and 350,000 m<sup>2</sup> employment space built within the next 16 years, in close proximity to the bridge. Warrington Council also has plans for significant increases in homes, with over 14,000 homes planned over the next 18 years.

Given the total lack of public transport in the area (no trams, no trains and no water-based transport for either passenger or freight traffic) and very few buses, there is likely to be a significant increase in traffic using the bridge.

### Our Objections and Concerns

The Friends of Carrington Moss would like to register their objections and significant concerns in relation to this TWAO as follows:

#### Increased Toll Charges

We object to the increase in toll charges, the move to 24x7 charging and the excessive fees for unpaid tolls. In addition, the company should not be allowed to profit from these tolls.

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We do not believe MSCC has provided adequate justification for raising the fee to the level specified in the TWAO. In fact, we would question whether it is valid for the company to charge a fee at all, given the regulation applies to the original Warburton Toll Bridge.

The scale of the proposed increase and the consequent impact on commuters (from the current 12p to a prospective £1, or possibly, if the precedent is set by the approval of this Order, more) is totally unacceptable.

It is of great concern that there is no mention in the TWAO of a fixed daily capped charge (which is currently 25p). Nor does the TWAO make provision for discounts for local residents, who have little choice but to use this bridge or take a time-consuming, fuel-hungry detour of several miles to an alternative route.

This is a key highway for many local people, which is demonstrated by the significant levels of congestion in the area surrounding the bridge, due to the heavy traffic. MSCC has a plan to introduce technology which will allow the 24x7 collection of toll monies, considerably increasing their available funds. Whilst we welcome the introduction of new technology, which will hopefully alleviate congestion in the area, this should not come at a cost to local communities, and we do not agree that an increase in toll charges is appropriate. In addition, we believe the move to 24x7 toll collection will severely impact the most vulnerable in our communities, who currently cross the bridge free of charge outside of the charging periods.

We are also concerned about the lack of clarity in the TWAO about the exemptions from the toll. It should be clear that active travel users and public transport will continue to use the bridge free of charge.

We believe the business case should provide more information about how the funds raised by the fees have been spent since its inception in 1863 (the information in the business case document, particularly in Table 1.1 is incomplete and, confusingly, mixes in information about the Thelwall Viaduct).

### **Ability to make new Byelaws**

We object to the proposal to enable MSCC to make and enforce byelaws.

This would give the company considerable control, which could be extensively misused and seriously impact local communities.

The business case document suggests that the bridge has deteriorated to the point where major refurbishment is needed, or it will risk closure entirely. Questions should be asked about why the owners have allowed this to happen. Given they are responsible for its repair and maintenance, it would be negligent to give the same organisation such far-reaching powers going forward.

Similarly, much is made of the costs of the arson attack in the business case documentation. One would assume that these costs were covered by insurance, but this is not confirmed.

The competence of the MSCC to appropriately make and enforce byelaws should be carefully considered as these two examples alone do not provide communities with confidence in their capabilities.

### **Transfer of Warburton Bridge Undertaking**

We object to the proposal to transfer the Warburton Bridge undertaking, severing it from the main company.

This approach may lead to higher intercompany charges for access to resources, leaving the Bridge company with potential financial issues, adding to the pressure to increase toll charges further (or for other requests for funding from public bodies). Given the cash rich nature of the MSCC, this would be wholly inappropriate.

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### Other Concerns

In no particular order of importance, our other concerns include:

- **HGV traffic:** the potential for the upgraded bridge to be considered suitable for the huge volumes of HGV traffic in this area (24x7 HGV traffic, typically over 200 HGVs an hour in rush hour and around 130 HGVs an hour during the day). Use by such vehicles was allowed in the past and the business case confirms planned improvements will make it suitable for heavier vehicles.
- **Air Pollution:** the business case suggests it is not possible to identify the exact air pollution levels in the vicinity of the bridge, yet the owner could have implemented locally placed diffusion tubes and other monitors to assess current and future air pollution. The lack of monitoring means there is no current baseline for air pollution in the area
- **Environment:** the environmental impacts of upgrading this bridge should be fully assessed, this TWAO should be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment.
- **Heritage:** the original Warburton Toll Bridge is considered to be a non-designated heritage asset (New Carrington Historic Environment Assessment Appendix 3, GMSF) and should be retained and conserved as such.

As an alternative, given the plans for Port Salford, which are highly advantageous to the MSCC, the new bridge proposed in Trafford's 2006 UDP and their 2012 Core Strategy, which is supported by local communities, should be erected between Carrington and Irlam to maximise the use of Port Salford by freight traffic and to minimise the number of such vehicles on local roads. Building this new bridge would significantly reduce the traffic using the current Toll Bridge.

### Conclusion

The original Act of Parliament established this Bridge to serve local communities and it is clear that they do not support this proposal, which will have a huge impact on the most vulnerable in our society.

It is also clear there are alternatives, such as the bridge between Carrington and Irlam (mentioned above) and the introduction of more sustainable transport options for both passenger and freight traffic in the area (which would reduce traffic in the area). It is also clear that the planned huge increase of both local residents and employees in the area will (without those alternative options) significantly increase the use of the Bridge, making a rise in the charges unnecessary.

### Submission Details

This response has been submitted on behalf of the Friends of Carrington Moss by the Chair, Marj Powner, of 30 Elmwood, Sale, M33 5RN. It has been copied to our local MPs (Sir Graham Brady, MP Altrincham and Sale West, and Kate Green, MP Stretford and Urmston), to the Warburton Toll Bridge Action Group and to Warren Marshall, Group Planning Director, Peel Ports.