

# The Bournemouth -Swanage M.R. & Ferry

## Public Inquiry into application for increase in tolls

### John South's Objections

I object to the proposed increase in tolls for private motor vehicles on two grounds, namely (1) that there is insufficient discount proposed for local residents who use the ferry frequently; and (2) that it is time that the toll motor road and ferry is taken out of ownership by a private company making profits out of what is an essential service "saving over 25 miles on a journey from Poole to Swanage" (as advertised by the Ferry Company) for the public benefit, put under local authority control and operated on a not for profit basis, which should result in tolls being reduced rather than being constantly increased.

#### 1. Discounts for local residents:

I contend that whatever new tolls are approved there should be a much-improved discount scheme for local residents whether or not they are frequent users of the Ferry.

At present the best discount which can be obtained by users of private cars is 24% and in order to achieve this they have to pay out a minimum £170 in advance before they use the Ferry. Many local residents can't afford such an outlay. I understand that the Ferry company proposes that the discount in future be increased to 30% of their much higher charge, but in my opinion even a 30% discount on charges which have to be paid in advance is neither fair nor acceptable for local residents.

I cite the following examples of provisions which apply for "local" users of other toll ferries, bridges and tunnels in England. ( I believe it to be reasonable to compare charges for toll bridges and tunnels with tolls for the Sandbanks Ferry because all are a charge upon road users seeking to get from A to B who have to pay for a crossing over or under land or water for part of their journey.)

The following should be noted (I quote only the rates for users of private cars):

1. The Woolwich Ferry is free – funded entirely by Transport for London.
2. The Dartford Crossing – normal charge £2.50; local resident charge – NIL - if you pay a fee of £ 20 p.a.
3. Dartmouth Higher Ferry – normal charge £6.70 (cost of return ticket £11); for an outlay of £62, users can make 40 crossings i.e. £1.55 per crossing which = a 76% discount on the single crossing price
4. The Itchen Bridge, Southampton – 80p toll at peak times, 70p at off peak. Concessionary toll for local residents is 40p (peak = 50% discount) and 30p (off-peak = 57% discount)
5. Torpoint Ferry & Tamar Bridge- £2 normal charge, TAG charge £1 = 50% reduction (TAGs can be obtained free of charge). **NB: tolls only apply to crossings in one direction NOT BOTH**
6. Mersey Tunnel - £1.80 normal charge, £1 for local resident = 44% discount
7. King Harry Ferry - £7 single (day return £9); Fal Mussel Card local savings – website states "you can travel for less than half price if you use the ferry more than 3 times e.g. buy 240 credits for £138, giving cost per journey of £2.30 = 67% discount.

The Ferry Company may claim that if they provide bigger concessions to local residents, they will need to increase the fares charged to others in order to make up lost income. But I believe that any loss will be offset to a significant extent by local residents who will make greater use of the ferry, particularly at times when the ferry is usually less busy e.g. commuters who currently travel the long way round by road, shoppers, retired persons (of whom there are many on both sides of the ferry) getting out and about and by locals generally for leisure purposes. As an OAP, 83 years old and resident in Studland for many years, I would certainly use the ferry much more often if the crossing cost were reduced.

I am not able to opine precisely what discount should be provided for local residents in the case of the Sandbanks Ferry and will leave the detailed calculations to those more skilled in such matters, but I do maintain that the information I have supplied demonstrates that the principle of substantial discounts for locals is widely applied and, I contend, should also be applied in this case. I suggest it should be in excess of 50% rather than the 30% proposed by the Ferry Company.

## **2. Ownership of the Toll Motor Road and Ferry:**

I contend that the ownership of the toll ferry and road under an Act of Parliament almost 100 years old is completely outdated.

**The road:** I believe that Dorset Council should be directed (or if that is not possible, invited) to use its compulsory purchase powers to acquire the road, making a GVD (General Vesting Declaration) as to the precise boundaries of the road and its verges, from where it begins close to Studland Village up to the toll booths. Ownership of the road is surely neither necessary for the Ferry Company to operate the Ferry, nor does it produce any revenue for it. Removal of the road from ferry ownership and it being taken over as a public highway by the Highways Authority would put to bed once and for all any debate about valuing the road in the Ferry Company's accounts. The cost of acquiring it from the Ferry Company (if indeed it owns the road – which I understand is disputed by some) should be minimal since it produces no income for the Company. And it would enable the Highways Authority to exercise proper control over a section of road which gives rise to so many parking, littering and hygiene (camping with or without vehicles) problems, particularly in the summer months.

**The Ferry:** I also contend that the Ferry should be brought into public ownership (perhaps jointly owned by Dorset Council (1) and Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (2) as the local authorities which it serves) because it provides (or should provide) a service to the general public which ought to be on a not for profit basis, as previously stated. There must be little doubt that tolls could be greatly reduced even though it may be necessary for the acquiring authority initially to reflect the cost of acquiring the Ferry from its present owners in the tolls it charges.

John South – 11 October 2020