

# THE COMPANY OF PROPRIETORS OF WHITCHURCH BRIDGE

(Established under the Whitchurch Bridge Acts of 1792 and 1988)

To:

Please reply to:

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Date: 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009

Dear Jo,

## Local Concessionary Toll

I refer to your letter of 10<sup>th</sup> November 2009 in which your Council again requests a concession for local residents based on their place of residence.

Our position on this issue has not changed. Our existing concessionary Toll based on Bridge Card ownership is already very generous, and we see no good reason to offer further concessions based on a Bridge Card user's place of residence. Our position has been vindicated by the Inspector's Report (para 6.27) following the Public Inquiry.

The reasons for our position are twofold. Firstly, as a matter of principle, we think it is fundamentally unfair to offer or restrict concessions to any group of Bridge users based on their place of residence. Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council is accountable only to the residents of Whitchurch and in this matter is acting as a self-interest group, but the Company has a duty to consider all Bridge users equally and we are not prepared to favour any Parish, group of Parishes, or any other arbitrary classification of Bridge user.

Secondly, the practical problems of operating a two-tier concession system are far greater than you appear to realise. A Bridge Card is not associated with its owner at the point of use. So if we sold a Bridge Card to a Whitchurch resident under a special concession he/she could easily pass it to his/her friend in Reading to use. We see no simple system which would prevent this. Also, the Bridge Card top-up system, both technically and operationally, could not cope with two different top-up regimes.

As regards your bullet points, we would comment as follows:

1. We are aware that some people are unhappy with the Toll increase, but those who have taken the time to read the PI documents and Inspector's Report understand why it is necessary. Our view is that the objectors, for their own reasons, are seeking to inflate the extent of opposition to the Toll increase.

2. We wish to maintain good relationships with all Bridge users, and not just those from Whitchurch-on-Thames. We are not prepared to “buy” goodwill from one Parish or group at the expense of others.
3. The Undertaking we have given on the future level of the concessionary Toll came about as a direct result of your representations to us, so it is not true to say that we do not listen to your views.
4. Our view is that those local residents who are hostile to the Company are so for ideological reasons. They want the Bridge put in public ownership and the Toll removed. Whatever we say or do – and it is clear, for example, that some hostile residents have not read and understood the PI documents which we put in the public domain – will not alter that hostility.

In summary, the Company considers that its existing concessionary Toll is very generous. It has no intention of introducing a further concessionary Toll based on place of residence. As far as the Company is concerned, this issue is now closed and we are not prepared to consider it further unless and until any new material facts emerge.

I shall write separately on the subject of communications.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Weir  
Company Secretary