



Proposed Toll Increases

Public Consultation Feedback Report

December 2025

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

1.1 This document describes the non-statutory consultation undertaken by the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (“**the Trust**”) in relation to its proposals to increase the permitted tolls which are currently levied for use of the Clifton Suspension Bridge and outlines the responses received to that consultation. It also sets out the Trust’s consideration of and responses to the key issues raised.

2. ABOUT THE CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE AND THE TRUST

2.1 Clifton Suspension Bridge is a remarkable feat of engineering spanning the Avon Gorge. It was the first commission awarded to the renowned engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, in 1831. It was completed in 1860-1864 by fellow engineers Sir John Hawkshaw and William Henry Barlow as a memorial to Brunel after his death, reusing chains from Brunel’s Hungerford Footbridge.

2.2 Despite its increased traffic load, the original wrought iron structure is substantially intact with little engineering intervention. It stands today as one of the world’s major landmarks, it is the icon of Bristol’s urban landscape and when it was designed by Brunel it was one of the longest suspension bridges in the world.

2.3 The bridge is operated by the Trust, which was established by The Clifton Suspension Bridge Act 1952. The 1952 Act sets out the main provisions regarding the operation and maintenance of the bridge, and the powers and duties of the Trustees including the power:

- 2.3.1 to levy and demand tolls; and
- 2.3.2 to set aside a Reserve Fund to be used both for future large maintenance expenditures, and as a contingency buffer if an unexpected expenditure need arises.

2.4 The Trust is constituted as a charity and is regulated by the Charity Commission. As such, it is not a private company which can make and distribute profits to outside shareholders - its income has to be spent on its charitable object of operating and maintaining the bridge in accordance with its statutory powers and duties.

2.5 The primary duty of the Trustees is to maintain the Bridge in proper repair and working order, with an ancillary objective to operate a visitor centre/museum.

3. THE TRUST’S PROPOSALS TO INCREASE THE CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE TOLLS

3.1 At present the bridge toll for vehicles is set at £1, the sum authorised by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2014, following a public inquiry.

3.2 The Trust’s proposals (“**the Proposals**”) to increase the permitted tolls which are currently levied for use of the Bridge, that were subject to the consultation involve:

- 3.2.1 an immediate increase in the base toll for vehicles from £1.00 to £1.50; and
- 3.2.2 thereafter, annual increases in the permitted toll calculated by reference to inflation.

3.3 The Trust currently faces three major challenges:

- 3.3.1 increasing costs of operation;
- 3.3.2 uncertainty of future investment returns; and
- 3.3.3 reductions in traffic volumes with a corresponding reduction in future toll revenues.

3.4 It is these challenges which the Proposals seek to address.

3.5 If the Trust wishes to increase the tolls it is required to apply to the Secretary of State for Transport for authorisation to do so, under section 6 of the Transport Charges &c (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1954.

4. APPROACH TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

4.1 The Trust undertook a public consultation between 26 September and 7 November 2025 to seek feedback on the Proposals. There was no statutory requirement for the Trust to undertake such an exercise, but it was considered prudent and good practice to seek feedback from a wide range of stakeholders to allow the Proposals to be reviewed, and if necessary refined, prior to any formal application to the Secretary of State for Transport to confirm the toll increases. The Trust had regard to the well-established *Gunning Principles*¹ in developing the consultation strategy, namely that:

- 4.1.1 the consultation took place whilst the Proposals were at a formative stage;
- 4.1.2 the consultation included sufficient information to allow consultees to give ‘intelligent consideration’ to the Proposals;
- 4.1.3 adequate time was given for consultees to review and respond to the consultation; and
- 4.1.4 conscientious consideration is given to any responses received as part of the consultation (which this report seeks to demonstrate).

4.2 The Trust produced a consultation document (“**the Consultation Document**”) which described the Clifton Suspension Bridge, the Trust and the Trust’s role in respect of the bridge. The Consultation Document also set out the context and rationale for the Proposals, the details of the Proposals themselves as well as including various appendices containing more detailed supporting information (e.g. financial and traffic forecasts).

4.3 The Trust sought to publicise the consultation through press releases sent to local media outlets on 25 September 2025. Letters notifying recipients of the consultation were also sent on the same date to North Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, the West of England Combined Authority and the MP for North Somerset.

4.4 The Trust also ensured that copies of the Consultation Document and feedback form (on which, see below) were placed in locations in proximity to the Bridge and made available throughout the consultation for inspection. The locations comprised the Clifton Suspension Bridge Museum and Clifton Library.

4.5 The Trust also placed a set of written FAQs and answers on its website alongside the Consultation Document, with a view to drawing out some of the key issues and themes of the Proposals.

4.6 The Trust held a public webinar on 8 October 2025, where a presentation was given to explain the Proposals with time allocated to questions from attendees. This webinar was recorded with the recording being made available on the Trust’s website afterwards, together with a written summary of the questions and responses raised.

4.7 Consultees could respond to the consultation in one of two ways:

- 4.7.1 through an online portal/questionnaire accessible on the Trust’s website; or
- 4.7.2 by way of hard copy written responses which could be deposited at the document inspection locations listed above.

¹ R v London Borough of Brent *ex parte* Gunning.

4.8 The questionnaire sought views in two ways on the Proposals – through closed/set questions and ‘free text’ questions.

4.9 The Secretary of State for Transport was notified of the consultation exercise by letter sent on 23 September 2025.

5. RESPONSES RECEIVED TO THE CONSULTATION

5.1 This section of the report summarises the responses received to the consultation on the proposals.

5.2 Overall, the Trust received 305 responses from a variety of respondents who answered a combination of questions posed. Of these 173 (57%) were from people who crossed the bridge at least once a week, and of these 80 (26%) said that they crossed at least once a day. 83% were vehicle users and a further 4% used cycles/scooters. 10% were pedestrians. Three group returns were received – from the Leigh Woods Association, the Pill Food Bank and the Pill Community Fridge. 60% of respondents used a bridge discount card and 40% not.

5.3 A summary of the responses to each question is set out below, along with the Trust’s responses to these. This is structured in the following way:

5.3.1 an outline of the responses received to the closed/set questions; and

5.3.2 an outline of the themes raised in responses to the ‘free text’ questions.

Responses to closed/set questions

Question - Do you understand why the bridge toll for vehicles needs to be increased to £1.50 from January 2027?

5.4 75% of respondents that answered this question answered “yes”, 15% said “no”, with 10% “unsure”. This appears to show that respondents appeared to have a good understanding of the challenges faced by the Trust and therefore the rationale for the Proposals.

Question - Do you agree that future increases to the toll for vehicles should be linked to inflation to reflect rising costs in the future?

5.5 There was a wide range of views as to whether future increases (beyond the initial £1.50) should be linked to inflation, with 44% of respondents to this question agreeing or strongly agreeing, 37% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, and 19% neutral. In the Trust’s view, it is reasonably encouraging to have a moderately greater number of people in favour (rather than against) of a formal annual process for an inflation-related increase, particularly given that few people are likely to be in favour of toll increases per-se. However, the Trust fully acknowledges the number of respondents that were not in favour of this.

Question - Do you support the proposed use of the Office for National Statistics Construction Output index (All New Work, Repair and Maintenance) as the applicable inflation index?

5.6 Whilst 46% of respondents to this question were neutral, there was again a modest majority in support of a more-specific index, with 34% supporting or strongly supporting this proposal and 29% against or strongly against. This again provides modest support in favour of the Trust’s proposal to use a more relevant (construction-cost) index but, again, the proportion of respondents not in favour is acknowledged.

Question - Do you agree that the annual increase to the toll for vehicles should be 0.5% below the rate of inflation, as proposed by the Trust

5.7 There was again moderate support in favour of the Trust's proposal to aim to achieve an efficiency gain (by basing increases on 0.5% below relevant inflation indices), with 34% of respondents to this question supporting or strongly in support and 31% against or strongly against.

Question - Do you agree that the traffic forecast assumptions made by the Trust are appropriate?

5.8 The majority of respondents to this question (52%) did not express a view. For those who did, 30% agreed or strongly agreed with the traffic forecast assumptions presented, with only 17% against or strongly against. This provides reasonable support for the Trust's view that traffic volumes will both decline as a result of the proposed toll increase and are likely to be in long-term decline for a host of other reasons as presented in the Consultation Document, in particular national and local transport reduction and road-pricing policies and measures.

Question - Do you agree with the modelling assumptions used within the Trust's income and cost forecast model?

5.9 The majority of respondents to this question (54%) held a neutral view on them, with a small majority of those who expressed an opinion (27%) supporting or strongly supporting the Trust's assumptions and 21% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with those assumptions. This response profile likely reflects the technical nature of this information.

Question - Do you agree with the Trust's financial projections relating to costs and income and related assumptions?

5.10 The majority of respondents to this question (52%) held neutral views, with again a small majority (28%) supporting or strongly supporting the Trust's assumptions, with 20% against or strongly against them. This shows modest support for the Trust's projections and assumptions but as with the above, the relatively low level of agreement/disagreement is likely reflective of the technical nature of the information presented.

Question - Overall, to what extent do you support the Trust's proposals?

5.11 The exact same proportion of respondents to this question (45%) supported/strongly supported and opposed/strongly opposed the Proposals.

The Trust's commentary on the responses to the closed/set questions

5.12 Having carefully considered all responses received to the closed/set questions, nothing has arisen (e.g. any new facts or points of view that had not previously been taken into account in formulating the Proposals) that suggests the Trust should materially change or withdraw any of them.

5.13 Fundamentally, an increase in tolls immediately, and regularly after this, is required to ensure the Trust can discharge its statutory obligations and nothing arose in the closed/set question responses which provided any alternative means of achieving this outcome or factors not already taken into account.

5.14 There is a high degree of understanding that the Trust needs to increase tolls (especially as it has now been almost 12 years since they were last increased), and modest support in favour of annual future increases and the use of a specific construction index. Most people were either in favour of the Trust's traffic volume assumptions or did not express a view, with similar proportions in relation to the Trust's financial assumptions. The proportion of respondents against the Proposals is noted and acknowledged by the Trust, and it is understandable. However, as set out above, no alternative means to enable the Trust to discharge its duties and functions was raised.

Responses to 'free text' questions

5.15 The Trust sought views from consultees through four 'free text' questions, as set out below:

Question - Do you have any comments or suggestions [in relation to the Proposals]?

Question - Do you have any other comments regarding the Trust's proposals and this consultation, including the alternatives considered and discounted by the Trust?

Question - Are there any other options that you think should be considered (e.g. charging pedestrians/cyclists; reducing discounts for frequent users/bridge card holders; removing concessions)?

Question - Overall, to what extent do you support the Trust's proposals?

5.16 c. 250 respondents responded to one or more of the 'free text' questions.

5.17 Given the natural overlap of these questions, the Trust has considered the responses to all four of these questions together and categorised these responses into various themes. These themes are as follows:

- 5.17.1 traffic - volume projections and traffic flow;
- 5.17.2 financial model, projections and assumptions;
- 5.17.3 "Day 1" toll increase from £1 to £1.50;
- 5.17.4 the 1000 crossing discount card; and
- 5.17.5 other measures to increase revenue.

5.18 A summary of responses which fell under each of these themes is set out below, together with the Trust's commentary on these.

Traffic – volume projections and traffic flow

Background

The Trust has experienced a 1% per annum decline in traffic volumes since 2000 as set out in Appendix 8 of the Consultation Document. The Trust also experienced step declines in volumes (averaging 10%) on the last two occasions when the Trust increased the cash toll, although these eventually reversed as the toll was not then increased further annually.

The Trust's 25-year traffic volume projections are that the 1% per annum decline is likely to continue, not least given the wide variety of traffic reduction and pricing measures being put in place by both Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council and set out in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 of the Consultation Document. In addition, the Trust has projected a 10% step-decline in traffic volumes when the £1.50 toll is introduced, but does not expect this to reverse, given that unlike on past occasions the Trust is seeking an annual inflation uplift. The Trust sought views on these projections.

Summary of consultation responses

Many respondents stated that they have vehicles that are not compliant with the Bristol Clean Air Zone (CAZ) and so are now using the bridge to avoid the CAZ. Other respondents cite the CAZ as the reason for higher traffic flows across the bridge and so delays.

Respondents also stated that they wanted to see faster traffic flows, using free-flow, ANPR and faster card processing.

A number of respondents stated that the proposed higher charge of £1.50 (or £3 a day for a two way journey) would mean that they have to change their normal route.

The Trust's commentary on the responses

The Trust notes that there has been a possible limited strengthening of traffic volumes since the introduction of the Bristol CAZ in 2022, although Covid-impact, maintenance work on the Cumberland Basin and the recent refurbishment project make this virtually impossible to be sure of. It is acknowledged, however, that if Bristol City Council was to extend the CAZ zone to Clifton, this could impact the Trust's traffic volumes significantly. However, this is not the situation at present and so any projections based on this would be speculative. It is however instructive to note that, in the context of the Trust's proposal to increase the toll from £1 to £1.50, Bristol City Council's daily CAZ charge is £9. This provides direct context for what the Trust believes to be modest toll increase proposals.

In respect of faster traffic flows, from an engineering and safety perspective the Trust cannot allow faster traffic speeds or greater traffic volumes on the bridge at any one time.

Turning to respondents needing to consider alternative routes, it is accepted that this will happen to some extent which is why the Trust has allowed for a 10% traffic volume decline in its projections.

Overall, the Trust notes that no respondents suggested that the traffic volume projections were too pessimistic, with many stressing either that they were now using the bridge to avoid the CAZ or that a higher toll might mean that they would now drive over the Cumberland Basin. The Trust has carefully assessed the extent to which this might be the case based on the Trust's past experience of toll rises, and overall the Trust sees nothing from the responses to suggest that the toll volumes included in the Trust's projections are not reasonable. It should be noted that Appendix 12 of the Consultation Document contains a sensitivity analysis of a greater traffic decline than that in the Trust's main projections.

Financial model, projections and assumptions

Background

The Trust has prepared a detailed 25-year financial model, from 2025 to 2050/51, i.e. after the completion of the next major repainting/relighting project in 2049/50. The main modelling assumptions were set out in Appendix 11 of the Consultation Document. The Trust sought views on these assumptions and the financial model used.

Summary of consultation responses

There were very few comments or concerns expressed concerning the financial model and its primary assumptions, the two major issues raised being the Day 1 increase of the toll from £1 to £1.50, and the discount levels attached to prepaid bridge cards. Neither of these relate to the model or assumptions themselves and both are covered elsewhere in this report.

There were some comments saying that the Trust should "test the modelling outcomes" with, e.g. community groups, etc.

A few respondents suggested that the Trust should use RPI/CPI or some other general inflation index, rather than a construction cost index.

Several respondents wanted to know whether toll reductions would take place if deflation occurred.

One or two respondents asked why the Trust had used the “0.5% efficiency gain”.

The Trust’s commentary on the responses

In respect of testing the modelling incomes with, for example, community groups, it is difficult to see how this could work in practice, given the great diversity of bridge users and opinions, and of course such groups themselves would not always speak for the entirety of their residents/members. Fundamentally, one of the aims of the consultation exercise was to seek the views of those with an interest in the Bridge tolls, including affected community groups.

In respect of the relevant index to be applied, the Trust explained in the Consultation Document that its costs are largely unrelated to general inflation and instead relate to construction and wage inflation, hence the proposed index to be used which goes directly to these types of costs.

In response to the prospect of toll reductions should deflation occur, the Trust can confirm this would be the intention given that the tolls would be linked to an index. The Trust has a track record of putting the toll down if income was considered sufficient for the Trust’s needs.

Turning to the “0.5% efficiency gain”, the reasoning for the use of this is set out in the Consultation Document, but in summary using any greater % figure would materially increase the financial risk to the Trust and the Bridge, as demonstrated by the published financial projections.

Overall, very few comments were made about the Trust’s financial projections, model or assumptions per se (excepting the 50% Day 1 increase and the level of card discounts, which are covered elsewhere). However, no responses suggested that the Trust’s projections, assumptions and model are not suitable for use.

“Day 1” toll increase from £1 to £1.50

Background

The Trust last increased the toll in 2014. The Trust has calculated that construction inflation from then to now is around 50% and is therefore proposing to apply for a 50% toll uplift from £1 to £1.50, which the Trust hopes will take place on 1 January 2027. By that time, it will have been almost 13 years since the toll last increased. The Trust sought views on this proposal.

Summary of consultation responses

A number of respondents (around 60) objected to a Day 1 toll increase of this extent, i.e. 50% (although none objected to an increase per se). It should also be noted that 30 people directly supported the Trust’s proposal, a typical example being “*£1.50 per vehicle seems reasonable, given its been £1 since 2014*”. Notwithstanding this, the Trust does acknowledge the many objections, summarised below.

A first group of respondents understood the need for inflation but disagreed with the Trust’s calculation of 50% inflation since 2014, mostly on the basis of their own calculation of inflation, e.g. using CPI, RPI, Bank of England, etc. Accordingly, suggestions included that inflation should, for example, be 44%, 39%, 33% or other figures (e.g. 25%), which various respondents felt would be “reasonable”.

A substantial number of respondents made comments about the 50% Day 1 increase, regularly suggesting that this was “too much”, and some suggesting that if the Trust had not put the toll up since 2014 that was “our fault”.

A further category of comment made in this theme was that, since some inflation assumptions were built into the Trust’s 2012 toll revision financial projections (the £1 toll was introduced in 2014), that by now asking for inflation since 2014 the Trust was “double counting”.

The Trust’s commentary on the responses

In response to the points made about the correct index to apply, the Trust has explained in Appendix 10 to the Consultation Document why CPI/RPI is not relevant to the Trust’s costs, as they are almost wholly construction or wage-related, indicating that construction inflation has been between 49% and 61% since 2014 (under two slightly different measures). The Trust also explained that the experienced wage inflation (including employment taxes) since 2014 has been over 50%. No comments provided provide counter-evidence that the Trust’s 50% inflation is its “lived experience” or that an increase to £1.50 from January 2027 is reasonable.

Turning to comments made that stated that perhaps the Trust could have put tolls up before now, thus reducing the need for a 50% increase now, it is worth noting that if the Trust had put up tolls several times since 2014, such that (say) the January 2027 increase was 10%, bridge users could actually have been worse off financially in total since 2014 as the tolls would have been higher for longer – albeit that the 2027 increase % itself would have been lower. These comments also do not take into account the very relevant practical issues the Trust would have faced if it had sought to increase the toll beyond £1 at some earlier point than now, which are set out in paragraph 4.2 of the Consultation Document. As is stated there, 1) the process of a toll revision application and then a public inquiry is very lengthy and expensive; and 2) until 2023 the Trust accepted cash payments, and setting a cash toll above £1 would have necessitated two or more coins which was considered both inconvenient and certain to slow traffic flow.

In response to comments made in relation to potential ‘double counting’, the Trust has revisited the inflation assumptions used in the 2012 financial projections (for 2014). The key assumptions used then were a general inflation rate of 2% and a wage inflation rate of 1%. These compare with RPI of 3.5% and wage inflation of 4% in the Trust’s 2025 model. Whilst the Trust acknowledges that a proportion (maybe 10% to 15% of the Trust’s 50% increase) was in some way anticipated by the 2012 toll application, it is the Trust’s view that this has been fully compensated for by the facts that the former application only considered projections to 2022, and that the current application will not be operational until January 2027, a full 5 years later. This is especially the case given the recent high cost-inflation the Trust has experienced in the period 2021 to 2026. In the Trust’s view, this negates any element of possible inflation double-counting arising from the 2012 projections.

Overall, it is worth noting that no respondents appeared to be objecting to an increase in the cash toll per se, the issue being how much inflation is charged. Whilst various measures have been suggested, no respondents appeared to counter the Trust’s view that its costs are construction and wage-related, such that RPI inflation is not directly relevant.

The 1000 crossing discount card

Background

The Trust has always offered regular users who prepay for a ‘bridge card’ an element of discount on the full toll – this is discretionary under its statutory powers. This is in common with many tolled crossing operators. The number of crossings which can be so purchased, and the price of

these cards (and so the discount) has varied a lot over time. Until early 2025 a 1000 crossing card was offered at a price of £460 (therefore a 54% discount on the £1 toll).

However, given the very steep rises in inflation the Trust has experienced since 2022, the impact this was having on the Trust's costs, their specific flow-through into wage settlements (the Trust follows local authority pay scales), and the commencement of an £8m repainting and relighting project which would deplete the Trust's free reserves by over 50%, it was decided that offering crossings for as little as 46p a crossing was simply no longer economically affordable. The 1000 crossing card was therefore withdrawn and replaced by a 500-crossing card offering a 30% discount.

It is important to note that the Trust is currently authorised to charge any toll up to £1 per crossing – whilst the Trust remains supportive of the principle of providing discount cards, under the legislative regime the Trust operates within, providing such discounts is solely at the Trustees' discretion (reasonably exercised) and can be based on whatever is commensurate with the Trust's financial position and resources at the time. In particular, there is no requirement to consult or give notice in relation to any changes to discounts offered.

Understandably, a number of respondents made comments around discounts, particularly the 1000 crossing card. However, it should be noted this is not directly relevant to the Trust seeking an increase to the tolls – any discounts offered are discretionary and are accordingly separate.

Summary of consultation responses

This theme elicited the highest level of response of any issue as part of the consultation, with the majority of such respondents asking for the 1000 card crossing card to be reinstated.

There were about 50 responses directly asking for the 1000 crossing card to be reinstated (including from the Leigh Woods Association), and around another 50 responses discussing discounts in general, and who they should be made available to – for example regular users, local residents (based on certain postcodes), etc. The point was also made as to why the Trust was proposing to increase the cost of bridge cards (in the future) to the same extent as the 50% increase in the headline toll – in other words, why were the Trust not favouring local residents/regular users and putting the toll up (potentially even more) for less regular users?

Many people made the point that they rely on the Bridge for work/school run/access to shops (especially in Clifton) and that they are therefore a “captive audience”.

The Trust's commentary on the responses

The subject of crossing discounts has been the single greatest issue raised each time the Trust has applied to increase the headline toll, and this 2025 consultation is no exception, attracting by far the greatest area of comment.

Whilst many people would like to return to the discount levels of the past, it is simply no longer viable for the Trust to offer discounts of 50% or more even to the Trust's most regular users. Given the inflation the Trust has faced, the increased taxes being levied and an £8m refurbishment project, such discounts are no longer affordable. The Trust cannot therefore reinstate the 1000 crossing/46 pence card. The Trust also notes that as of today's date, and until any toll revision is approved, it is still possible to purchase 500 crossings for £350, i.e. a 30% discount and so to cross for 70 pence per crossing. The Trust views this as an entirely fair and reasonable price to pay for accessing and crossing the Bridge by vehicle.

It is worth noting some comparable motoring expenses, for example the Bristol CAZ (covering most of central Bristol) costs £9 a day, parking in Cabot Circus costs £5 for one to two hours, Queen Square costs £7 for two hours, and even parking in Clifton (where many objectors say that their journey ends, i.e. for shopping) costs up to £3 an hour. In the light of these high costs, a charge of 70 pence per crossing before a toll increase, and £1 after a toll increase (utilising the

discounts on offer), is still in the Trust's view very reasonable, not least to operate and maintain for perpetuity such a unique and historic structure.

The question of whether the Trust should provide automatic discounts to local residents, i.e. based on certain postcodes, has been raised in past consultations, and was raised again, but the Trust considers that this is open to abuse and also penalises regular users/residents just outside wherever such a zone is drawn. Any such system is also heavily IT and human resource dependent, based as it would be on obtaining and processing not just evidence of residence but then the vehicles at that residence and tracking their licence plates. In the Trust's view it is much better for everyone to have the choice to buy-forward and so obtain a set discount.

A new consideration in relation to the intended 2025 toll revision application (i.e. over past applications) is that both councils (and indeed national transport policy) aim much more explicitly to discourage shorter/local journeys and encourage public transport. During meetings with the transport teams at both Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council this fact was emphasised to the Trust, not least as North Somerset Council's data suggests that most west to east bridge crossings end within 2 miles of the Clifton end of the Bridge. As such, both transport teams gave the impression that they would broadly welcome higher tolls and lower crossing discounts. The Trust is not responsible for this transport policy, but it is relevant for the Trust to take into account.

The Trust is very aware and appreciates the importance of the Bridge (and the level of tolls) to regular users. The Trust has a history of offering discounts to such users, and continues to do so. However, as set out above, the Trust's financial position, both current and with a forward look, determines the level of such discounts. Ultimately the Trustees will need to keep all such discounts under review, as they have in the past, but this is not an issue that is directly relevant to the intended toll revision application.

Finally, on the 'captive audience' point, the Trust would note that whilst it accepts this may be valid to a limited extent, unlike virtually all other major UK tolled crossings, the drive-around to avoid the Clifton toll is only 2.5 miles.

Other measures to increase revenue

Background

As part of the consultation process, the Trust asked bridge users for any further revenue options, ideas or comments they had as to the approach being taken by the Trust.

Areas to explore were charging pedestrians/cyclists, reducing or removing discounts, etc., but the Trust welcomed other comments and suggestions. The Trust had, though, already explained in the Consultation Document that it did not wish to move towards charging pedestrians or cyclists, partly because the Trust did not wish to discourage such healthy crossing choices, and partly because of many practical problems.

Summary of consultation responses

There was a reasonable number of respondents (around 20) who wished to see the toll increased above the £1.50 the Trust had suggested - £2 was the level mentioned most often. The reasons cited were partly to discourage car traffic and the pollution it causes, partly that the Trust would benefit from increased revenues to keep the historic structure of the Bridge well maintained, and partly that £1.50 was a very low charge in relation to what else it buys.

In relation to charging cyclists and pedestrians, whilst only a few respondents said that the Trust should move towards charging pedestrians, there was a considerable number of people (30 to 40 respondents) who said that the Trust should move towards charging cyclists.

Several respondents mentioned alternative revenue generating ideas that are things already done by the Trust. These include the Trust's visitor centre/museum, bridge tours, a donation station, selling coffee, snacks, etc.

A reasonable number of respondents asked why the costs of maintaining the Bridge did not fall on the public purse (and suggested they should, in whole or in part). So it was variously suggested that the costs should be borne by the Secretary of State for Transport, regional transport authorities (as a major highway) and (most regularly) that North Somerset Council and especially Bristol City Council should pay, as the Bridge clearly benefitted the city. This could either be via regular payments or by applying for grants.

The Trust's commentary on the responses

Because of the number of comments, the Trust has briefly considered again the matter of tolls for cyclists (for completeness, the Trust does not wish to charge pedestrians – this would be very difficult practically and they are not road users).

There are many reasons why the Trust still considers that charging cyclists is not an option the Trust wishes to pursue. First, the Trust is of the view that charging cyclists sends out the wrong message as cycling is a healthier option, both for the environment and for the individual. But, perhaps more importantly, beyond this it is very difficult to achieve. Even if cyclists had to purchase a bridge card or use a credit card, at present they have a dedicated (and free) cycle lane around the toll barrier. If they were charged and had to use the barrier system, not only would they be part of the normal vehicle traffic queues and operations (with consequent health and safety risks), but the toll barrier raising system, which relies on metal sensors in the roadway in order to operate, would not be triggered by a small and light vehicle such as a bicycle. The Trust would therefore need a completely new (and likely expensive) system. Any such system would also be very easily by-passed, simply by the cyclist choosing to walk (or even attempt to ride) their bicycle along the walkway, with all the hazards to both pedestrians and cyclists this would cause. For these reasons the Trust continues to believe that charging cyclists is not a viable option.

In relation to other public bodies paying for some of the Trust's costs, especially on maintenance, this is also not, in the Trust's view, a viable option. The Trust has occasionally explored this in the past and been rebuffed quite clearly. The view of the Secretary of State for Transport, national transport bodies and local authorities is that Parliament has put in place, via the Clifton Suspension Bridge Act 1952 Act, a mechanism for paying for the Bridge and its costs, and it is this route therefore which should be used when the Trust needs a higher toll. It is also worth noting that the prospect of either national or local government having freely available funds to subsidise the tolls in any meaningful way is highly unlikely, given the pressures everywhere on the public purse. It is noted that external organisations (for example the National Lottery) have provided grants towards the Trust's other activities – for example building the museum - but they would not contribute to maintenance projects or subsidising tolls.

6.

CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Trust wishes to thank all those who took the time to respond to the consultation. The Trust believes that this has been a useful exercise, with a good level of engagement.
- 6.2 Overall, the Trust has considered all responses provided and acknowledges that the nature of the Proposals will not be welcome to Bridge users. However, it was encouraging to see that there was a high level of understanding of the need for the Trust to put up tolls (with a minority explicitly supporting such a move) and broad support (or neutral views) in relation to the Trust's financial model and assumptions, the approach to inflation the Trust is using both to determine the Day 1 uplift and the calculation of the ongoing annual toll increase. There was also broad support for the Trust's traffic

volume assumptions, with no respondents viewing these as too pessimistic, and many identifying ways in which they might even be too optimistic (citing the threat of a CAZ extension and other national or local traffic reduction measures). The Trust has however mapped these potential downside sensitivities.

6.3 The Trust notes some specific points which were raised in the consultation responses which it hopes this report has helped to address (and which the Trust will seek to articulate clearly in its formal application to the Secretary of State for Transport for authority to increase the tolls), in particular:

- 6.3.1 the reasons why the Trust has not increased the headline toll since 2014, and the fact that whilst this was leading to a higher Day 1 increase in 2027, overall bridge users were better off financially with such delayed rises;
- 6.3.2 the very real problems with charging cyclists, even if the Trust wished to;
- 6.3.3 that there is no realistic prospect of other national or regional bodies paying for maintenance of the Bridge;
- 6.3.4 the safety and engineering reasons why totally free-flow traffic, eg using ANPR, is not possible;
- 6.3.5 the reasons why RPI/CPI are not relevant inflation indices for the Trust;
- 6.3.6 that using an index model to determine annual increases would also mean that tolls would reduce if the index reduced; and
- 6.3.7 the “double counting” as between the 2012 and the 2025 financial projections.

6.4 In relation to the 1000 crossing discount card, there is clearly concern about its removal, despite the level of any discount (if any at all) being entirely for the Trustees to determine, dependent on the Trust's financial circumstances. Despite this, the reality is that the Trust's financial position means that it is simply not viable for the Trust to re-introduce a card with the prior level of discount, given higher costs especially in recent years. Car users have experienced much higher vehicle costs in other areas (notably the CAZ and car parking) and in the Trust's view a discounted charge of 70 pence per crossing (today), or potentially £1 (from 2027), is not in any way unreasonable for people pre-buying a 500-crossing card. It is also possible to avoid the charge by driving 2.7 miles around the Cumberland Basin.

6.5 The Trust is very aware and appreciates the importance of the Bridge (and the level of tolls) to regular users. The Trust has a history of offering discounts to such users, and continues to do so. However, as set out above, the Trust's financial position, both current and with a forward look, determines the level of such discounts able to be offered at any one time. Ultimately the Trustees will need to keep all such discounts under review, as they have in the past, but this is not an issue that is directly relevant to the intended toll revision application.

6.6 Ultimately, having regard to the above, having carefully considered all consultation responses received, the Trust does not consider that any materially new or different factors have been raised which were not already taken into account in developing the Proposals. As such, no responses have given rise to a need to materially alter the Proposals.

7. **NEXT STEPS**

7.1 As set out in the Consultation Document, the Trust is required to apply to the Secretary of State for Transport to increase the level of tolls able to be charged in respect of the Bridge. This is by way of an application made under section 6 of the Transport Charges &c (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1954.

- 7.2 Following completion of its consideration of the consultation responses, the Trust will now refine the Proposals (noting they are unlikely to change materially to those that were consulted upon, for the reasons given above) and prepare its formal application to the Secretary of State for Transport. It is expected that this will be submitted in Q1 2026.
- 7.3 Following the submission of the application, the Trust will publicise this fact by way of a statutory notice in one or more local newspapers. This will contain details of how objections to the application can be made to the Secretary of State. It is possible that a public inquiry will be held to consider any objections to the application prior to the Secretary of State determining the application.

Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust

December 2025