Political Myopia – A Bridge at Any Cost

The numbers for a new Forth crossing bridge simply do not add up. Commuters from Fife are condemned to a life time of congestion and Scottish Tax payers are condemned to pay for this short sighted solution for the rest of their foreseeable life.

There are 37,500 vehicle movements each day in one direction with upwards of 50,000 commuters in these vehicles and most of which cross in the rush hour in the morning in private cars. The provision for Trams similar to those currently being built in Edinburgh would allow only 2,500 per hour of these commuters onto additional public transport and even if these commuters could cross the Forth in the morning there would be nowhere for them to connect to the Edinburgh tram system. Gogar and Newbridge will already have commuters queuing, the park and rides in these areas will deliver at least 2500 passengers in the rush hour to insure that the system is at full capacity. The morning figures for Edinburgh airport suggest that 7 to 8,000 passengers arrive in the rush hour most of which want to access Edinburgh. Commuter from Maybury, Saughton and Rosburn like those in similar areas in Dublin will not be able to use the service because of its congestion. The Edinburgh on surface trams will suffer from the same problems. Dublin is now building their further extensions underground increasing the capacity to 10 to 15,000 passengers per hour.

If our myopic government are building their transport strategy for the East of Scotland around the Edinburgh trams then the project should be stopped and the system put underground.

Transport Scotland argues that they can radically increase the capacity of the existing rail from Fife but when their ideas were checked with Network Rail they were not as confident. The sum total suggested in the SESTRAN, SITCoS report up till 2026 would increase the current capacity by 8000 passenger in the morning rush hour.

By the time the new bridge is open in 2016 the traffic will have increased by 20% and by the time that all of the rail improvements are made in 2026 the traffic will have increased by 55%.

The commuter figures simple do not add up, there is no adequate provision for public transport in the current plans. Our government are failing in their

commitment to carbon reduction by condemning those, north of the Forth to using their cars.

A drawing of an early Forth bridge was recently discovery in the archives of the Earl of Kincardine and Elgin dated 1934. The location of this bridge is identical to that of the bridge being proposed by Transport Scotland, the spans are similar, it has four lanes, two lanes north and two south and two footpaths. Does the inclusion of a strip up the centre of our new Forth bridge constitute the sum total of our ability to look to the future from an obviously futuristic insight of 85 years ago!

Or should we look to other countries that have the vision for the future. One of those is Denmark who already own and operate the Oresund crossing which has the largest cable stay bridge in the world that takes heavy rail.

The Danes look to the future with fast high speed connections to Scandinavia and Germany and onto the rest of Europe.

They have the transport visionaries that are far sighted, farsighted enough to see that true multi modal connections which includes heavy rail are their future. The Fehmarn Belt Bridge is there next major project.

Fehmarn is a bridge that will connect Denmark to Germany by building a 12 mile long cable stay bridge over the Baltic Sea which will carry heavy high speed rail. The project has three major spans of 740m (compared with two at 680m for the Forth). The price for this is £3.2Bn which includes £1.0Bn for infrastructure (compared to £4.2Bn for the Forth Crossing). The Fehmarn Belt bridge project includes 160km of rebuilt railway from single to double track and electrification in it price (base on Transport Scotland's performance on the Stirling Alloa line this would cost over £1.0Bn as a standalone project!)! The railway will connect to the Trans European Network (TEN).The mast will be 280m high (nearly twice as high as those of the existing FRB) and the ship clearance will be 65m.

This project is substantially designed and is now, after the signing of a treaty between Denmark and Germany on its way through the public procurement process. It is due to commence building in 2011 with complete in 2018. This project is substantially ahead of the Forth Crossing with details like the wind shielding design to reduce closures due to high winds.

Base on these figures and the development already done on this project it is unlikely that the next Forth Crossing can be built by 2016.

Fehmarn also begs the question if the Danes can build a bridge of this size with heavy rail included at a cost of £3.2Bn then why are our myopic government contemplating spending £4.2 Bn on much reduced project.

Fast subsidised heavy high speed rail should be included in the Forth solution; it is the only way to move those 50,000 commuters from Fife and to encourage them out of their cars.

The Danes also priced a immersed tube tunnel and it came out marginally more expensive but due to its length of 19Km proved to be restrictive in trains clearing the tunnel before the next entered.

This makes a mockery of the costing put forward by Transport Scotland. It would appear to me that they deliberately manipulated prices to suit their inability to deliver projects on time and on budget and to further their irrational desire for a second road only bridge, a desire that comes predominantly from the sizable road haulage lobby.

Current estimates of the tolling level should tolls be necessary to finance this extravagant project would be in the region of £40 each way. Oil is forecast to reach $200 per barrel by the end of this year, a gallon of fuel will cost over £10.

We need a solution that will last the design life of 120 years, not a quick fix imposed on us by the road haulage industry. An industry whose are currently lobbying to put 82 Ton trucks on our highways, an industry that is guilty of having a disproportionate detrimental effect on the current bridge?