

Queensferry Community Council Demand Changes to Bill Process

☒ Queensferry & District Community Council (QDCC) this week called for a rethink of the way major public infrastructure projects are handled following the Forth Crossing Act coming into force.

The calls came in response to the Scottish Parliament's hybrid bill feedback process with objectors to the Forth Crossing Bill, which closes this week. It was the first 'hybrid bill' – a public bill affecting private interests – to be laid before the Parliament and the committee which scrutinised the bill agreed to give objectors the chance to comment on the process.

Martin Gallagher, convener of the community council's Forth Replacement Crossing sub-committee, said: "Lessons must be learned from this experience and we have made a number of suggestions to the Parliament which we feel will, if implemented, simplify the process for objectors and improve accountability."

"The process of grouping objectors and appointing a lead objector for each group seemed designed to minimise the workload for the Parliamentary clerks, while placing a great burden on objectors. The group hearings put objectors at an unfair disadvantage as Transport Scotland was able to bring in an experienced QC to quiz objectors, something which individual objectors and community councils clearly could not afford."

"The use too of an independent Assessor to hear evidence is also something we would like to see abolished. There was a feeling amongst some objectors that this was seen as an 'easy

way out' for the Committee by appointing someone else to do the work and write a report, which the Committee ultimately accepted the findings of in its entirety. The use of a third-party Assessor effectively reduces the process to a glorified public inquiry which is not how other primary legislation is dealt with. Hybrid bills deserve just as much scrutiny and consideration by MSPs as public bills receive."

The Scottish Parliament will collate the views from the hybrid bill feedback exercise and submit a summary to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for consideration.

Construction of the Forth Replacement Crossing is expected to commence in July. The £2.3billion project will see a new road bridge, approach roads and junctions built, with The Forth Road Bridge being retained for use by public transport.