



MERSEY GATEWAY BRIDGE AND SILVER JUBILEE BRIDGE TOLL CHARGES

Consultation feedback and analysis report

January 2025

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Executive summary

The Mersey Gateway Crossings Board (MGCB) and Halton Borough Council held a six-week consultation about proposed changes to toll charges and scheme details for the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee bridges.

The consultation covered a six-week period starting on 4 November and closing on 16 December 2024.

This consultation report summarises:

- The consultation activity
- Common themes of the responses from consultees
- Responses from the MGCB to the themes raised in the responses

The consultation responses have been used in a range of ways:

- By the MGCB and Halton Borough Council officers to help inform their report to Halton Borough Council and the recommendations it includes.
- To inform ongoing activity and future policy decisions undertaken by the MGCB as it works with its tolling operator merseyflow to ensure that paying for crossings is as easy as possible for bridge users.

A full meeting of Halton Borough Council will consider the recommendations from the MGCB and Halton Borough Council officers and, if necessary, approve a new Road User Charging Scheme Order (RUCSO) that sets out any new toll charges.

This report and the consultation feedback will be part of the information considered by Halton councillors as they make final decisions on any changes to toll charges and any other details of the scheme.

The changes will then be communicated directly by email or letter to all merseyflow customers at least 30 days prior to their introduction.

Consultation activity

The Mersey Gateway Crossing Board and Halton Borough Council would like to thank everyone who responded. The consultees collectively provided valuable feedback, representing a range of opinions on different topics, and we respect and value the contributions that have been made.

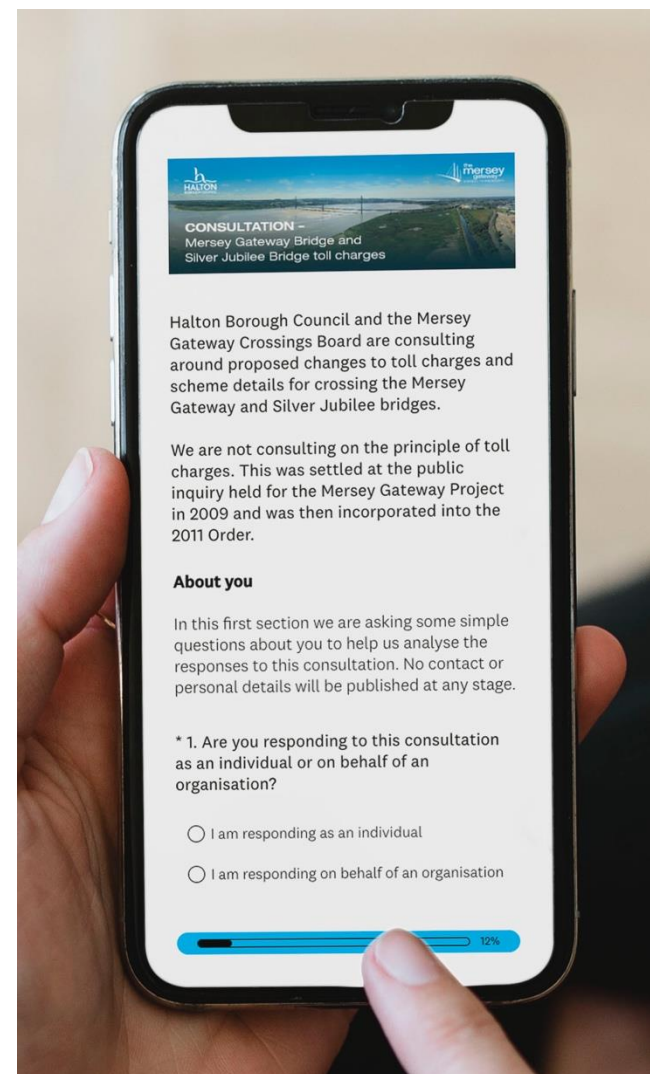
With support from our tolling operator merseyflow we issued almost 350,000 emails and letters to bridge users and organisations to engage them in the consultation. We also used a range of other methods to encourage responses from stakeholders representing drivers and organisations across the north west.

Consultation responses and themes

We received 10,391 responses, which represents a response rate from 3% of customers registered with merseyflow and approximately 0.75% of annual bridge users.

Respondents raised a range of issues and there was a mix of views ranging from respondents who feel very clearly that tolls should never have been introduced, to responses which stated they understood and supported the proposed 20% increase in tolls and the other changes proposed.

A summary of responses to the four key proposals presented for consultation is shown overleaf, along with high level responses from the MGCB. Both the feedback received and the MGCB's responses to it are expanded upon later in this report.



Online consultation survey

Executive summary

Proposal A – to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, particularly the long-term financial viability of the project, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends the 20% increase to Halton Borough Council as a necessary measure.

It is clear that the majority of respondents to this question would rather that toll charges do not rise at all, and that if a rise is necessary, then the majority would prefer as small a rise as possible. Many felt that the proposed 20% increase was too large and would significantly impact bridge users.

A number of respondents strongly objected to the principle of tolling, saying that the project should be funded through general taxation, and some believed (incorrectly) that the bridge has already been paid for so that tolls should be removed.

Some respondents understood and provided support for the proposed increase on the basis that:

- tolls hadn't been increased since the bridge opened in 2017
- the proposed increase was less than cumulative inflation during that time, and
- they felt that the investment in the essential infrastructure was important

We understand the concerns raised by many respondents about the impact of the proposed 20% toll charge increase.

However, after over 7 years of price stability, a minimum increase of 20% is required to ensure the financial robustness of the scheme without additional Government grants.

As a result of good management of resources in an uncertain economic environment, this increase represents less than half of a comparison with inflation via RPI over the same timescale.

A range of smaller increases were considered as part of the preparation for this consultation and have been considered again following consultee feedback.

Proposal B – to typically consider changes to toll charges every three years moving forwards

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends that Halton Borough Council typically considers changes to toll charges every three years.

Over 60% of respondents to this question supported this proposed timeframe for considering toll charges moving forwards. Those who opposed it were relatively evenly split between respondents who felt toll charges should be increased by a larger amount but less frequently and those who felt toll charges should be increased more frequently but by smaller amounts.

Balancing all the views received, we would recommend that the Council aims to increase the tolls every three years, unless another time period is required.

Given the current legal framework governing the process for increasing tolls a smaller but more frequent (annual) increase in tolls may cause confusion, as the process to create a new RUCSO would need to commence only a few months after the introduction of the previous RUCSO.

Executive summary

Proposal C – to raise the annual cost of the Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS) by 20% to £12 from April 2025, but to introduce a discount making it £10 annually for those customers who switch to the auto-renew system

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends an increase in the registration fee cost of LUDS in line with a proposed price increase of 20%.

This would be accompanied by an associated discount for those customers signed up to Auto Renewal with a Direct Debit.

Almost 75% of respondents to this question supported this proposal.

Proposal D – to increase Penalty Charge Notice fees (PCNs) for people who don't pay for their crossing on time by 25% (rising from £40 to £50) from April 2025 if the proposed rise in toll charges is introduced at the same time

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends that the PCN rate increases from £40 to £50.

The vast majority - over 97% - of users pay for their crossings and the PCN is there as a deterrent to encourage users to pay for their crossings, and so as the cost of the toll for compliant users increases, it is appropriate that a proportionate increase in the penalty for non-compliance is applied.

There are multiple ways of paying for the crossing for both the regular and infrequent users

Just over two-thirds (67%) of respondents to this question disagreed with the proposal. Just under a quarter (25%) supported it, whilst the remaining 8% felt that PCNs should increase by a greater amount.

As the PCN is intended as a deterrent to non-payment, and to encourage users to open accounts, it is recommended to the Council that they should offer the opportunity for those unregistered users on receipt of their first PCN at the new rate to cancel the PCN in exchange for opening a merseyflow account.

Discounts on standard toll charges

We also asked for feedback as to whether greater discounts on the standard toll charges would encourage people to open an account with merseyflow.

Just over 70% of respondents to this question who didn't already have an account responded that a higher discount would encourage them to open an account with merseyflow. The remaining 30% stated a range of reasons as to why this wouldn't encourage them to do so, e.g. they didn't use the bridges enough, they found the process difficult, they didn't trust the system.

It is helpful to receive feedback regarding the relationship between the level of discount and willingness to open an account. Although a higher discount may encourage more users to open a merseyflow account, a higher discount would also result in reduced revenues which would require an even larger increase in toll, hence it is something we will consider in the future but not as part of the proposed RUCSO.

Additional feedback

Some of the feedback received covered areas and issues outside of the questions asked in the consultation. The Mersey Gateway Crossings Board and Halton Borough Council value all feedback and will use this to inform future planning and activity.

About the Mersey Gateway Project

The Mersey Gateway Bridge is a tolled crossing of the River Mersey that opened in October 2017.

It crosses the River Mersey connecting the towns of Widnes in the north and Runcorn in the south. Both Widnes and Runcorn sit within the area covered by Halton Borough Council.

The Mersey Gateway Crossings Board Ltd (MGCB) is a special purpose vehicle established by Halton Borough Council with the delegated authority to deliver the Mersey Gateway Bridge project and to administer and oversee the construction and maintenance of the new tolled crossings including the tolling of the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Prior to the construction of the Mersey Gateway Bridge, the UK Government of the day made it very clear that if a new bridge over the River Mersey was to be developed, both it and the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge, which was free to use at the time, would become tolled crossings.

Financial background

Halton Borough Council is responsible for funding the Mersey Gateway Project in line with the funding agreement it has in place with central government.

It does this through setting the toll charges and rules relating to crossings made on the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee bridges.

The project is financed through a Public Private Partnership until 2044. Under the terms of this arrangement the payments to the private sector partners responsible for design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the Mersey Gateway project are index linked and increase from the 1st April every year.

To allow for this increase, it was forecast that toll charges would increase in line with inflation every year. Had this been implemented, this would have seen the toll charge for Class 2 vehicles (cars and small vans) rising from £2.00 in 2017 to more than £2.80 in 2024.

Toll charges have not been increased since the Mersey Gateway Bridge opened in 2017.

In line with the Government forecast at the time, an increase of 20% to respond to inflation was anticipated in the first seven years of the project and built into the financial forecasts.

However, cumulative inflation (based on Retail Price Index) over the past seven years has actually been 40% as shown in the table below.

To date it has been possible for the project to absorb the inflationary increase in costs. However, following the exceptionally high level of inflation between 2021 and 2023, the project now needs to raise additional revenue to meet the forecast expenditure going forward.

A copy of the 2024 Income and expenditure summary document is included as Appendix A.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cumulative RPI inflation % increase since 2017	3.3%	5.8%	7.0%	12.2%	26.4%	37.5%	41.3%
In year inflation % increase annually	3.3%	2.4%	1.1%	4.9%	12.6%	8.9%	2.7%
Class 2 vehicles toll charge once adjusted for cumulative inflation	£2.07	£2.12	£2.14	£2.24	£2.53	£2.75	£2.83
Class 2 vehicles toll charge under proposed approach	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2	£2.40

Table showing cumulative inflation since 2018

Consultation activity and methodology

The Mersey Gateway Crossing Board (MGCB) and Halton Council undertook a six-week consultation on proposed changes to toll charges and RUCSO* scheme details on the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee bridges.

Consultation started on **4 November 2024** and closed on Monday **16 December 2024**.

The principle of the consultation was approved by a meeting of Halton Borough Council's Executive Board on 24 October 2024 and the consultation details were then developed by the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board.

Interested parties were encouraged to respond to the consultation:

- **Online** via a specially created section on Mersey Gateway website:
<https://merseygateway.co.uk/consultation2024/>
- By requesting and completing a printed questionnaire by visiting one of Halton Council's Halton Direct Links in Widnes / Runcorn or merseyflow's Walk-In Centre in Manor Park, Runcorn and asking staff for a printed Mersey Gateway consultation questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were then manually entered into the online consultation to have all responses collated together.

Promotion of the consultation

The consultation was promoted via a range of channels:

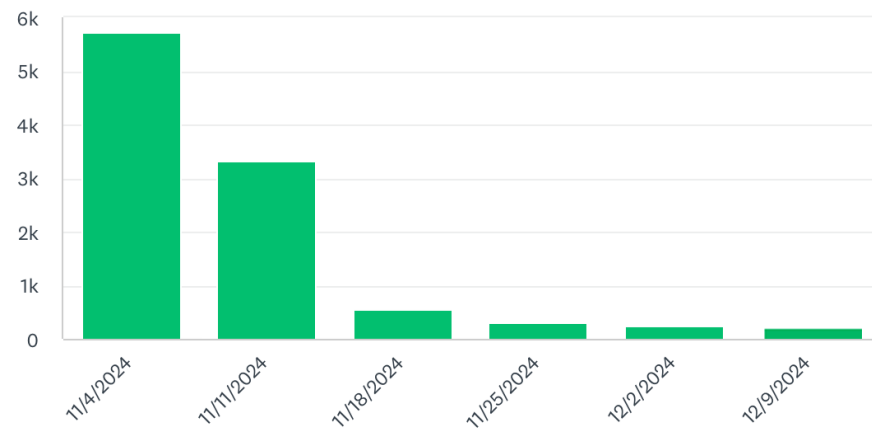
- Emails to 337,775 registered merseyflow customers (a mix of individuals and businesses) with 'email' as their preferred means of communication.
- Letters to 8,402 registered merseyflow customers (a mix of individuals and businesses) with 'post' as their preferred means of communication.
- Public notices were placed in local and regional newspapers, together with the London Gazette, prior to the start of the consultation.
- Emails were issued to 56 third-party stakeholder organisations or individuals such as neighbouring local authorities, regional MPs, local NHS Trusts and other similar groups.
- Briefing sessions were held for Halton Borough Council councillors.

*The A533 (Mersey Gateway Bridge) and the A557 (Silver Jubilee Bridge) Road User Charging Scheme Order 2025.

- Press releases were issued to local and regional media in advance of and at the start of the consultation.
- Social media posts were issued on Mersey Gateway Facebook and 'X' channels and shared by merseyflow and Halton Borough Council.
- Notifications were included on the merseyflow website and app.

Trends in response rate shown weekly throughout the consultation

- WC 4 November: 5730
- WC 11 November: 3338
- WC 18 November: 562
- WC 25 November: 293
- WC 2 December: 239
- WC 9 December: 204



Consultation questions

The consultation covered proposed changes to the toll charges and scheme details for crossing both bridges.

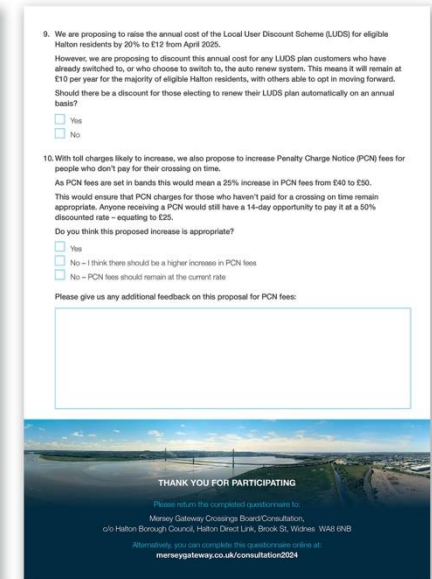
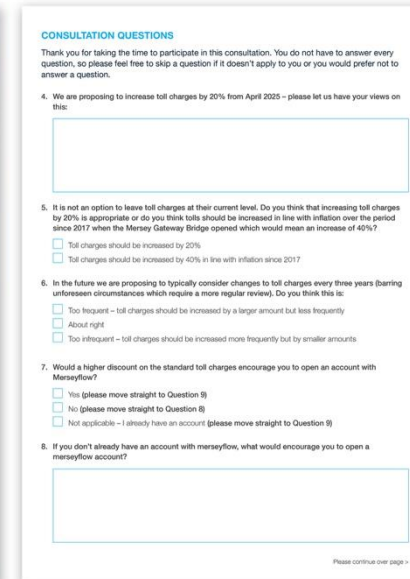
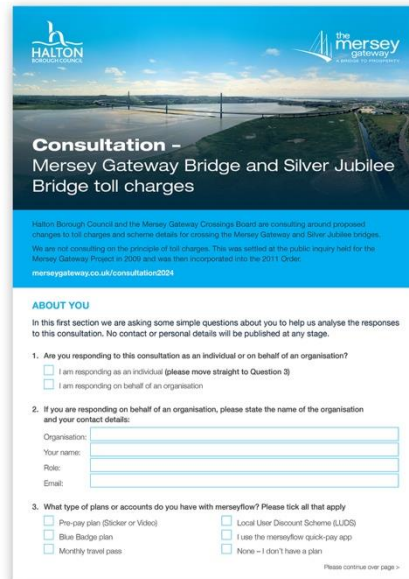
The consultation questions and answer options are included as Appendix B

Consultees did not have to answer all questions to participate.

The consultation was designed to provide realistic alternatives for respondents to consider given the reality of toll charges, the project's financial commitments and the impact that the changes we have seen in inflation since 2021 will have going forward.

Had we presented attractive but unrealistic options such as freezing toll charges, we understand these would have been more popular, but they would not have been deliverable. It would have been disingenuous to do so.

We deliberately chose to include a number of 'free text' response questions alongside some 'either or' questions which presented alternatives. These free text response questions allowed consultees to express their views on wider issues and we are grateful for the feedback.

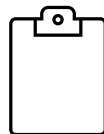


A copy of the hard-copy questionnaire is included as Appendix B.

CONSULTATION RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

10,391

Total number of
online responses



3m:29s



Typical time spent

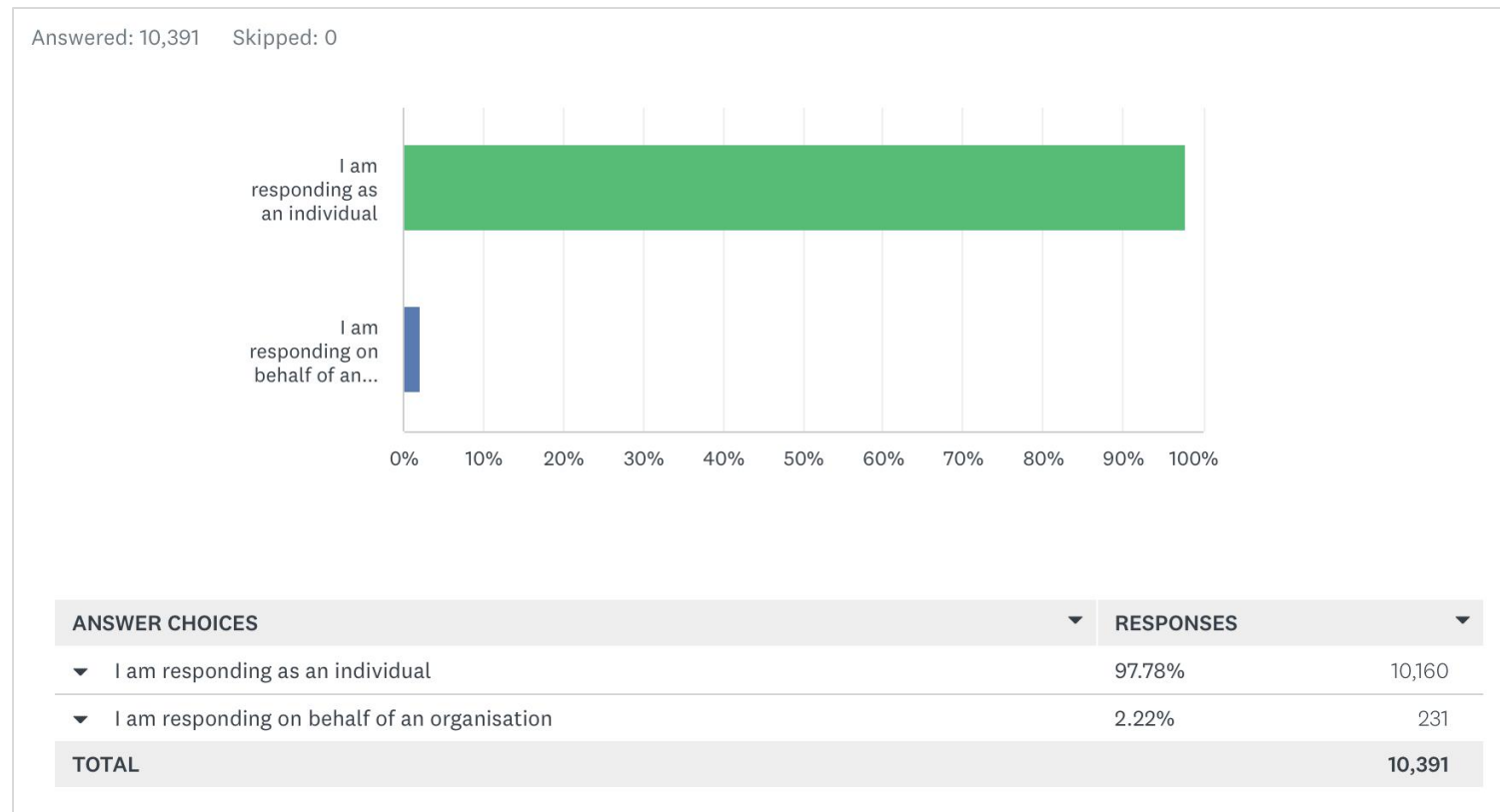
80%



Completion rate

Q1: Are you responding to this consultation as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Response rate 100%



This question was included to enable MGCB to easily identify responses from organisations employing or representing groups of people.

Equal weighting has been given to all responses, whether from individuals or organisations, in the statistics presented in this report.

Of the 231 respondents who identified that they were making responses on behalf of organisations, these included a range of bodies such as large and small businesses, people working for public sector bodies, and also responses from a number of charitable organisations.

The vast majority of responses to the consultation (over 97%) were from people who identified that they were responding on behalf of themselves rather than a wider organisation. There were no significant differences to the responses from people who responded as individuals and those who responded on behalf of organisations.

Q2: If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state the name of the organisation and your contact details:

Response rate 76%

Answered: 175 Skipped: 10,216

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Organisation:	Responses	99.43%	174
Your name:	Responses	98.86%	173
Role:	Responses	93.71%	164
Email:	Responses	99.43%	174

Of the 231 organisations who responded to Q1, 175 entered their contact details.

MGCB asked people who were responding on behalf of organisations to provide details of their organisation and role and contact details in order to help it verify their identity, paint a picture of the range and size of organisations that were responding to the consultation and to provide a point of contact for follow-up queries.

Of the 231 respondents who said they were responding on behalf of organisations, 76% (175) provided these details.

More details about the responses from organisations are provided on the following page.

Responses from organisations

Of the 231 respondents who identified that they were making responses on behalf of organisations, 175 of these provided details about the organisation they were representing.

These organisations included a range of bodies such as large and small businesses, neighbouring local authorities and other public sector bodies, energy companies, MPs, charities and organisations representing motorists such as the Road Haulage Association.

Responses from organisations generally mirrored those from individuals in terms of their views on the proposals put forward in the consultation, but there were also specific issues raised by many members of this group in their responses.

This included:

Many respondents understand the need for costs to be reviewed and managed, and that a potential increase in toll charges is to be expected but were concerned about the scale of the proposed 20% increase. There were suggestions it could be introduced in a delayed or phased way to mitigate the impact. These are responded to on page 15 of this report.

Businesses typically highlighted the impact of the proposed rise against a backdrop of other increasing costs, particularly the recent rise in Employers National Insurance, which comes into effect from April 2025.

Businesses and organisations operating in and around Halton expressing concerns around the proposed 20% rise would have on staff members and potential future staff members who live outside of Halton. They highlighted this would either be a cost

met by staff, in which case it would have an impact on recruitment and retention, or it would be an additional cost met by the business/organisation on top of other cost pressures, which would either result in rising prices or reduced profits. Some businesses expressed the view this would affect future recruitment plans and could affect customer retention if they were forced to raise prices.

Businesses, particularly those operating a large number of vehicles and/or using HGVs, highlighted that a 20% increase from April was not something expected in their budget planning processes, and it could be a significant cost increase as they already spend significant sums on toll charges .

Some highlighted the environmental impact of drivers choosing alternative routes (typically the M6 or through Warrington) to avoid paying the toll charges.

Charities operating in and around Halton highlighted that any increase will add to their costs and potentially impact their ability to provide support to people living north or south of the river, depending on where the charity is based, and were typically keen to see some kind of additional exemptions or discounts for charity workers or vehicles.

Some businesses responded by asking for improvements to the systems used that would enable them to have greater flexibility and/or to spend less time managing their account for their fleet of vehicles, e.g. making it easier and quicker to add vehicles, issue guest passes for VIP customers visiting the area etc. thus minimising the impact of any toll charge increases.

Out of the options provided, respondents representing organisations were generally supportive of the proposal to review toll charges every three

years moving forward and were more likely than individuals to favour smaller but more regular changes to toll charges as opposed to larger but less frequent changes.

MGCB response

We thank those businesses and organisations that have taken the time to respond on behalf of the people they represent, whether that is as their employees, customers, volunteers or constituents.

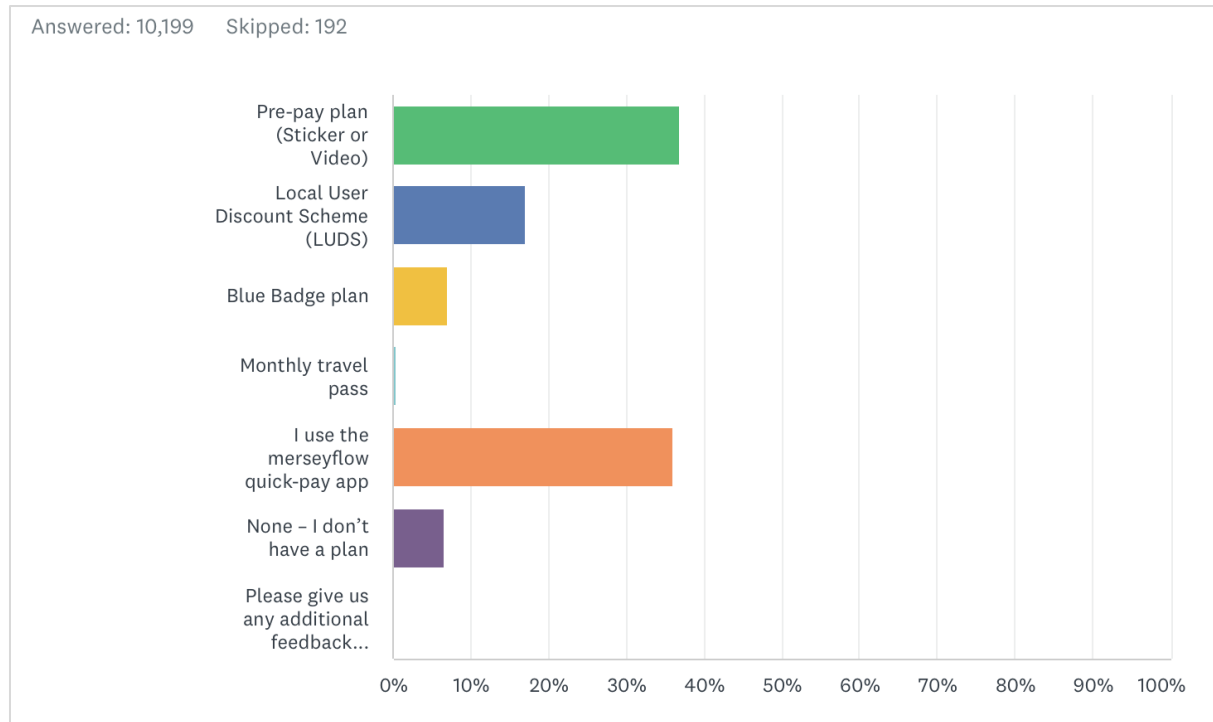
We have considered these responses as part of our overall feedback to this consultation and will also take them into account as we continue to work with our tolling partner merseyflow to continuously improve the service we are able to offer to all customers.

With regard to the management of fleet accounts, we will look at how this could be improved for those account holders with significant numbers of vehicles.

With the exception of this issue, the other points raised in the responses from organisations reflect the themes raised in general and are addressed at the relevant places in this report.

Q3: What type of plans or accounts do you have with merseyflow? Please tick all that apply

Response rate 98%



MGCB asked all respondents to detail what types of plans or accounts they or their organisation holds with tolling operator merseyflow.

As the graph and figures to the left show, the largest group of respondents was those that hold a pre-pay plan, which provides a 10% discount on all journeys if the vehicle is fitted with a sticker and a 5% discount on all journeys if no sticker is fitted.

The second largest group of respondents was those that use the merseyflow quick pay app to pay for their journeys. This provides a quick way of paying for those customers who aren't registered with merseyflow but doesn't provide any discount.

Respondents were able to select more than one option to allow for the fact that some people have more than one vehicle registered. There were around 296 people who did this, with the largest crossover being respondents who have a pre-pay plan and also use the app (134), or have another plan e.g. LUDS (86), or Blue Badge (58), for another vehicle as well as their pre-pay plan.

The breakdown of plan / account types of the respondents is largely representative of the number of accounts/plans held by customers, though Blue Badge holders are slightly over-represented in terms of the number of respondents and unregistered customers are slightly under-represented.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	36.90% 3,763
Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	17.12% 1,746
Blue Badge plan	7.14% 728
Monthly travel pass	0.50% 51
I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	35.96% 3,668
None - I don't have a plan	6.70% 683
Please give us any additional feedback...	Responses 0.00% 0
Total Respondents: 10,199	

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Response rate 73%

Total responses

Answered: 7,566 Skipped: 2,825

Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video):

Answered: 3,003 Skipped: 760

Local User Discount Scheme:

Answered: 1,330 Skipped: 416

Blue Badge plan:

Answered: 514 Skipped: 214

Monthly travel pass:

Answered: 28 Skipped: 23

I use the merseyflow quick-pay app:

Answered: 2,559 Skipped: 1109

None – I don't have a plan:

Answered: 457 Skipped: 226

Of the 10,391 survey respondents, there was a response rate of just under 73% for this question. The highest response rate was amongst pre-pay customers. Respondents raised a range of issues and there was a mix of views ranging from respondents who feel very clearly that tolls should never have been introduced to responses which stated they understood and supported the proposed increase.

It is clear that the majority of respondents would rather toll charges do not rise at all, and that if a rise is necessary, then the majority would prefer as small a rise as possible. Many felt 20% was too large and would significantly impact bridge users.

Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, particularly the long-term financial viability of the project, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends the 20% increase to Halton Borough Council as a necessary measure.

We understand the concerns raised by many respondents about the impact of the proposed 20% toll charge increase.

However, after over 7 years of price stability, a minimum increase of 20% is required to ensure the financial robustness of the scheme without additional Government grants.

As a result of good management of resources in an uncertain economic environment, this increase represents less than half of a comparison with inflation via RPI over the same timescale.

A range of smaller increases were considered as part of the preparation for this consultation and have been considered again following consultee feedback.

We have categorised the responses to Question Four into eight themes as set out below. These are ranked 1-8 in order of the frequency in which they were detailed in consultees' responses.

Each of the themes below is detailed on the following pages.

Theme 1: The scale of the proposed 20% increase

Theme 2: Objections to the principle of tolling

Theme 3: Calls for enhanced or expanded discounts

Theme 4: Consultation methodology

Theme 5: Financial transparency

Theme 6: Tolls should be removed because the bridge is paid for

Theme 7: Support for essential infrastructure funding

Theme 8: Frequency of potential future changes to toll charges

The following pages summarise the key issues raised by respondents within these themes and provide responses from the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board. Some of the themes and issues raised relate specifically to the proposals consulted on, but many respondents used the opportunity of the consultation to express views on tolling in general or on wider aspects of the project. The Mersey Gateway Crossing Board will consider all responses and suggestions and take account of them in our ongoing discussions with merseyflow around potential business improvement areas.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 1 – The scale of the proposed 20% increase

The specific issues raised by consultees within this theme have been carefully considered by the project team and are presented and responded to below (see also the following page):

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>1. Toll charges should be removed altogether, kept as they are, or increased by a lower amount than 20% from April 2025</p>	<p>The financial agreement that was agreed with the Government and the Merseylink consortium, which designed, built, operates and maintains the bridge, means that we need to factor in cumulative inflation over this past seven years to our future budgets.</p> <p>This is to ensure we can meet our financial commitments and that the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the project road, which stretches from the M56 in Runcorn to the A562 in Widnes can be paid for.</p> <p>If toll charges were removed, kept at their current level, or increased by a lower amount than 20% Halton Borough Council would have to fund future shortfalls from other areas of its budget, which given the current budget deficit is not a feasible option.</p>
<p>2. The 20% increase should be phased in over time</p>	<p>The funding agreement with Government required the tolls to increase annually by RPI, unless the project could demonstrate that the increase was not financially required. Whilst no increase in toll charges has been required to date, the increase in RPI since opening the Bridge has been 40%. A lower figure of 20% is now required for the reasons set out above. The introduction cannot be phased as this would lead to a shortfall between revenue and costs.</p>
<p>3. By keeping toll charges lower, traffic volumes would increase, so the project would receive the same income, without the impact on motorists</p>	<p>The increase in tolls at 20% recognises the elasticity of demand, as any increase in price may result in a decrease in demand for that product. So even a 10% increase in tolls would result in a reduction in users. The option of not increasing the tolls at all, and relying upon growth in traffic numbers, would not generate sufficient revenue to meet costs. Full details were provided in the supporting documentation to the consultation.</p>
<p>4. Class 1 vehicles, in particular motorbikes, should be charged and this would generate additional income which would allow for a smaller increase for other vehicles</p>	<p>Class one vehicles are less than half a percent of bridge traffic, so any revenue derived from charging would be minimal. The approach taken on the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee Bridges is consistent with other open road tolling schemes in England e.g., the Dartford Crossing, where Class 1 vehicles are not charged.</p>
<p>5. Blue Badge holders should be charged more, and this would generate additional income which would allow for a smaller increase for other vehicles</p>	<p>With regards to Blue Badge holders, there is a requirement for all tolling operators in the UK to identify exempt vehicles so that people using these do not pay a toll. Many vehicles used by Blue Badge holders are classed as exempt. Halton Borough Council’s Executive Board has already considered whether those Blue Badge holders whose vehicles are not exempt should have to pay the full toll charge and decided it was not an appropriate option for the project at this stage.</p>

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 1 – The scale of the proposed 20% increase

The specific issues that have been raised by consultees within this theme have been carefully considered by the project team and are presented and responded to below (see also the previous page):

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>6. LUDS plan holders should be charged more, and this would generate additional income which would allow for a smaller increase for other vehicles</p>	<p>Whilst we can understand people asking for this to be extended to people living in nearby areas, or to be used to minimise toll levels, it would not be appropriate for council tax paid by residents in Halton to be used to fund discounted crossings for people from outside the area or for Halton Council to do so. Halton Council is happy to have any discussions with neighbouring authorities that wish to invest in a similar way to set up a discount scheme for their residents.</p> <p>The boundary of Halton Borough Council is unusual in that the borough is divided by an estuarial river. LUDS allows the majority of its residents to access services on either side of the river without incurring additional costs. The principle of the LUDS plan is consistent with local discounts offered on other estuarial crossings throughout England.</p>
<p>7. Toll charges should be directly linked to Mersey Tunnel costs / discounts</p>	<p>Mersey Tunnel tolls are set by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the bridges and the tunnels are completely separate projects with very different financial agreements and requirements.</p> <p>However, we acknowledge that there is a logic in the toll levels for the two sets of crossings to be broadly comparable given they are relatively close to each other so as not to influence journey choices or cause potential congestion.</p> <p>We note that since this consultation began, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has announced its intention to increase tunnel charges to £2.30 for cars, with corresponding increases for other vehicle types.</p>
<p>8. A 20% increase would mean less people travelled across the bridges so would reduce project income, making this proposal unaffordable</p>	<p>We understand the responses from those people saying they would use the bridges less if toll charges increase. Any traffic and financial modelling work that we undertake always considers this and we accept that any increase in toll charges is likely to generate a reduction in traffic volumes.</p>
<p>9. The increase will have a particularly large impact on certain groups e.g. people on low incomes, people who live outside Halton but work in the borough, people who live outside Halton and travel through the borough for essential journeys, particularly as part of their work, and that a 20% increase would have a negative impact on them and the local/regional economy</p>	<p>Whilst recognising the impact that the increase in tolls will have on certain groups of users, the Council is not in the financial position to either hold tolls at the current rate or as explained elsewhere in this document to extend the discount schemes.</p>

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this?

Consultee responses: Theme 1 – The scale of the proposed 20% increase

Example comments

- This is a large increase in one go, and while I understand that it is less than would be the cost if the toll had increased in line with inflation, for many households and businesses, their income has not increased sufficiently to not notice even a 20% increase.
- This is a poor decision! Inflation we all get but 20%, why be greedy? Why not 10% or 15% maximum?
- 10% increase is enough considering the amount of people who use it.
- Absolute joke we already pay a lot of money to cross the bridge as someone who works in Runcorn and the way costs are rising for everything else I will have to consider a job outside of Runcorn because the costs are too much.
- Given there has been no increase I personally don't have a problem, but I wonder if the local Halton economy and small businesses will feel an impact given the additional costs they are having to meet since the budget.
- Toll charges should see a small increase yearly. A 20% increase for LUDS is still a very good rate.
- 20% is a fair increase , but if everybody paid to cross the bridge except local buses the increase could be lower. That includes motor bikes & blue badge holders.
- Bearing in mind the toll has not been increased annually by inflation over several years, this increase is reasonable.
- Reasonable and expected. First rise since the opening of the bridge.
- Please don't, that would put me off visiting the areas I visit locally across the bridge from Chester.
- My job does not have a 20% increase in pay over the year, the money both bridges make already is surely enough to cover costs for running and maintenance. I only use the bridge for work reasons, nothing else.
- I will not be using your bridge again and would rather take the long way around and use the mersey tunnels in future.
- This is unacceptable and the crossing of the bridge is far too expensive. The bridge service some of the most deprived areas in the country. While the residents of Halton the surrounding areas don't.
- I would probably not use the bridge as much, I use it roughly once a week. But I can avoid it and take the M6 and M62.
- I use it from St Helens. I will just use the M6 and M56.
- I will be even less inclined to use the toll road. I usually go round on the M6 but occasionally use the toll.
- We'll just start using the Mersey Tunnels to head to Wales instead of the bridge.
- I understand the rationale. Can a lower fare based on frequency of use be considered? eg if you use the bridge 15 x in a month 10% off.
- Will change to use Mersey Tunnel instead of Mersey Gateway. Only to use if benchmark to Mersey Tunnel.
- Increases should take into account the cost of other crossings (above and below water) and remain competitive. Availability of other routes should be considered if traffic is to be retained on the Mersey Gateway and not lost to free routes.
- You are pricing people out of jobs, they cannot afford to work and you risk them avoiding the borough altogether, you are also having an impact on those who visit family and friends, who cannot afford to visit more often. You are also taking money away from families, therefore, also taking food from their mouths. This bridge already rakes in millions of pounds every year, inflation is not a valid reason to increase the already disgraceful and extortionate charges how much does it actually cost to maintain this bridge yearly?? Where is the extra money going? Can you justify where this extra revenue will be spent? If not, and you're raising more than enough already to maintain the bridge, then you should absolutely NOT be increasing these tolls!

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 2 – Objections to the principle of tolling

The specific issues raised by consultees within this theme have been carefully considered and are presented and responded to below:

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>The Mersey Gateway Bridge should be funded through government / taxation</p> <p>Silver Jubilee Bridge should never have been tolled</p>	<p>We understand that there are many people who fundamentally object to the principle of tolled crossings and who feel that the bridges should not be tolled at all. It is important to acknowledge this viewpoint when considering the consultation responses.</p> <p>When Halton Borough Council set out the case for developing the new bridge, the options were made very clear by the UK Government at the time, and this was reflected in Halton Borough Council’s consultation materials and activity before the project began.</p> <p>The choice was either between the status quo – retaining an over-used and under-pressure Silver Jubilee Bridge that was free to users or introducing a tolled crossing that would also mean the tolling of the Silver Jubilee Bridge due to its proximity to the new crossing.</p> <p>Following extensive consultation and a public inquiry, the decision was made to proceed with the construction of the Mersey Gateway Bridge as a tolled crossing. Unless there is a fundamental change in UK government policy towards paying for major estuary crossings and a major additional financial commitment from the UK government, this position is very unlikely to change and toll charges will remain until at least 2044.</p>
<p>Comparisons with other bridges that are toll free e.g. Severn Bridge, Queensferry Crossing</p>	<p>The situations for the Severn Bridge and the Queensferry Crossing are different. The Severn Bridge was tolled for 52 years until it became free in 2018. By this time construction had been paid for and the UK Government decided to fund the maintenance of the crossing through general taxation. In Scotland, the transport policy is devolved and Scottish government decided that the construction and maintenance costs for the Queensferry Crossing would be paid for through general taxation. Newer crossings like the second Tyne Tunnel, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing and the Silvertown Tunnel (scheduled to open in April 2024) are tolled crossings.</p>
<p>Merseyside area suffers disproportionately from tolls</p>	<p>Whilst recognising that Merseyside has a number of tolled crossings with the two bridges and the Mersey Tunnels, this is a matter for UK Government policy around funding for estuary crossings which applies across England. For example, the Silvertown Tunnel in East London is scheduled to open in April 2025, and from this point drivers will also pay a toll to use the existing free-to-use Blackwall Tunnel as well.</p>

Example comments

- I believe there shouldn't be a charge. As other bridges/tunnels within GB either don't have tolls or have had them removed in recent years. The Mersey Gateway bridge is in a socio/economic deprived area and likewise should be toll free.
- There should be no need for tolls at all on the Silver Jubilee bridge.
- I strongly disagree with a toll at all, and do not think it should increase, there is currently no crossing that doesn't charge, with 2x tunnels and now 2x bridges charging. The toll should not increase.
- Why toll fees will not instead be completely scrapped as they did in the South West with the Severn Bridge?
- My view is that both bridges be free (and the Mersey tunnels) to cross and should be part of the national road network, maintained through the vehicle excise licence money collected by the government.
- It's a disgrace. There shouldn't even be a charge. The silver jubilee bridge was free until the new bridge was built. People are already stretched to the hilt. The government should cover the cost of road and bridge building through our taxes. We pay road tax and tax on fuel etc. simply these charges should be abolished. Not increased.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 3 – Calls for enhanced or extended discounts

Respondents raised a range of potential options and ideas linked to greater discounts. We welcome the feedback and suggestions from consultees.

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
Increasing the 10% discount that account holders currently receive on the main toll charge	This consultation and the potential changes to toll charges present a natural opportunity for the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board and Halton Borough Council to look at the discount packages that exist and consider whether it is possible to make any adjustments to those that could benefit regular users of the bridges whilst maintaining the project as financially robust.
Introducing extra discounts for a range of groups e.g. students, people on low incomes, people who work in Halton, people classed as essential workers, people who drive environmentally friendly vehicles etc.	We have to ensure that any changes to discount packages are affordable within the wider context of the Council’s financial commitments relating to the Mersey Gateway Project and are deliverable within the powers granted to Halton Borough Council by the Department for Transport.
Making monthly passes cheaper	Any extension of the discount scheme to other groups, cheaper monthly passes or a higher discount rate, would create a gap in the project finances, that would need to be covered from other resources. As no government funding is available, then the gap would need to be covered by increasing the tolls for other road users.
The LUDS scheme being extended to those who live outside Halton	The LUDS scheme is funded by Halton Borough Council and the UK Government for eligible Halton residents. It would be up to other local authorities to fund similar schemes for residents who live outside Halton.
Making the LUDS discount available to all Halton residents	The UK Government stipulated there had to be a socio-economic criteria attached to the LUDS scheme, and this requirement remains in place, which is why Halton residents living in properties with council tax bands G and H are not eligible for the standard LUDS plan.

Example comments

- I agree prices have to rise but I believe the free residents crossing plan should be extended to cover more locals in Widnes/Runcorn and Warrington.
- I think the rise is fair, however I do feel that the LUDS should be rolled out to the wider Liverpool City Region population, as currently, Runcorn in particular is the only town in the region seclude.
- Extend the perimeters to FRODSHAM and Helsby residents.
- The local offer should be extended to include residents of Warrington.

- Recognition of Essential Workers I strongly recommend introducing toll discounts for individuals in essential services, including NHS staff, police officers, and fire brigade personnel.
- Consider implementing discounts for low-emission vehicles, particularly electric and hybrid options, while potentially maintaining standard or slightly higher charges for petrol and diesel vehicles.
- While I don't disagree with increasing the charges I think the area for residents free pass should be expanded to include areas such as Warrington particularly the south of Warrington as the bridge is fairly essential rather than a convenience, for travel

in that direction for those residents.

- I believe that nhs staff who live outside of halton but have to come into halton to work should have a pass eg doctors and nurses who cross the bridge a number of times for home visits.
- Rather than thinking about putting the price up my suggestion would be that you should extend the subsidised local travel scheme to the whole of Merseyside and offer a discount in the same way as the Mersey Tunnels do.
- Toll should be free or at least reduced for Frodsham residents who need to use the bridge for work.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 4 – Consultation methodology

Some respondents raised concerns around consultation methodology in two key areas as set out below.

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
Frustration that there were no options presented as a response to Question 5 enabling consultees to express their views that tolls should either be removed, reduced or remain the same	<p>We welcome the feedback on the consultation methodology and understand why some respondents are frustrated that we did not present an option for toll charges to remain as they are or even for them to be lowered or abolished in the answer options for Question 5.</p> <p>We understand that almost everyone would rather not have to pay a toll charge for using the bridges and, also, given that toll charges are necessary, that everyone would rather these are minimised.</p> <p>The consultation was designed to provide realistic alternatives for respondents to consider given the reality of toll charges, the project's financial commitments and the impact that the changes we have seen in inflation since 2021 will have going forward.</p> <p>Had we presented attractive but unrealistic options such as freezing toll charges, we understand these would have been more popular, but they would not have been deliverable for the reasons set out on in MGCB's response to Theme 1 of the responses to Question 4. It would have been disingenuous to present these options.</p> <p>We deliberately chose to include a number of 'free text' response questions alongside some 'either or' questions which presented alternatives. These free text response questions allowed consultees to express their views on wider issues, including the principle of toll charges, and we are grateful for the feedback. We will take on board all feedback and use it to inform the development of any future consultation exercises.</p>
Queries as to why RPI rather than CPI was used as a measure of inflation in the financial modelling presented	Our financial modelling uses RPI as this is the specific methodological requirement set out by the Department for Transport in the financial agreement reached in 2014.

Example comments

- You only let me select if I think 20% or 40% is appropriate. I have selected 20% but the actual answer is the toll should not be increased at all.
- Not in favour of such a large increase, so only having 20% or 40% as options in the next question is disingenuous.
- Why are the only 2 options to increase by 20 or increase by 40percent?
- A rise in place with wages should be compared. Not RPI. RPI includes many items which will not impact the bridge costs so is not an accurate comparison.
- The consultation shows RPI, however CPI is a more reasonable measure to use and hopefully what is used to inflate costs for maintaining and operating the bridge. Cumulative CPI increase since 2017 is currently 31%. So if 20% was anticipated for then the increase needed should only be 11%, not the 20% proposed.
- Strongly against, the proposed justification of the use of RPI for the inflation figure is unacceptable, benefits and pay settlements are linked to CPI, CPI should be used for any inflationary raise. Money should be raised by removing the exemption of Halton residents to the toll.
- Shameful. Question 4 is ridiculous - as you'll smartly word this in a way that makes it sound like people have said yes 'increase by 20%.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 5 – Financial transparency

The specific issues raised by consultees within this theme have been carefully considered and are presented and responded to below:

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>Respondents wanted to know more about project costs and expenditure, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - why an increase of 20% is required / what costs does the project face that have increased? - how revenue generated through toll charges and Penalty Charge Notices is used - does the project generate an annual loss or surplus? <p>Some respondents commented that they understood the rationale for increases in toll charges but would welcome more information to justify that and understand how income is spent.</p>	<p>We understand the desire for transparency and prior to this consultation published a range of financial details and information on the Mersey Gateway website at https://merseygateway.co.uk/finances/. including a project income and expenditure summary document covering the first seven years (Appendix A). Moving forward we will publish this data more frequently, i.e. on an annual basis, and review how we can best present and share it to inform bridge users and local residents. This annual data report will be supplemented by quarterly data around traffic numbers, payment methods and income from toll charges and PCNs, which is already published by merseyflow, and is also shared on the Mersey Gateway website.</p> <p>To summarise the current position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halton Borough Council is responsible for funding the Mersey Gateway Project in line with the funding agreement it has in place with central government. • Under the terms of this arrangement the payments made by Halton Borough Council to the private sector partners responsible for design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the Mersey Gateway project are index linked and increase from the 1st April every year. • To allow for this increase it was originally forecast that toll charges would increase in line with inflation every year, and had this been implemented, this would have seen the toll charge for Class 2 vehicles rising from £2.00 in 2017 to more than £2.80 in 2024. • To date it has been possible for the project to absorb the inflationary increase in costs. However, following the exceptionally high level of inflation from 2021-2023, the project now needs to raise additional revenue to meet the forecast expenditure going forward. • Questions in relation to how is PCN revenue used and does the project make a profit/loss are addressed in the financial information provided at www.merseygateway.co.uk. The question of “has the bridge been paid for?” is addressed elsewhere in this report. • With regard to maintenance, the bridge and all associated highway infrastructure is subject to defined inspection and maintenance plans, which dictate the scope and frequency of individual maintenance activities. Other maintenance work may be implemented on a reactive basis as a result of cyclic inspection.

Example comments

- Transparency is needed, what is this 20%+ for? I'm largely ignorant to all the details regarding the Merseyflow bridge but hypothetically. Has the bridge been paid for? What's the break even cost? How regularly does it have maintenance?
- Don't have an issue but will this mean that the debt will be paid off sooner thus meaning the bridge will be handed back to Halton council earlier than expected.

- Would like to know what the actual toll funds, for example repaying of finance to build or maintenance. Would have expected costs to decrease once the bridge has been paid for.
- This bridge already rakes in millions of pounds every year, inflation is not a valid reason to increase the already disgraceful and extortionate charges how much does it actually cost to maintain this bridge yearly?? Where is the extra money going? Can you justify where this extra revenue will be spent?

- I understand that due to the increase of inflation and other issues you are facing difficulties that have to be resolved by increasing toll charges. However, I think you have to be more transparent about those difficulties: what are the costs that you are facing: how much goes to pay the loan (I guess there is a loan), how much goes to operation, etc.
- I would like to see transparency with regards to tolls and running costs of bridges to access whether increases are needed or are being used to bolster council deficit not necessarily in this area.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 6 – Tolls should be removed because the bridge is paid for

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>Some respondents felt that the bridge(s) had already been paid for and that tolls should now be removed</p>	<p>The bridges have not been ‘paid for’ in the way that some respondents believe. As such, both the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee Bridges are scheduled to remain tolled crossings until 2044.</p> <p>Once 2044 is reached, Halton Borough Council would, in principle, support the removing of tolls on the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge, providing all outstanding financial matters relating to the two bridges have been met.</p> <p>However, any decision would also require a commitment from the Government of the day to meet the annual repairs and maintenance costs from the National Roads Budget, as even after the bridges are paid for, there would be an annual maintenance and repairs budget of several million pounds that would need to be funded appropriately.</p> <p>The Mersey Gateway Project will cost £1.86bn over its 30-year time period (2014-2044). This amount is based on the figures agreed by all parties in the contracts awarded to the Merseylink consortium (which designed, built, operates and maintains the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the approach roads) in March 2014 and reflects the £250m saved by Halton Borough Council and Merseylink through the innovative procurement process.</p> <p>To meet these costs, the funding arrangements between the UK Government and Halton Borough Council were agreed on the basis that users of the Mersey Gateway and the Silver Jubilee bridges will contribute the majority of funding through the payment of tolls.</p> <p>In addition to the revenue from users, the Department for Transport provides grant funding for the project every year, £100m from 2017 to 2024. Without this subsidy from Government, the project would make a significant annual loss.</p>
<p>Some respondents stated strongly that once the bridges were paid for that tolls should be removed</p>	<p>Both the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee Bridges are scheduled to remain tolled crossings until 2044.</p> <p>Once 2044 is reached, Halton Borough Council would, in principle, support the removing of tolls on the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge, providing all outstanding financial matters relating to the two bridges have been met.</p>

Example comments

- We were told as a local business that this toll would only exist until the bridge was paid for, it is well and truly paid for now, also as a local business it is just another unfair taxation we have no choice but to pay or increase congestion in the centre of Warrington. I do not think there should be any toll never mind an increase.
- I think it's greedy. This bridge has more than paid for itself now.

- Was there talk that once the bridge had been paid for it should be free.
- I think you shouldn't be expecting people to fund a bridge that has already been paid off?
- Not against it, provided the toll is fully removed once the project has paid itself back.
- There shouldn't be any increase the amount of money that has been made from charges and fines has paid for that bridge a million times over.
- You should publish the date that the investment

- will be paid off and toll charges are removed.
- I was under the impression that the toll was to cover the cost of building the bridge and when paid for the toll would be removed?
- Surely everything bar maintenance is paid off?
- We were told once it was paid off it's become free to use, so I don't agree with any of this.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 7 – Support for essential infrastructure funding

We welcome the feedback from consultees who acknowledged the requirement to fund essential infrastructure activity and stated that the investment in the Mersey Gateway Bridge and associated infrastructure improvements has provided them with quicker, easier and more reliable journeys over the bridges in Halton.

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>Many respondents acknowledged the need for toll charges to support bridge maintenance</p> <p>Some respondents considered a 20% increase in the context of cumulative inflation since 2017, and toll charges having been static for seven years as reasonable and appropriate</p> <p>Many respondents highlighted the improved travel experiences and reliability that the Mersey Gateway Bridge provides</p>	<p>The Mersey Gateway Bridge is the centrepiece of the project, but the project budget also covers the junction and road improvements made to and the maintenance of 9 miles of approach roads across Halton, ranging from the M56 junction to the south of Runcorn to the A562 in Widnes and the free-flow tolling operation that runs across both bridges.</p> <p>This feedback reflects what bridge users have previously said to us - in merseyflow’s 2024 Customer Service Survey, respondents said that on average they save over 75 minutes every week travelling in and around Halton and crossing the river compared to their average journey times before the Mersey Gateway Bridge opened.</p> <p>The same survey also found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% of customers said the standard of service was ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ • A clear majority of all respondents said it was ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to pay or manage payment for their crossings <p>The Mersey Gateway Crossings Board is continuing to work with merseyflow to identify and continually make improvements to the tolling system to make it as easy as possible for drivers to pay or manage payments for their crossings. We also continue to work with Merseylink, which is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of both bridges and the approach roads to ensure a seamless journey experience wherever possible.</p>

Example comments

- Given the cumulative inflationary rises, the increase is fair, provided that will cover the costs of maintaining the bridges.
- The improved infrastructure and journey times have improved the travel experience throughout the area.
- Putting charges up isn't unreasonable, although 20% in one go seems a little steep. Having said that, it is less than the 40% increase

in inflation since 2017 and is therefore the less expansive option for users of the bridges.

- I think the most important thing is to ensure the bridge is kept well. Therefore if extra money is needed it should be increased.
- With no increases within the foregoing period then I think the proposal is proportional to the current financial position over the previous number of years.
- No problem with an increase in charges providing

the money is ringfenced for the bridge, current and future needs and maintenance.

- If necessary to meet maintenance contracts then that's ok.
- The Mersey Gateway Bridge is as it says a "Gateway": it is a significant piece of infrastructure and makes my life easier: therefore I agree with the increase in charges.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Theme 8 – Frequency of potential future changes to toll charges

We welcome the feedback around the frequency of any potential future changes to toll charges. Toll charges will require reviewing, and are likely to need increasing, throughout the lifetime of the project between now and 2044.

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>This issue was raised in connection with the scale of the proposed 20% increase.</p> <p>Some respondents felt that smaller but potentially more regular increases would have been preferable since the bridge opening</p> <p>Some respondents also suggested this approach moving forward, and this is also reflected in the responses to Question Six</p>	<p>As was set out in the consultation, our preference moving forward is to routinely consider any potential changes to toll charges every three years, though in exceptional circumstances it may be more frequent.</p> <p>The majority of consultees have supported this proposal as is shown in responses to Question Six, and this is the option that is being recommended to Halton Borough Council for approval.</p> <p>We also recognise the comments from respondents who suggested that earlier but smaller increases could have presented an alternative way for the project to meet its financial commitments to this point. There are a range of reasons why that approach has not been taken before by the MGCB and Halton Borough Council, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To date, it has been possible for the project to absorb the inflationary increase in costs • An increase was not previously necessary and would have generated additional costs for our customers • We did not think it was appropriate to consider increasing toll charges during the Covid pandemic <p>This has then been exacerbated by the exceptional increases in inflation seen since 2021.</p> <p>However, we do recognise that greater certainty around the timing and potential scale of any future toll charge changes will be helpful for bridge users – whether they are individuals or organisations, which is why we are recommending the approach to typically review toll charges every three years, barring exceptional circumstances.</p>

Example comments

- This is a large increase in one go, and while I understand that it is less than would be the cost if the toll had increased in line with inflation, for many households and businesses, their income has not increased sufficiently to not notice even a 20% increase.
- No-one would welcome this, but it is inevitable that costs will rise. I hope that a 20% increase will be enough to cover the next 3-4 years at least.
- Given inflation over the period, 20% does appear

reasonable. Going forward a review every 5 (or possibly 3) years may be more appropriate to ensure that increases (or reductions?) in the price are gradual. Given the relative volatility of income and costs, an annual review is not appropriate.

- Little and annually is better rather large increases every few years.
- It feels big jump for regular users who are struggling with increases everywhere, it would be better accepted if there is a commitment to fix this for a number of years.

- As much as I don't think the tolls are beneficial to the borough as a whole, I do understand the need as the new bridge was needed. As much as 20% is a large increase especially for non-lud accounts, as this is the first rise since the bridge opened I can understand why it's needed.
- Perhaps laying out a 7-year plan with perhaps a 2% annual increase. After all the average inflation rate over the last 20 years was only 2.5%. An increase of 20% from 2025 is fair but no increase thereafter without appropriate financial planning and communication.

Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

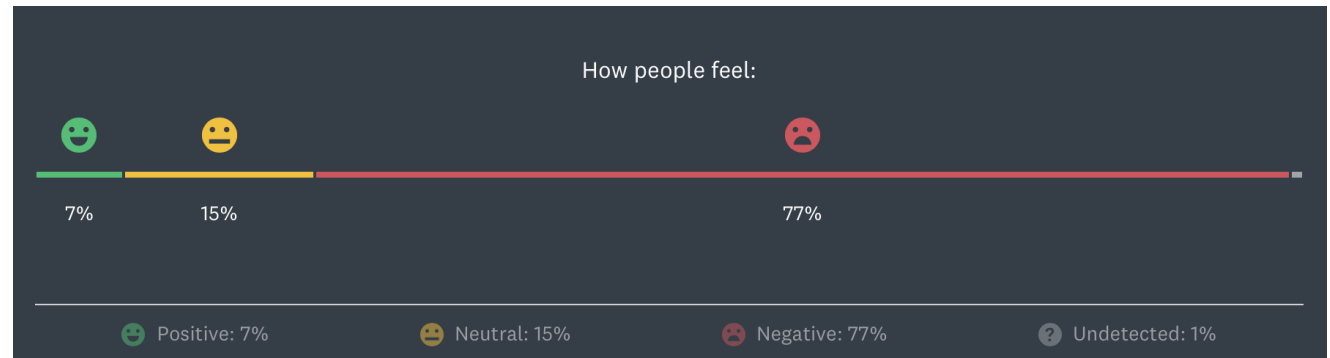
Response rate 73%

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment Analysis has been used to support the categorisation of open-text responses to reveal the emotion behind what people are saying.

By categorising responses as positive, negative, or neutral, we can measure the public's overall stance on the toll charge increase.

1. **Negative:** Responses opposing the toll increase, citing affordability concerns, dissatisfaction with the consultation process, or criticism about transparency.
2. **Neutral:** Responses that neither strongly support nor oppose the increase, including suggestions for alternative methods (e.g., gradual increases).
3. **Positive:** Responses supporting the toll increase, often citing inflation or maintenance needs as justifications.
4. **Undetected:** Responses that don't have enough information to be categorised



Sentiment analysis

Total responses: 7,566

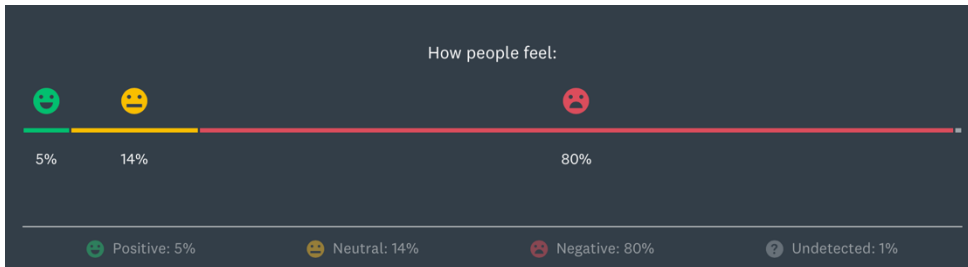
Positive 7%:	534 responses
Neutral 15%:	1,147 responses
Negative 77%:	5,863 responses
Undetected 1%:	22 responses

- **Negative Sentiments** focus on the financial burden, distrust in the consultation and transparency.
- **Neutral Sentiments** revolve around economic understanding, approval of fees tied to specific conditions and alternative suggestions.
- **Positive Sentiments** highlight acceptance of the increase and inflation awareness, support for funding and long-term stability.

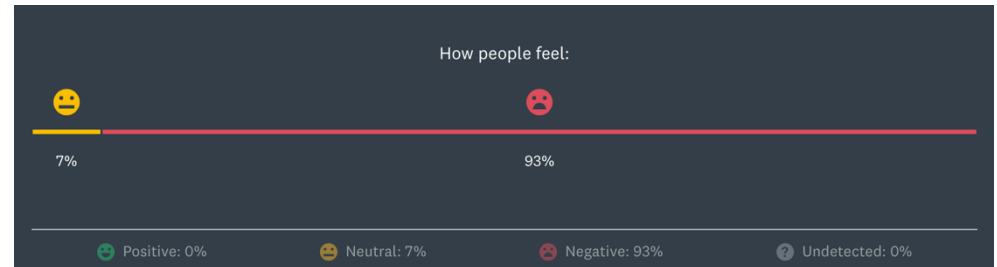
Q4: We are proposing to increase toll charges by 20% from April 2025 – please let us have your views on this

Sentiment analysis per plan type – is there a marked difference?

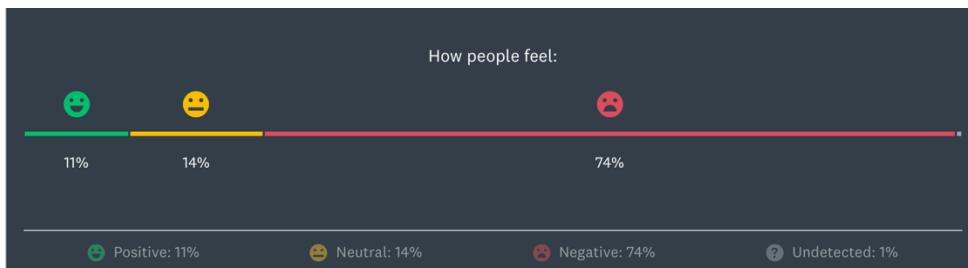
Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video): 3,003 responses



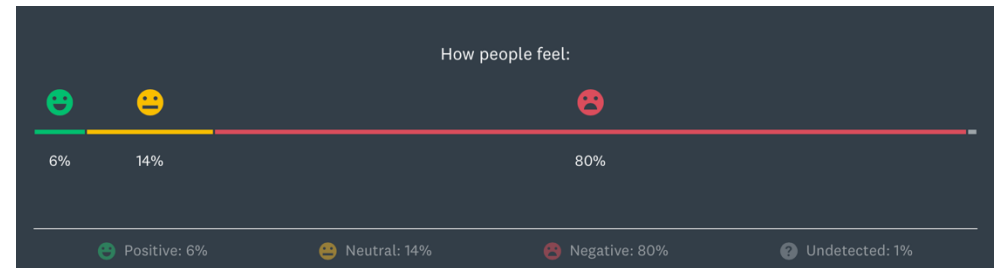
Monthly travel pass: 28 responses



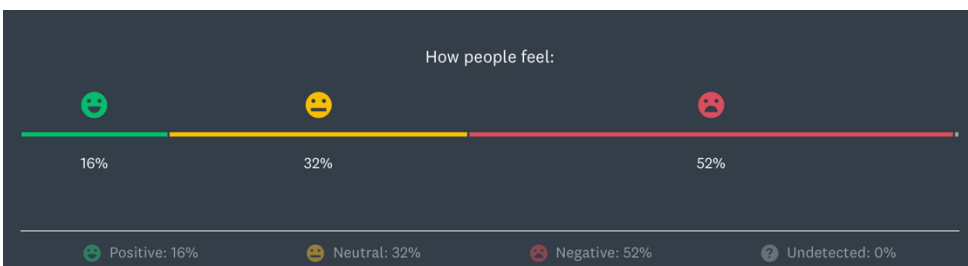
Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS): 1,330 responses



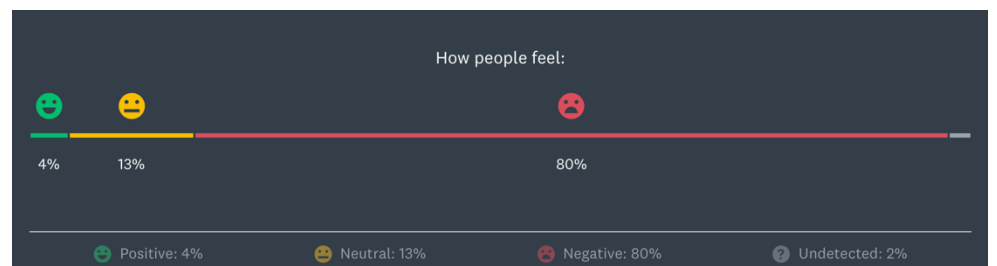
I use the merseyflow quick-pay app: 2,559



Blue Badge plan: 514 responses



None – I don't have a plan: 457 responses

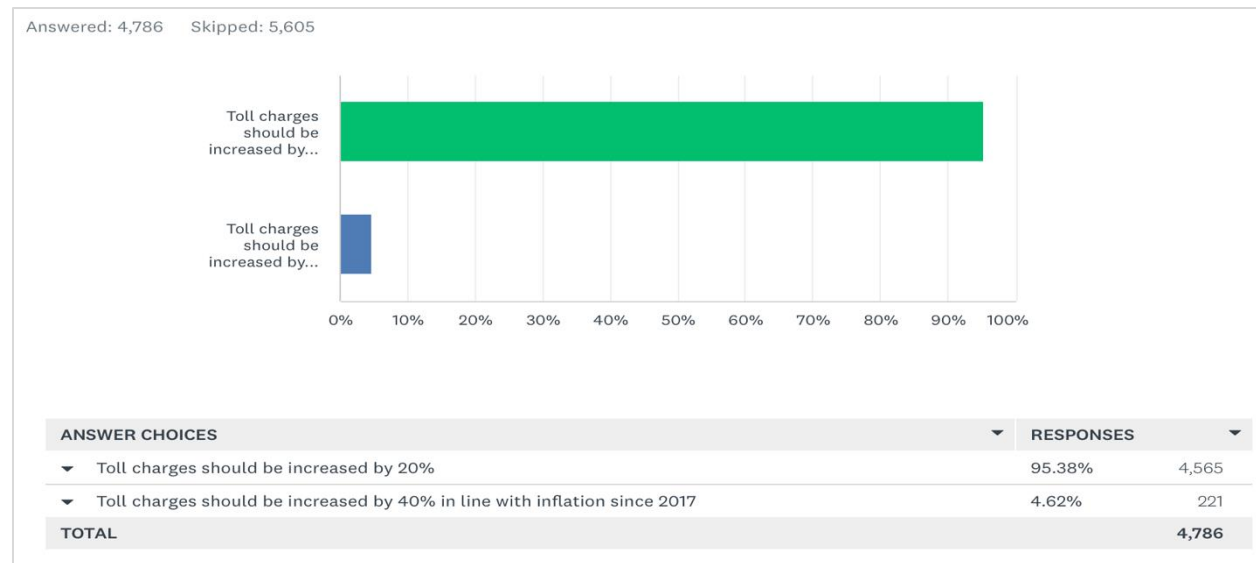


Whilst there is no major variation in the sentiment of responses from different user groups, the sentiment expressed by LUDs plan and Blue Badge holders is more positive in relative terms.

Q5: It is not an option to leave toll charges at their current level. Do you think that increasing toll charges by 20% is appropriate or do you think tolls should be increased in line with inflation over the period since 2017 when the Mersey Gateway Bridge opened which would mean an increase of 40%?

Response rate 46%

- Toll charges should be increased by 20%
- Toll charges should be increased by 40% in line with inflation since 2017



The vast majority of respondents (over 95% of those who responded to Question 5) felt that the proposed 20% increase was more appropriate than a 40% increase which would be more in line with cumulative changes to inflation since the Mersey Gateway Bridge opened.

However, it is also clear that the vast majority of respondents would rather see no increase and tolls kept to a minimal level and a large number of overall survey respondents chose not to answer this question. The response rate was 46%, which is the lowest of any question asked in the consultation survey, and it is clear from comments made elsewhere across the survey that a number of respondents felt that there should have been an option for 'no increase' or a 'smaller % increase' provided as a third option.

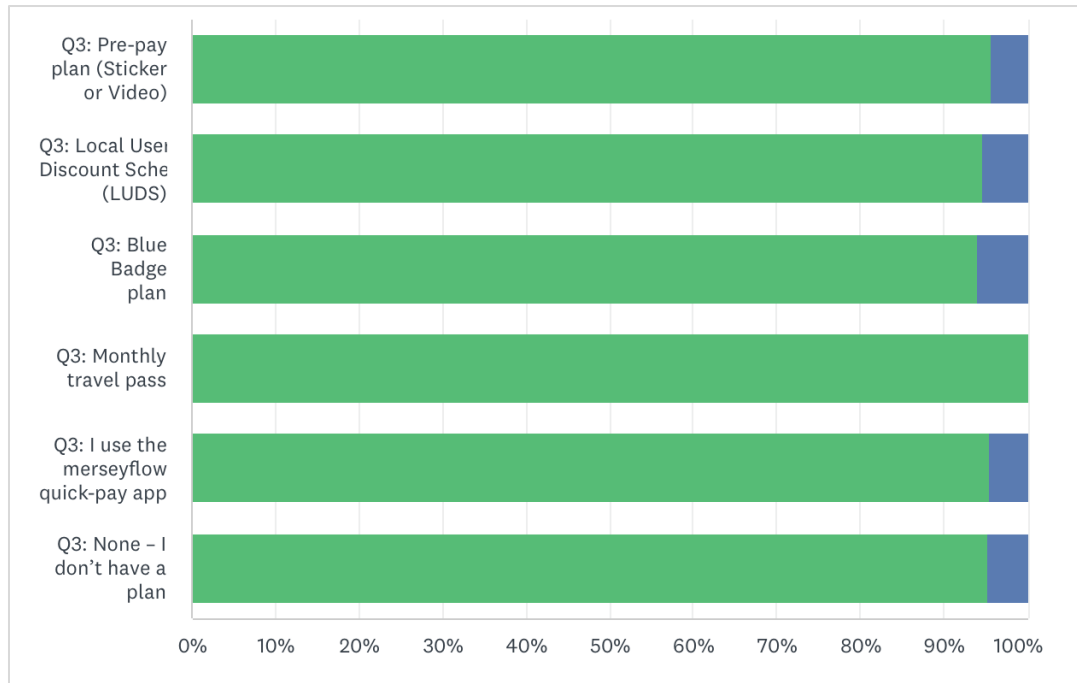
Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

The Mersey Gateway Crossings Board has considered the responses from those who felt toll charges should be increased by 40% in line with cumulative inflation since 2017, but we would not support a change in the proposed 20% increased recommendation to Halton Borough Council as we believe a larger increase would have a disproportionate impact on bridge users, is not required on financial grounds and would not be supported by the vast majority of the community.

The Crossings Board understands this perspective, but we did not provide a third option as given the increase in costs the project is facing and the requirement for the majority of the project costs through to 2044 to be funded through toll charges from road users rather than through general taxation, we did not believe either of these was an option. The consultation was designed to provide realistic alternatives for respondents to consider given the reality of toll charges, the project's financial commitments and the impact that the changes we have seen in inflation since 2021 will have going forward.

Had we presented attractive but unrealistic options such as freezing toll charges, we understand these would have been more popular, but they would not have been deliverable. It would have been disingenuous to do so.

Q5: It is not an option to leave toll charges at their current level. Do you think that increasing toll charges by 20% is appropriate or do you think tolls should be increased in line with inflation over the period since 2017 when the Mersey Gateway Bridge opened which would mean an increase of 40%?



- Toll charges should be increased by 20%
- Toll charges should be increased by 40% in line with inflation since 2017

As the graphs and table to the left show, there were no significant variations between the responses to Question 5 across different customer types.

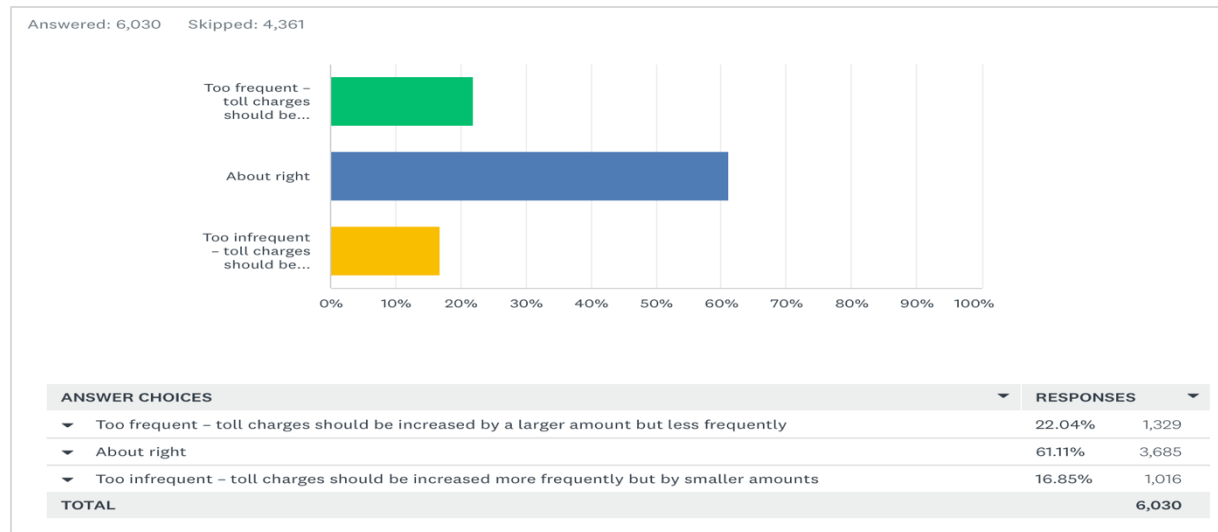
Similarly, there was a consistent response across responses from individual respondents and those representing organisations.

	TOLL CHARGES SHOULD BE INCREASED BY 20%	TOLL CHARGES SHOULD BE INCREASED BY 40% IN LINE WITH INFLATION SINCE 2017	TOTAL
Q3: Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	95.71% 1,608	4.29% 72	35.10% 1,680
Q3: Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	94.77% 797	5.23% 44	17.57% 841
Q3: Blue Badge plan	93.97% 421	6.03% 27	9.36% 448
Q3: Monthly travel pass	100.00% 14	0.00% 0	0.29% 14
Q3: I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	95.42% 1,668	4.58% 80	36.52% 1,748
Q3: None - I don't have a plan	95.28% 242	4.72% 12	5.31% 254
Total Respondents	4,565	221	4,786

Q6: In the future we are proposing to typically consider changes to toll charges every three years (except if there are unforeseen circumstances which require a more regular review). Do you think this is:

- Too frequent – toll charges should be increased by a larger amount but less frequently
- About right
- Too infrequent – toll charges should be increased more frequently but by smaller amounts

Response rate 58%



Overall, the most popular option selected for future timeframes to consider making changes to toll charges was once every three years as proposed by Halton Borough Council. Whilst this was clearly the preferred response at 61%, there was a significant minority of respondents who felt that any consideration of toll charge changes should be made by a larger amount but less frequently (22%) and also a smaller minority who felt that change to toll charges should be considered more frequently but by smaller amounts.

The order of preference was the same amongst people responding as individuals as it was amongst people responding on behalf of organisations, though people responding on behalf of organisations were more likely than individuals to opt for more regular but smaller increases. The overall response rate for Question 6 was 58%. This was a relatively low response rate compared to some other questions, which could indicate that respondents felt frustrated that no option was given for changes in toll charge levels to never be considered/ increased.

Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends that Halton Borough Council typically considers changes to toll charges every three years.

Balancing all the views received, we would recommend that the Council aims to increase the tolls every three years, unless another time period is required.

Given the current legal framework governing the process for increasing tolls a smaller but more frequent (annual) increase in tolls may cause confusion, as the process to create a new RUCSO would need to commence only a few months after the introduction of the previous RUCSO.

The Board believes this will ensure long-term financial viability for the project and provide greater certainty for bridge users as to the timeframe for potential future changes to toll charges. We also work with the Council to make people aware of this timetable on an ongoing basis as we move forward.

Q6: In the future we are proposing to typically consider changes to toll charges every three years (except if there are unforeseen circumstances which require a more regular review). Do you think this is:

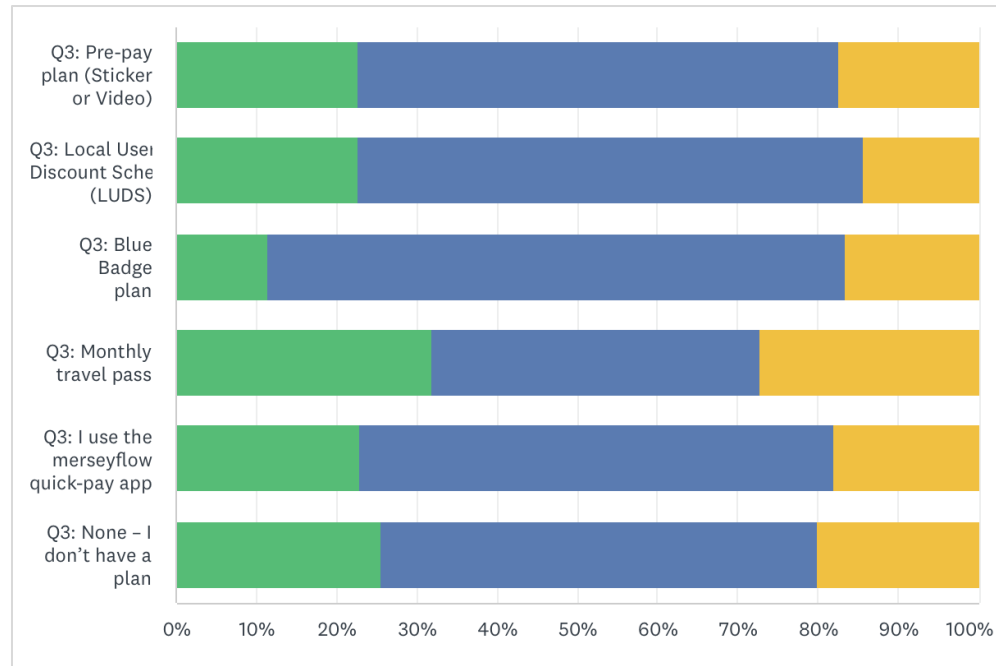
- Too frequent – toll charges should be increased by a larger amount but less frequently
- About right
- Too infrequent – toll charges should be increased more frequently but by smaller amounts

Whilst the proposal to typically consider changes to toll charges every three years was the preferred option amongst all groups, there was some variation as to their scale of preference for this option.

Blue Badge holders were the most in favour of this option, with monthly travel pass holders the least positive (albeit with a small sample size).

Amongst all groups except Blue Badge holders the second most popular option was to change toll charges by a larger amount but less frequently.

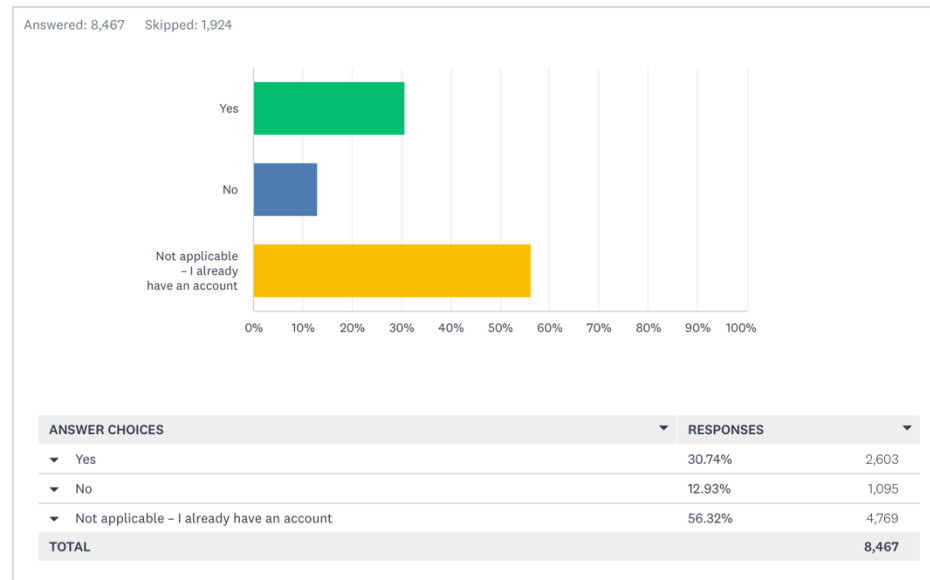
Response rates for this question ranged from 43% for monthly travel plan customer respondents to 70% for Blue Badge holder's respondents.



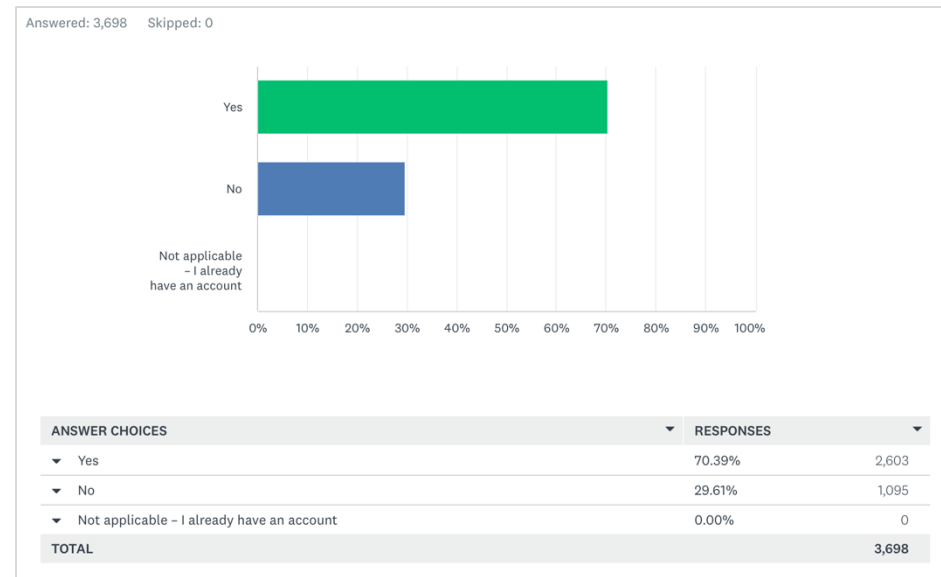
	TOO FREQUENT - TOLL CHARGES SHOULD BE INCREASED BY A LARGER AMOUNT BUT LESS FREQUENTLY	ABOUT RIGHT	TOO INFREQUENT - TOLL CHARGES SHOULD BE INCREASED MORE FREQUENTLY BUT BY SMALLER AMOUNTS	TOTAL
Q3: Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	22.68% 509	59.85% 1,343	17.47% 392	37.21% 2,244
Q3: Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	22.77% 227	62.89% 627	14.34% 143	16.53% 997
Q3: Blue Badge plan	11.49% 58	71.88% 363	16.63% 84	8.37% 505
Q3: Monthly travel pass	31.82% 7	40.91% 9	27.27% 6	0.36% 22
Q3: I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	22.86% 499	59.05% 1,289	18.09% 395	36.20% 2,183
Q3: None - I don't have a plan	25.53% 84	54.41% 179	20.06% 66	5.46% 329
Total Respondents	1,329	3,685	1,016	6,030

Q7: Would a higher discount on the standard toll charges encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?

Response rate 81%



Graph 1



Graph 2

For this question we gave people three answer options – Yes, No, and Not applicable (on the basis they already had an account with merseyflow). 56% of the total respondents said that this was not applicable to them.

The feedback shows that over 70% of respondents without an account said that a higher discount on the standard toll charges would encourage them to open an account with merseyflow, with just under 30% stating that it wouldn't. This is based on a sample size of 3,698 respondents. This percentage rises from 71% to 80% if you purely look at responses that come from people responding on behalf of organisations. For 'individual respondees' it is 70%.

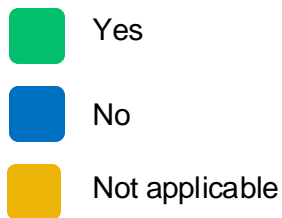
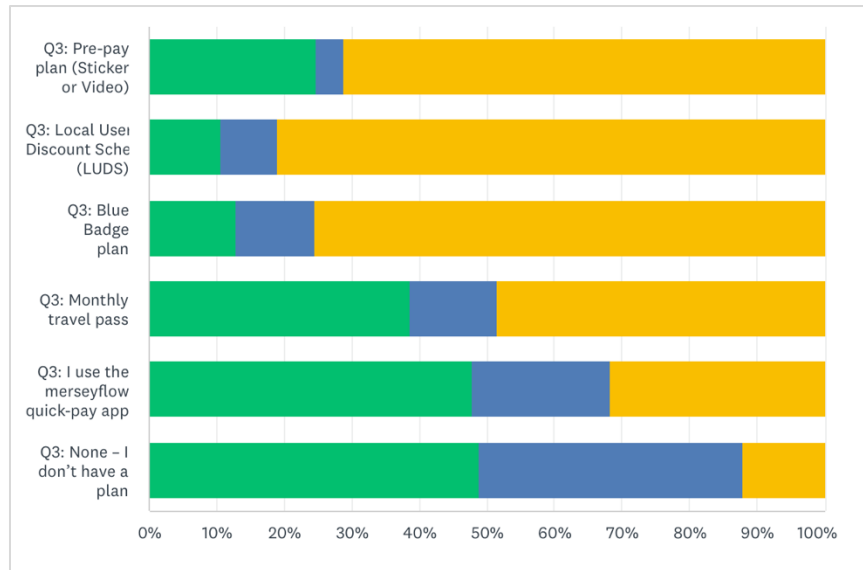
Overall, response levels to this question were high at 81%, with all customer groups responding in high numbers.

Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

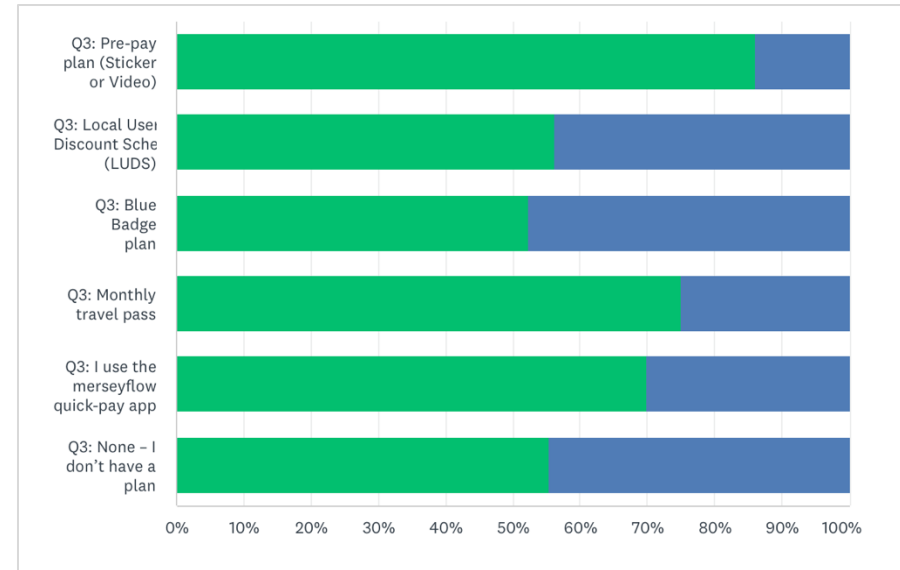
It is helpful to receive feedback regarding the relationship between the level of discount and willingness to open an account. Although a higher discount may encourage more users to open a Merseyflow account, a higher discount would also result in reduced revenues which would require an even larger increase in toll, hence it is something we will consider in the future but not as part of the proposed RUCSO.

We have to ensure that any changes to discount packages are affordable within the wider context of the Council's financial commitments relating to the Mersey Gateway Project and are deliverable within the powers granted to Halton Borough Council by the Department for Transport.

Q7: Would a higher discount on the standard toll charges encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?



Graph 1



Graph 2

The yellow bar in the graph above shows the percentage of respondents from each customer group that felt that higher discounts wouldn't be relevant to them. It is worth noting that a number of LUDS and pre-pay customers and some Blue Badge holder customers still felt this was relevant to them. This is likely to represent people who fall into more than one customer group.

Similarly, 12% of respondents who said they didn't have a merseyflow plan/account and 32% of respondents who said they use the quick pay app said this question wasn't relevant to them as they "already have an account". These two statements are contradictory, indicating some potential confusion amongst this customer group as to whether they have an account / discount.

When looking at graph number 2, with responses with the 'not applicable' answers removed, it shows that the majority of respondents in the customer groups that don't have an account / plan i.e. those using the merseyflow quick pay app / or saying "I don't have a plan" would be encouraged to open an account with merseyflow if there was a higher discount on the standard toll charges.

It also shows a positive response towards having an account/plan in relation to higher discounts from all customer groups.

	YES	NO	NOT APPLICABLE - I ALREADY HAVE AN ACCOUNT	TOTAL
Q3: Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	24.81% 799	3.98% 128	71.21% 2,293	38.03% 3,220
Q3: Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	10.67% 157	8.29% 122	81.03% 1,192	17.37% 1,471
Q3: Blue Badge plan	12.84% 81	11.73% 74	75.44% 476	7.45% 631
Q3: Monthly travel pass	38.71% 12	12.90% 4	48.39% 15	0.37% 31
Q3: I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	47.82% 1,407	20.56% 605	31.61% 930	34.75% 2,942
Q3: None - I don't have a plan	48.78% 260	39.21% 209	12.01% 64	6.30% 533
Total Respondents	2,603	1,095	4,769	8,467

Q8: What would encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?

Response rate 78%

This question was offered to respondents who had responded 'no' to question seven, which would indicate that they didn't have an account / plan with merseyflow, and that a higher discount on standard toll charges wouldn't be something that would encourage them to open one.

Our intention was to understand if there were any other factors we could introduce beyond a financial discount, or barriers we could remove, that would encourage respondents to open an account.

Of the 1,095 people asked this question, we received a response rate of 78%. Most respondents indicated there was nothing that would encourage them to open an account as they either didn't use the bridges enough, or didn't want to sign up for an account as they would rather pay for individual journeys.

Amongst those that did offer alternative suggestions, there was no real consensus amongst the answers, but a range of issues were raised by different respondents.

These included:

- Reducing charges associated with opening an account, changing a vehicle, changing address etc.
- Reducing the amount of money that needs to be held in an account before a top-up fee is required.
- Providing greater transparency about how revenue raised through toll charges is used.
- Using technology to provide push notifications where an app user has crossed but a journey hasn't been paid for.

More details and example comments are shown on the following page.

Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

This question was included in the consultation to gather wider feedback from customers beyond the specific proposals set out in the draft Road User Charging Order.

Alongside our partners at merseyflow we are always looking at ways we can improve the customer experience and make it easier for people to pay for their crossings. We consider that registering for an account is the easiest way to manage these payments but recognise that not everyone wishes to register.

The feedback received reflects the nature of the responses to similar questions that we received earlier this year in our most recent customer service survey. The Mersey Gateway Crossing Board will consider all responses and suggestions and take account of them in our ongoing discussions with merseyflow around potential business improvement areas.

Q8: What would encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?

To provide further insights into the responses, we have broken down the themes within each sentiment category based on the responses.

This helps highlight key concerns and common viewpoints.

Consultee response theme

- **High Costs:** Frequent mention of toll charges being too expensive or unjustified.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Complaints about unclear terms or hidden charges.
- **Distrust in the Service:** Accusations of greed, indicating dissatisfaction with Merseyflow / Halton Borough Council's intentions.
- **Frustration with process:** Issues like difficulties with setting up an account or making payments.
- **No benefits to having an account:** Many responses state there is no incentive to open an account, as no discounts or tangible benefits are perceived.
- **Infrequency of use:** Respondents mention rarely using the bridge and hence not needing an account.
- **Preference for Pay-As-You-Go:** Some users are fine with occasional payments without the hassle of account setup.
- **Scepticism about benefits:** Doubts about whether having an account offers any significant advantage.
- **Discounts or incentives:** Some suggested they'd be willing to consider opening an account if discounts or promotions were provided.
- **Improved systems:** Appreciation for better apps, websites, or smoother account management processes.

Examples

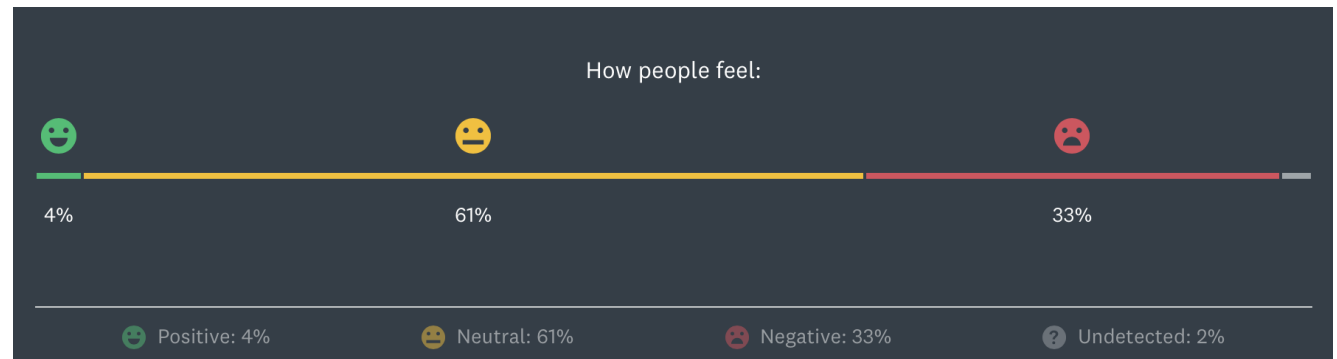
- The toll is far too expensive for what it is.
- I don't trust Merseyflow, it's all about money.
- Nothing would encourage me; this is daylight robbery.
- I don't use the bridge often enough to justify an account.
- I already have a way to pay when I need to.
- It might be okay, but it's not something I feel I need.
- If they offered discounts for regular users, I'd consider it.
- I like that the app makes it easier to manage my payments.
- With a loyalty scheme, it could be worth it.
- I just want a simple way to pay. I am 70 years old and not IT savvy and I get fined on my journeys.
- I have one but you need to be transparent on money in money out and profit and justify any increase if in profit ?
- I do have an account, You need to think of people who work in Halton but don't live there. We are as much as part of the community and the cost will have an impact and drive talent out.
- Allowing all LOCAL residents to use the discount scheme and not cap it at a certain TAX BAND, horrible decision. If your local your local regardless off your wealth.
- Free use of the old bridge for residents.
- The credit should remain indefinitely (I am an irregular user) and ability to nominate several vehicles. I believe (perhaps wrongly) that it currently doesn't.
- A significant discount of at least 50% on toll fees. The main impact of the proposed increase in cost would be that I would not use the bridge as frequently, if at all.
- Already had one but it did not work and was fined two times even though my reg was on the database.
- If there was a discount on pay to use.
- No admin charge. An account benefits both ends of the service. The charge to setup and account is just money making. I have a Dartford account which was free to setup and register.

Q8: What would encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment Analysis has been used to support the categorisation of open-text responses to reveal the emotion behind what people are saying.

- 1. Negative:** The high number of the responses expressed dissatisfaction or frustration. Common complaints included high costs, lack of transparency, and distrust of the organisation. Words like "greedy," "unfair," "disgrace," and "scam" were frequently used. Many respondents outright stated "nothing" would encourage them to open an account, reflecting a strong negative sentiment.
- 2. Neutral:** A larger number of responses reflected neutrality. These responses often came from infrequent users who didn't feel the need for an account or were content with paying as they went. Examples included statements like "I don't use the bridge often enough" or "I already have an account."
- 3. Positive:** Very few responses were positive. Positive suggestions included discounts, incentives, or improvements to the app and payment system, showing that some respondents were open to opening an account under specific conditions.



Sentiment analysis Total responses: 861

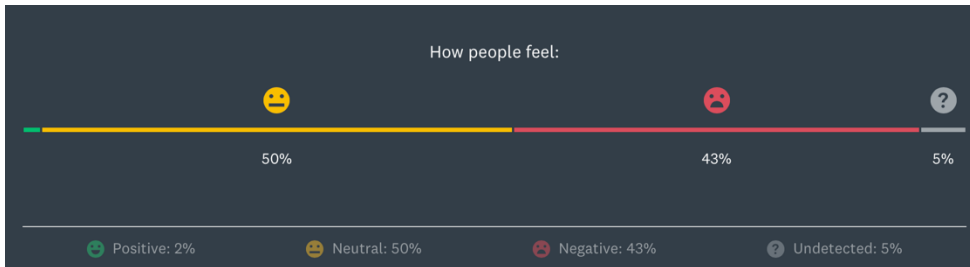
Positive 4%:	31 responses
Neutral 61%:	529 responses
Negative 32%:	278 responses
Undetected 3%:	23 responses

- **Negative Sentiments** focus on distrust, high costs, and lack of benefits.
- **Neutral Sentiments** revolve around infrequency of use or lack of need for an account.
- **Positive Sentiments** highlight potential benefits, provided that incentives and smooth systems are in place.

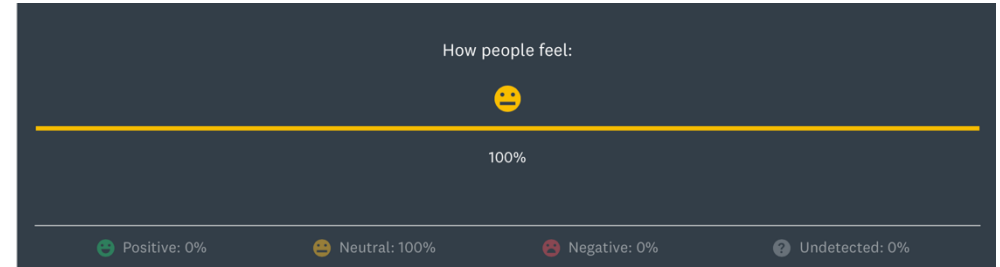
Q8: What would encourage you to open an account with merseyflow?

Sentiment analysis per plan type – is there a marked difference?

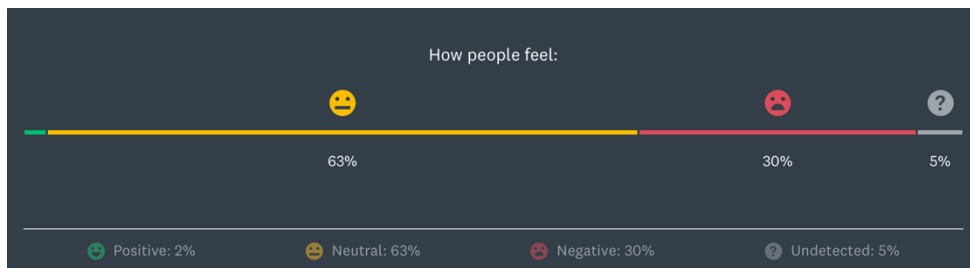
Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video): 104 responses



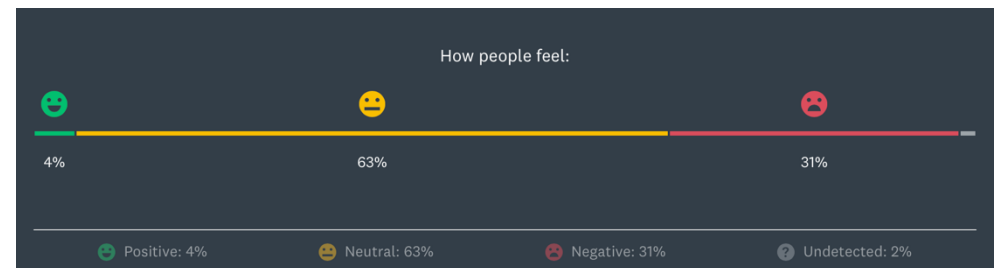
Monthly travel pass: 1 response



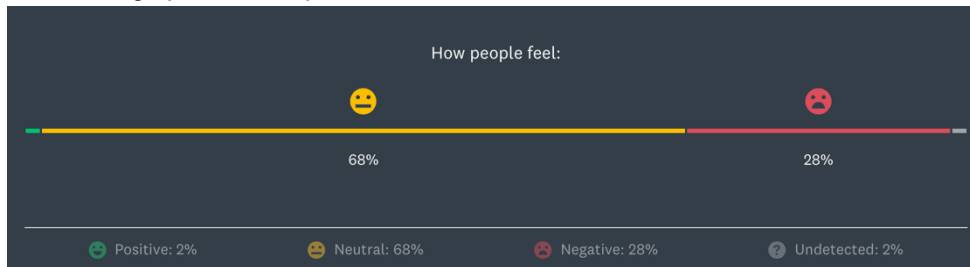
Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS): 83 responses



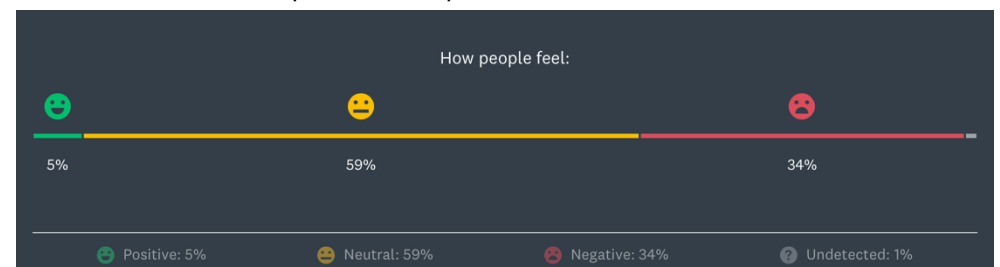
I use the merseyflow quick-pay app: 475



Blue Badge plan: 57 responses

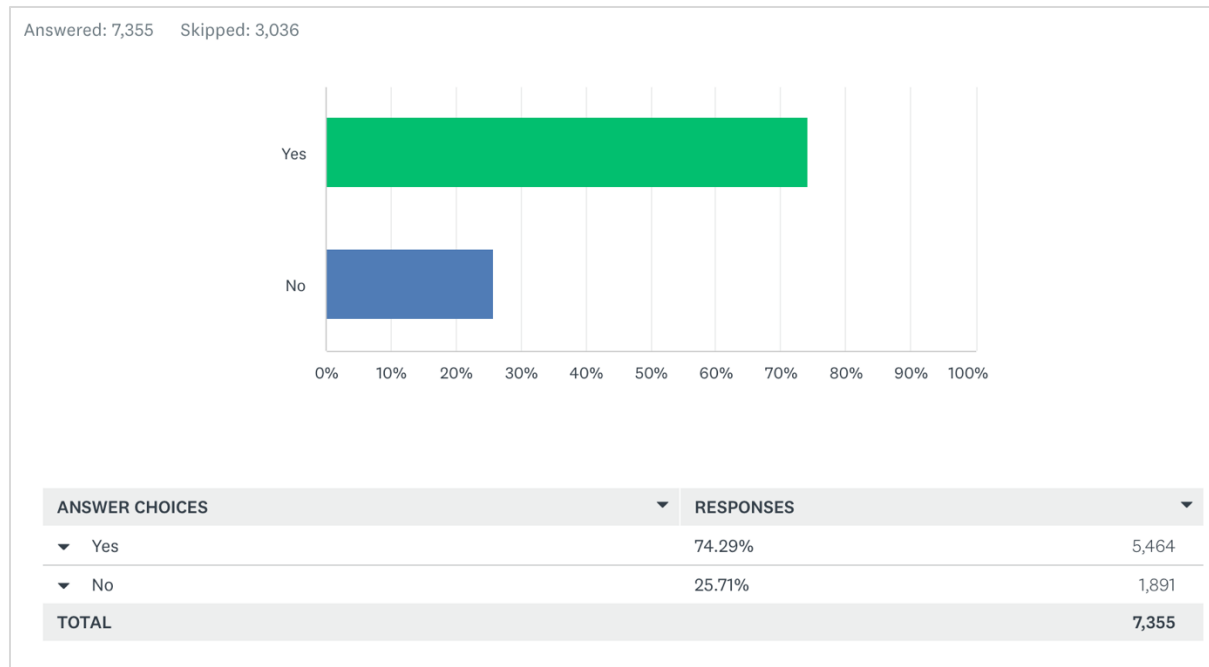


None – I don't have a plan: 177 responses



Q9: We are proposing to raise the annual cost of the Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS) for eligible Halton residents by 20% to £12 from April 2025. However, we are proposing to discount this annual cost for any LUDS plan customers who have already switched to, or who choose to switch to, the auto renew system. This means it will remain at £10 per year for the majority of eligible Halton residents, with others able to opt in moving forward. Should there be a discount for those electing to renew their LUDS plan automatically on an annual basis?

Response rate 71%



Over 74% of respondents to this question supported the proposal. The remaining 25% of respondents opposed it.

There was no significant difference in the responses received from people responding as an individual or on behalf of organisations.

The overall response rate to this question was 71% with LUDS customers (80%) unsurprisingly providing the highest response rate given the topic of the question.

There was support from all customer groups for this proposal, with the highest levels of support coming from LUDS customers and Blue Badge holders.

Support was consistently high across the board with more than two thirds of all respondent customer groups supporting the proposed approach.

Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends an increase in the registration fee cost of LUDS in line with the proposed price increase of 20%.

This would be accompanied by an associated discount for those customers signed up to Auto Renewal with a Direct Debit.

We also received a number of comments throughout responses to different survey questions concerning the Local User Discount Scheme. These, along with the Board's response, are summarised on the following page:

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Q3: Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	68.13% 1,868	31.87% 874	37.28% 2,742
Q3: Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	89.28% 1,241	10.72% 149	18.90% 1,390
Q3: Blue Badge plan	87.37% 491	12.63% 71	7.64% 562
Q3: Monthly travel pass	74.07% 20	25.93% 7	0.37% 27
Q3: I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	71.61% 1,814	28.39% 719	34.44% 2,533
Q3: None – I don't have a plan	68.38% 292	31.62% 135	5.81% 427
Total Respondents	5,464	1,891	7,355

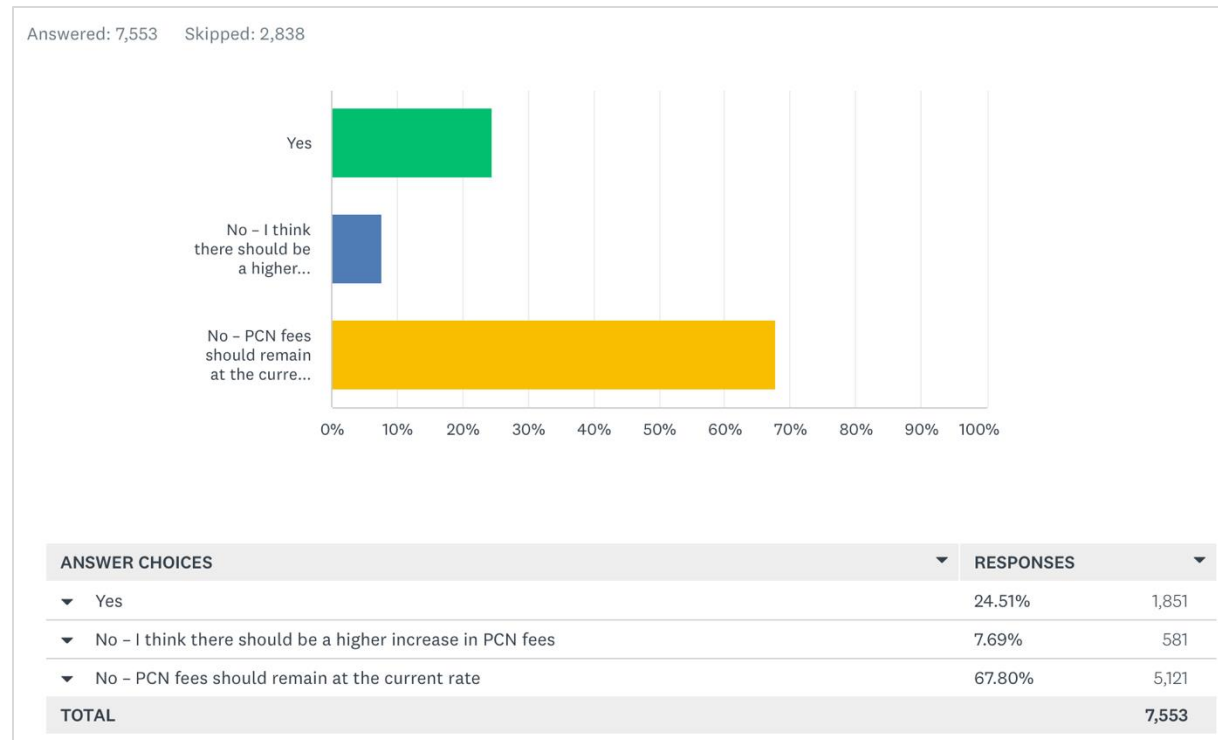
Q9: We are proposing to raise the annual cost of the Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS) for eligible Halton residents by 20% to £12 from April 2025. However, we are proposing to discount this annual cost for any LUDS plan customers who have already switched to, or who choose to switch to, the auto renew system. This means it will remain at £10 per year for the majority of eligible Halton residents, with others able to opt in moving forward. Should there be a discount for those electing to renew their LUDS plan automatically on an annual basis?

Whilst this was a Yes/No question, we received a number of comments throughout responses to different survey questions concerning the Local User Discount Scheme which can be summarised in **three** themes.

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>Theme 1: Respondents asking for the LUDS scheme to be extended to cover additional groups e.g. a) across a wider geographical area b) to include people work in Halton and c) all Council Tax bands in Halton.</p>	<p>The cost of LUDS plans are funded directly by Halton Borough Council and the Government.</p> <p>Whilst we can understand people asking for this to be extended to people living in nearby areas, or to be used to minimise toll levels, it would not be appropriate for council tax paid by residents in Halton to be used to fund discounted crossings for people from outside the area or for Halton Council to do so.</p> <p>Halton Council is happy to have any discussions with neighbouring authorities that wish to invest in a similar way to set up a discount scheme for their residents.</p>
<p>Theme 2: Respondents who felt Halton residents shouldn't have to pay any kind of fee to travel within the borough.</p>	<p>The Mersey Gateway LUDS plan is consistent with local discounts offered on other estuarial crossings throughout England. It was designed to ensure that the project complies with the rules set out by the UK Government.</p>
<p>Theme 3: Respondents who felt that eligible Halton residents who qualify for the LUDS scheme should pay a greater amount each year and that this should be used to offset the cost of crossings for people living outside Halton.</p>	<p>The boundary of Halton Borough Council is unusual in that the borough is divided by an estuarial river. LUDS allows the majority of its residents to access services on either side of the river without incurring additional costs. The principle of the LUDS plan is consistent with local discounts offered on other estuarial crossings throughout England.</p>

Q10a: With toll charges likely to increase, we also propose to increase Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) fees for people who don't pay for their crossing on time. As PCN fees are set in bands this would mean a 25% increase in PCN fees from £40 to £50. This would ensure that PCN charges for those who haven't paid for a crossing on time remain appropriate. Anyone receiving a PCN would still have a 14-day opportunity to pay it at a 50% discounted rate – equating to £25. Do you think this proposed increase is appropriate?

Response rate 73%



Over two thirds of respondents (almost 68%) felt that PCN levels should remain at their current level even though toll charges were likely to increase.

Almost a quarter of respondents felt that PCNs should be increased by 25% alongside likely increases in toll charges. A further 8% felt PCNs should be increased by a greater amount.

There was no significant variation in views between people responding on behalf of organisations and those responding as individuals.

The overall response rate for this question was 73% with all respondent groups showing relatively high response levels for this question.

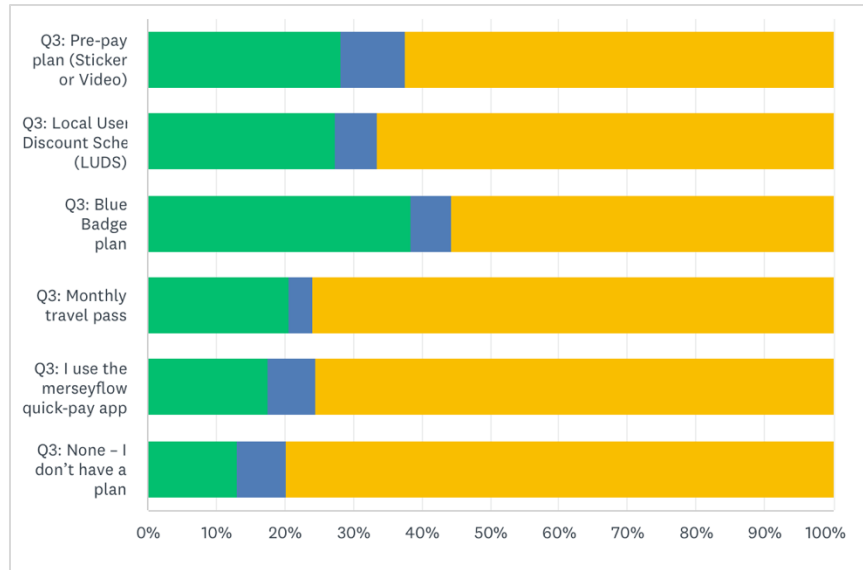
Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response

Having considered the consultation responses alongside other relevant factors, the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board recommends that the PCN rate increases from £40 to £50.

The vast majority - over 97% - of users pay for their crossings and the PCN is there as a deterrent to encourage users to pay for their crossings, and so as the cost of the toll for compliant users increases, it is appropriate that a proportionate increase in the penalty for non-compliance is applied.

There are multiple ways of paying for the crossing for both the regular and infrequent users

Q10a: With toll charges likely to increase, we also propose to increase Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) fees for people who don't pay for their crossing on time. As PCN fees are set in bands this would mean a 25% increase in PCN fees from £40 to £50. This would ensure that PCN charges for those who haven't paid for a crossing on time remain appropriate. Anyone receiving a PCN would still have a 14-day opportunity to pay it at a 50% discounted rate – equating to £25. Do you think this proposed increase is appropriate?



- Yes
- No – I think there should be a higher increase in PCN fees
- No – PCN fees should remain at the current rate

	YES	NO – I THINK THERE SHOULD BE A HIGHER INCREASE IN PCN FEES	NO – PCN FEES SHOULD REMAIN AT THE CURRENT RATE	TOTAL
Q3: Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video)	28.30% 819	9.40% 272	62.30% 1,803	38.32% 2,894
Q3: Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS)	27.35% 355	6.24% 81	66.41% 862	17.19% 1,298
Q3: Blue Badge plan	38.49% 219	5.80% 33	55.71% 317	7.53% 569
Q3: Monthly travel pass	20.69% 6	3.45% 1	75.86% 22	0.38% 29
Q3: I use the merseyflow quick-pay app	17.64% 470	6.87% 183	75.49% 2,011	35.27% 2,664
Q3: None – I don't have a plan	13.06% 55	7.13% 30	79.81% 336	5.57% 421
Total Respondents	1,851	581	5,121	7,553

Looking at responses from individual customer groups, there was a clear majority from all customer groups to say that PCNs should remain at their current rate.

This was most pronounced amongst customers without a plan and customers who use the merseyflow quick pay app.

Blue Badge holders were the most supportive of a potential increase in PCNs with almost 45% responding in favour of either a 25% increase or a larger increase alongside an increase in toll charges.

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Response rate 36%

Whilst there was a clear majority of respondents who felt that PCN's should remain at their current level, even with a proposed increase in toll charges, there were a wide range of responses and ideas and suggestions received to the request for additional feedback on this issue.

The following pages detail this consultee feedback and provide responses to the issues raised from the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board.

Some of the issues raised relate specifically to the proposal consulted (to increase PCN fees from £40 to £50), but many respondents used the opportunity to express wider views on Penalty Charge Notices.

We have categorised the responses to Question 10b into three different themes as summarised below and expanded upon over the following three pages.

Theme 1: Responses from people opposing the proposed increase in PCN fees

Theme 2: Responses from people supporting the proposed increase in PCN fees

Theme 3: Responses from people proposing broader system changes relating to PCNs

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Theme 1 – Responses from people opposing the proposed increase in PCN fees

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
Where people made additional comments opposing the proposal for PCNs they covered five key areas.	By proposing to raise PCNs to £50 our aim is to maintain a balance with the proposed increase to toll charges, but we recognise that almost two thirds of respondents stated that they opposed this option. We recognise this view and understand that PCNs and any subsequent enforcement action can be a sensitive issue, so we feel it is important to respond to some of the specific issues raised by respondents to the consultation. We would rather that everyone who crosses either bridge pays on time and that no-one receives a PCN, but it is only fair to those people who do pay on time that we seek to recover toll charges from those who don't.
1. Concerns over potential economic hardship caused by PCNs, and that the increase would exacerbate this	Economic hardship: We understand that PCNs are an unexpected cost and have procedures in place to support people who are financially vulnerable. Our message to anyone who receives a PCN is to deal with it as quickly as possible. If it is paid within 14 days, the cost of a PCN is £20 (at current rates).
2. Concerns that the cost of a PCN is disproportionately high relative to the cost of making a crossing	Cost of a PCN: PCN costs relating to the Mersey Gateway and Silver Jubilee bridges are significantly lower than those on comparable projects across the UK such as Dartford Crossing where the PCN is £70 (£35 if paid in 14 days), and also lower than PCNs issued for unpaid parking fines.
3. Views that PCNs are issued unfairly	PCN fairness: There is a comprehensive appeals process relating to PCNs whereby anyone who feels they have received a PCN in error, or that it has been issued unfairly, can appeal. Anyone who receives a PCN is entitled to appeal and details of how to do this are provided alongside a PCN.
4. Concerns over a lack of clarity as how PCN income is used	Use of PCN revenue: Revenue from PCNs is not treated any differently to revenue from toll charges received by the project. All income is used to meet the project's funding commitments to pay for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the design, build, operation and maintenance of the Mersey Gateway Bridge and associated infrastructure - operation of the tolling contract - insurance premiums and interest on prudential borrowings associated with the project, and - the cost of operating the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board
5. Concerns that people get PCNs as a result of an honest mistake e.g. forgetting to pay on time or not realising there is a toll to pay	Honest mistakes: We work with our partner at merseyflow to encourage customers to come forward quickly if they realise they have forgotten to pay, or to respond promptly to a PCN if they receive one. We aim to operate a common sense and understanding approach to situations like this where appropriate.

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Theme 2 – Responses from people supporting the proposed increase in PCN fees

Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
<p>Where people made additional comments supporting the proposal for PCNs they covered three key areas.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="143 408 772 504">1. If toll charges are to be increased for bridge users who are paying on time for their crossings, it was appropriate for PCNs to be increased as well.<li data-bbox="143 539 772 635">2. The existence of tolls on the bridges and the extent of the signage makes it very clear that you have to pay and that there is a time limit for payment.<li data-bbox="143 670 772 766">3. Some respondents felt that PCNs should be increased further if this could allow toll charges to be minimised for those people paying on time.	<p>The feedback from this group reflects the reasons that an increase in PCNs was proposed as part of this consultation.</p>

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Theme 3 – Responses from people proposing broader system changes relating to PCNs

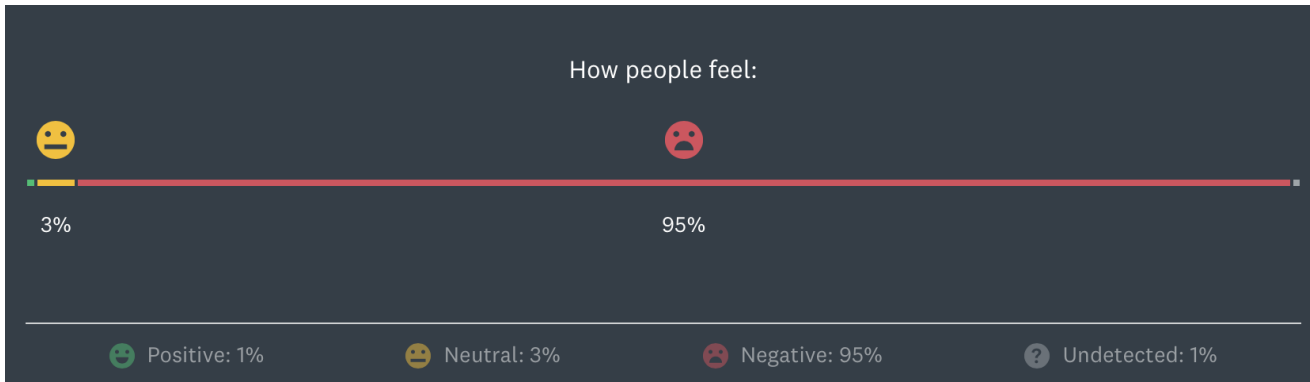
Consultee response theme	Mersey Gateway Crossing Board response
A number of people proposed a range of broader system changes relating to PCNs, as set out below	<p>The element of this consultation relating to PCNs was specifically focused on the proposal to increase PCNs from £40 to £50. However, we recognise that in responding to the consultation a number of respondents have made a series of wide-ranging suggestions as to potential reform of the PCN system.</p> <p>The vast majority of these ideas and issues have been discussed and debated before and have not been implemented for a variety of reasons as set out below.</p> <p>However, we will continue to review the toll charges and PCN policy on the project moving forward and will consider all viable alternatives and opportunities for improvement as we do so.</p>
Extending the time available to pay for a crossing	<p>There is no evidence that improved payment compliance would happen as a result of extending payment deadlines. The compliance rate for payment 'on time' under the current system is 97.8%, demonstrating evidence that a large majority of users are fully aware of the necessity to pay, how to pay and the deadline to pay on time. There are currently 102 tolling/charging fixed signs or carriageway markings installed on the bridge and its wider approaches providing information on the scheme. Full details can be found at MG Interactive Map The Mersey Gateway Project.</p>
Extending the time available to pay for a PCN	<p>PCN timescales are set out by government in legislation. This states PCNs should be paid in 28 days with a 50% discount if paid within 14 days.</p>
Introducing toll booths on the bridges to allow people who aren't registered an option to physically pay at the point of crossing	<p>Toll booths were not installed because of research on free flow tolling that shows it delivers an improved customer experience with fewer hold ups and much improved air quality. Toll booths have been removed from other schemes worldwide as a result.</p>
Providing first time warnings or lower PCN fees for people crossing the bridges for the first time	<p>First time PCNs where a representation is made are treated with discretion by tolling operator merseyflow in order to promote the benefits of accounts and the merseyflow Quick Pay App. The app requires no registration and can accept a payment in as little as 90 seconds. Payment in advance for crossings can be made in order to provide flexibility for the customer.</p>
Maybe offering an account at the time of giving out a PCN would be a good idea	<p>To encourage unregistered users to open an account, it is recommended that on receiving the first PCN at the higher rate from 1st April 2025 customers could be given the opportunity to have the PCN cancelled in exchange for opening an account.</p>
Issuing a reminder to pay to those who have crossed and not paid before issuing a PCN	<p>Unfortunately, tolling operators are unable to send reminders in advance of a customer receiving a PCN as they can only obtain the vehicle's registered keeper's details from the DVLA once a payment deadline has been missed. merseyflow would not otherwise hold the registered keeper's details.</p> <p>However, if customers want to receive reminders to pay for crossings, they can download the merseyflow Quick Pay App and create a profile within the app, making sure they add their email address to the profile and activate notifications. The app also has an auto-pay feature that will automatically deduct the crossing amount every time the customer crosses without the need for a reminder.</p>

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Consultee responses:

- I think a reminder email should be sent 1st.....Before a fine is issued....then if NO payment is made then issue a fine.....
- I don't agree with the charges. The northwest is not an affluent area. Why are we forced to pay to cross the Mersey but almost all Thames crossings are toll free?
- Your payment process is a joke. Instead of paying by app look at Toll pass systems as in the US that are properly automated. The risk of a PCN being issued is too high because of short deadlines and rubbish app. I'm sure that's what you want but frankly it's robbery.
- Users of the bridge should be given a week to pay for a crossing. There should be no fine before then. There then should be an option to pay for the crossing if you have forgotten. Only after a month should fines apply. Fines should remain the same level.
- Pcn should be scrapped it has caused so much stress to families making mistakes.
- This whole system is unfair because people can make an honest mistake and it's not accessible for those who are digitally excluded or may have disabilities, extenuating circumstances.
- Increased revenues should come from LUDS. A minimal payment increase of £2 per year is completely eclipsed by regular uses of the bridge who are non-residents of Halton. The creation of the questions are focused on LUDS users and a minimal increase. It gives no voice to those who use it frequently who will be most significantly affected by the change.
- Being late to pay a £2.40 charge justified £50? Ridiculous, if any penalty it should be simply doubled toll fees. This scheme is making ridiculous amounts of cash already.
- Sometimes there's a genuine reason for people forgetting to pay. A letter is a gentle reminder that it needs paying.
- Another opportunity to steal even more money from motorists.
- Yes - If this is used to reduce the increase in the cost per crossing for regular users.
- There is plenty of signage indicating the charges on approach to the bridge. Users are given a 14 day period in which to pay and get a reduced fee. I think this is fair.
- Increase for PCN looks fair and appropriate.
- I have been very happy with the scheme so far. Appropriate notice of D/Ds and no issues at all. Thank you. Oh and the bridge looks superb!
- They should have longer to pay before being charged 24 hours isn't long enough should be 1 week. All PCNs money should be given to the local hospitals.
- I think the excessive PCN charges should be unchanged or preferably lowered, and the time to pay be extended to thirty days. The current time limit is unfair to visitors to the area who may not be aware of the charges in advance of reaching the crossing and who may not see notification of charges for a holiday period afterwards.
- PCN is highway robbery. An invoice should be sent to ask for payment giving adequate notice. Only if no payment after that should a small amount be considered to be added. Current system is designed to catch people out and to get them into financial difficulties. This was s toll free route.
- There us no reason not to pay the toll charge. If one cannot be bothered to pay then it is reasonable to expect the operator to issue a PCN.
- You should extend the period that people have to make payment. Toll booths would help prevent PCNs.
- No - these PCN charges are a cynical ploy to extract more money out of users who might forget to pay on time. Pay people to operate toll booths or provide an option to pay on use. More importantly, stick to George Osborne's commitment to make it FREE for Cheshire motorists.
- I don't regularly travel to Halton however I do pay my tolls, on occasion I have missed a payment. The rate for missed payments is extortionate. Especially for someone on low to middle income.
- £40 is enough for 1 mistake, maybe offering an account at the time of giving out a PCN would be a good idea.

Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees



Consider whether we want to engage here about the balance between PCN fees and toll charges. Probably not as we can't factor in PCNs to pay for the bridges

Sentiment analysis

Total responses: 3,808

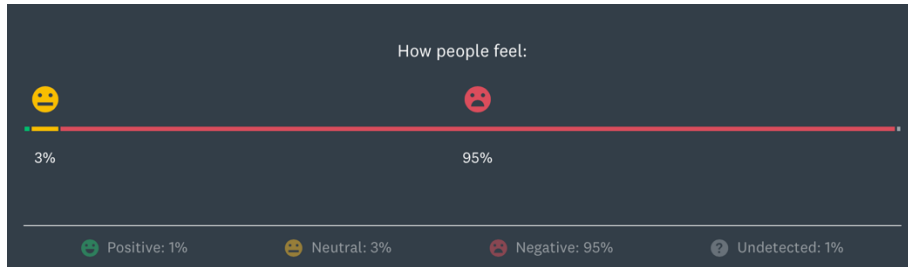
Positive 1%:	34 responses
Neutral 3%:	120 responses
Negative 95%:	3,649 responses
Undetected -1%:	5 responses

- **Negative Sentiments** focus on financial burden, disapproval of the current system and accessibility concerns.
- **Positive and Neutral Sentiments** revolve around support for penalty increases in principle and suggestions for improvement.

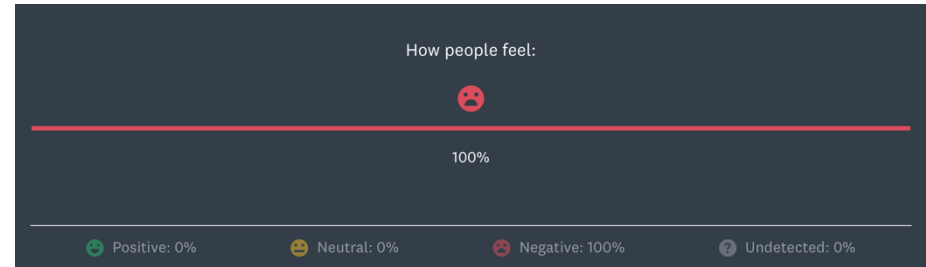
Q10b: Please give us any additional feedback on this proposal for PCN fees

Sentiment analysis per plan type – is there a marked difference?

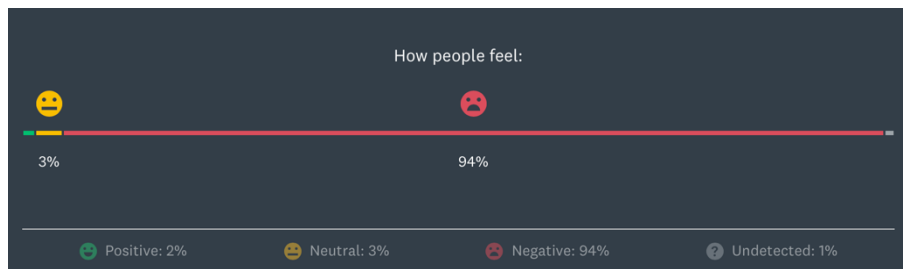
Pre-pay plan (Sticker or Video): 1431 responses



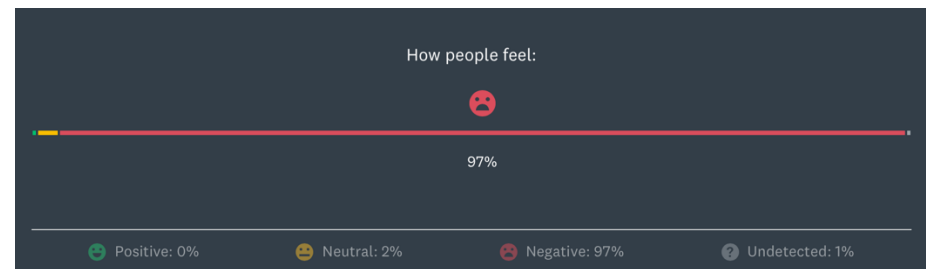
Monthly travel pass: 11 responses



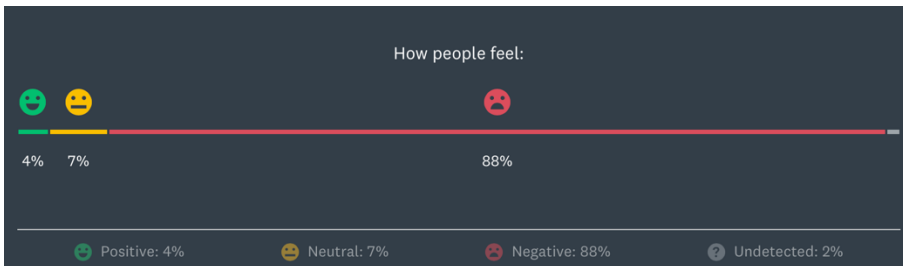
Local User Discount Scheme (LUDS): 662 responses



I use the merseyflow quick-pay app: 1339



Blue Badge plan: 250 responses



None – I don't have a plan: 298 responses

