

S.C.M.F.

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\$13 toll shock for motorists

Motorists may face a double dose of higher tolls for the Cross Harbour Tunnel — from the tunnel company and the Government.

The Cross Harbour Tunnel Co announced yesterday it has applied for toll increases ranging from 25 to 60 per cent for various types of vehicles.

Only four days ago, the Financial Secretary, Sir John Bremridge, disclosed plans to tax tunnel-users.

If the Government bows to the tunnel company's demands and also goes ahead with its own levy, private motorists could find themselves having to pay \$13 for a one-way ride instead of the present \$5.

And the additional charge for a single taxi trip through the tunnel would be \$26.

The company wants to put the toll for private cars and taxis up by \$3 to \$8 and motorcycles by \$1 to \$3.

The charge for franchised double-decker buses would go up from \$15 to \$20 and from \$15 to \$20 for single-decker franchised buses.

Mini-buses would have to pay \$2 on top of the existing \$8 and another \$8 for each extra axle in excess of two instead of the present \$5.

Goods vehicles will have to pay between \$2 and \$5 more if the proposals are approved.

While the tunnel company's proposed price hikes are across the board, Sir John's \$5 tax spares public buses and minibuses.

A tunnel company spokesman said the application for an increase was aimed at restoring to some extent the company's earnings in real terms following the steady decline in the value of the local dollar.

Referring to Sir John's Budget Day statement on the fares, the spokesman said that the real cost of using the tunnel was now about one-third of the levels charges in 1972.

He claimed that there had not been a sufficient increase in cross-harbour traffic to offset the decline in the firm's real earnings.

"In fact, the 1983 traffic actually decreased," he said.

The company's profits in the past two to three years have averaged about \$140 million compared with about \$110 million in 1979.

Sir John said in his Budget speech that subject to Legislative Council agreement, the \$5 tax would apply to private cars, taxis and goods vehicles from April 1.

The only vehicles excluded would be mini-buses, public and private omnibuses.

The tax level for motorcycles was set at \$2.