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Permanent Tolls on the Öresund Bridge – A Threat to Swedish Infrastructure Planning

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In its latest national infrastructure bill (Prop. 2024/25:28), the Swedish government introduced a new financing model for the Swedish transport infrastructure. The proposal states that once the Öresund Bridge has been paid off, tolls will continue to be collected and used to finance new infrastructure investments in the Öresund region. This represents a clear break with established practice. Previously, tolls on the Svinesund, Motala, Sundsvall, and Skuru bridges were abolished once construction loans had been repaid, after which the prevailing principle of marginal cost pricing was reinstated. The total scale of the proposed financing linked to revenues from the Öresund Bridge is estimated at SEK 25 billion.

While several financing solutions have been used historically in Sweden, including tax financing, public borrowing repaid through temporary tolls, public-private partnerships, and regional co-financing, the government has not evaluated the new proposal from a socio-economic perspective. This study identifies several risks associated with the proposal that have not been examined. A rough estimation suggests that maintaining the toll will not result in major differences in socio-economic costs compared with traditional tax financing. However, the fact that such an analysis was not carried out prior to the decision is problematic.

More importantly, the proposed new financing model poses structural risks to the Swedish transport planning system. By converting the Öresund Bridge toll into a permanent and fiscally motivated revenue stream, the model risks distorting the results of socio-economic cost–benefit analyses that are central to national infrastructure planning. When toll revenues can be used to fund new investments, the national, regional and local governments all have fiscal incentives to prioritise projects that can generate or preserve toll income rather than projects that are more socio-economically justified. In the long run, this risks steering investments away from roads and regions with the greatest need and towards those that can secure direct revenue flows.

The proposal also raises concerns regarding distributive fairness. Road users who pay bridge tolls would, in practice, contribute twice to infrastructure they do not necessarily use, once through the toll and once through general taxation. Moreover, the continued toll would lead to traffic displacement. Today, the toll causes travellers and freight operators to divert to alternative routes and ferry lines. Maintaining the toll after the bridge has been paid off would therefore continue to impose accessibility losses and higher transport costs for individuals and businesses. At the same time, permanently linking new infrastructure investments to a specific revenue source risks creating political pressure to maintain and possibly expand the toll system to ensure future financing. This increases the long-term risk of politically protected monopolies and a gradual erosion of the marginal cost pricing principle that underpins the Swedish planning model.

While there are indeed documented shortcomings in the current planning system, all changes should be preceded by a transparent analysis. The shift from temporary, cost-covering tolls to permanent, fiscally motivated tolls marks a fundamental change in the governance of Swedish transport infrastructure. Without a thorough socio-economic assessment, the new model risks increasing inequities among road users, undermining the legitimacy of the planning system, and weakening the link between infrastructure investments and societal benefit. In the long term, this could challenge the foundational principles of Swedish transport policy: economic efficiency, equal access, and long-term sustainability.

Against this backdrop, this study yields four policy recommendations:

- Carry out a socio-economic analysis of the proposal before the current tolls become permanent.
- Avoid creating long-term dependencies on toll revenues in the national planning model.
- Review the legitimacy and fairness of charging user fees for infrastructure that has already been paid off.
- Carry out an in-depth analysis of how permanent tolls affect Swedish transport planning and socio-economic efficiency in the transport system.

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