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Toll bridge loss could cost Fingal €5.5m

This month's introduction of barrier free tolling on the Westlink toll bridge could also mean a major financial loss to Fingal County Council, *Community Voice* has learned. National Toll Roads (NTR) the former operator

of the toll bridge was one of the biggest commercial ratepayers in Fingal with a rates bill for the current year in excess of €5.5m. As a result of the buyout of the bridge by the National Roads Authority (NRA), this source of income for the local authority could now be lost.

A spokesperson for the NRA told *Community Voice*, "we have made enquiries with our advisors to see if we are liable to pay rates on the bridge. It has been suggested to us that we are not liable and as a public body we would have the Comptroller & Auditor General coming after us if we were to pay bills for which we were not liable."

A spokesperson for Fingal County Council confirmed that "the rates assessment for the toll bridge on the M50 for 2008 is €5.5m." However the spokesperson continued

"we cannot comment on whether or not the toll will be subject to rates in the future as this is a matter for the Valuations Office."

According to a spokesperson for the Valuation Office the question of rates on the toll bridge has always been a contentious one and initially NTR contested the matter. Usually valuations are placed on buildings based on the rental value of the premises, however in the case of toll bridges the courts have determined that the valuation should be based on the level of tolls received by the operator.

Over the years, with the phenomenal growth in the company's toll income, NTR has had recourse to the Valuation Tribunal and the courts on a number of occasions to appeal the various revised valuations being made by the Valuation Office.

Cont'd. on page 2



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