A strategic freight-corridor charging power

Policy proposal for the Department for Transport | Highways (Financing) Bill | 24 October 2026

1. Purpose

Electroporte proposes that the Highways (Financing) Bill include a general enabling power under which the Secretary of State could, by subsequent regulations, establish a regulated charging scheme for a nationally significant freight corridor. The power would permit qualifying freight movements to contribute to approved capacity and resilience infrastructure without requiring every vehicle to travel along a particular newly constructed or improved toll road.

This proposal concerns legislative capability, not the approval of Electroporte or any individual development, and would not itself introduce a charge.

2. The gap in the Bill as drafted

Clause 3 links a licence to tolling vehicles using or being kept on a specified qualifying trunk road, in return for highway construction, capacity-increasing improvement or prescribed continuing activities. It does not clearly provide a mechanism to recover the cost of corridor-wide resilience assets from freight movements that benefit from them but do not use the chargeable road.

For example, the Dover Straits corridor uses both the M20/A20 and M2/A2 approaches. Permanent freight-marshalling infrastructure connected to the M20 could preserve the strategic network’s operation during serious disruption, but many Dover-bound vehicles using the A2/M2 would never enter that infrastructure or the relevant M20 section. Artificially diverting vehicles for toll collection would be undesirable.

Clause 33 concerns incorporation of independently authorised qualifying charging schemes into the tolling regime; it should not be presumed to create the underlying power to charge freight movements across a corridor.

3. Proposed enabling principle

Where nationally significant freight movements depend upon infrastructure providing corridor-wide capacity, reliability or resilience, the Secretary of State should be able to establish a proportionate, regulated charge on defined freight movements, independent of the approach road used, with revenue dedicated to approved infrastructure and service obligations.

4. Recommended structure

Primary legislation: confer an express power to designate qualifying national freight corridors and enable charging by regulations. Specify the fundamental purposes, scope of chargeability, public-interest tests and mandatory safeguards in the Act.

Subsequent regulations: designate each corridor and chargeable movements; specify liable persons, the collection mechanism, exemptions, duplicate-charge protection, enforcement and review. Require affirmative approval by both Houses following public consultation and published economic appraisal.

Financial framework: permit approved net revenues to support eligible infrastructure construction, financing, maintenance, operation and proportionate resilience-readiness costs, with transparent allocation between any regulated highway licence and distinct service contracts.

5. Necessary safeguards

The legislation should require independent oversight of efficient expenditure and tariffs; published appraisal of need, proportionality and economic effects; consultation with freight, ports and highway authorities; transparent accounting; limits on cross-subsidy of commercial activities; suitable dispute and appeals routes; and periodic review or sunset arrangements for each designation.

Collection through existing border or freight systems could be examined, but should not be prescribed prematurely: declarations and individual vehicle crossings do not necessarily correspond one-to-one.

6. Dover Straits as an illustrative application

An integrated M20 freight-resilience scheme could include new designated trunk-road marshalling lanes, access and traffic-management infrastructure, and independently justified improvements to M20 J8-J9. Its purpose would be to replace motorway-based HGV holding while maintaining the functionality of the wider corridor. Evidence-based scenario modelling would determine the necessary capacity; financial appraisal would determine eligible expenditure and an appropriate charge. Designation would remain a separate Government decision.

7. Questions for DfT’s Bill policy and legal teams

1. Does the Bill as drafted already contain any sufficiently clear power for the described corridor-wide movement charge, including through Clause 33 and independently authorised schemes?

2. If not, would the Department consider a limited enabling clause, with the charging scheme’s implementation reserved for regulations subject to affirmative parliamentary approval?

3. How could revenues under such a scheme be integrated with the Bill’s regulated licensing model without extending regulated recovery to unrelated commercial activities?

4. What constraints arising from existing tolling powers, international obligations, enforcement and devolution would need to be addressed in primary legislation?

The requested next step is an early technical discussion with the officials responsible for the Bill’s charging, licensing and legal provisions, while committee scrutiny remains under way.

Electroporte | Policy discussion paper; not draft statutory text.