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Forestalling Tolls and Tax Increases Won't Keep Bridges from Rotting: Cameron on Transportation

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The recent debate over tolling our highways should remind us of just how divided the state has become. It's not red vs. blue and not even just upstate vs. downstate. The real divide is between those who commute by car vs. those who take mass transit.

I've written for years about how Metro-North riders pay the highest commuter rail fares in the U.S., and those fares will only keep rising. Most rail riders have little choice, especially if headed to New York City. What are they going to do — drive?

Yet, every time the fares go up — increasing 55 percent since 2002 — ridership rises as well. Why? Because

conditions on the highways keep getting worse.

But those who choose to drive, or must because there's no viable mass transit option, seem to literally hate rail commuters. I think it's jealousy. During the tolls debate, the venom was dripping and one Tweet in particular hit home.

"Just because your commute (by train) is so expensive doesn't mean mine (by car) should be too (because of tolling)," the post read.

The driver clearly missed the point. We aren't looking for tolls to subsidize rail fares. It's just to get motorists to pay for the upkeep of their roads and bridges before we have another Mianus River Bridge collapse, which we will.

But it gets worse.

The anti-toll forces now sound like Howard Beale, the deranged newsman from the movie "Network" who was "mad as hell and not going to take it anymore." Doubtless, much of this is directed at Gov. Dannel Malloy who has the lowest popularity rating in the history of polling. Sure, the economy of our state is in bad shape. But Malloy didn't create this economic mess. He just inherited it and mishandled it.

And it will get far worse, no matter who succeeds Malloy. The solutions will be few and all will be painful. Forestalling tolls and gasoline taxes won't stop the bridges from rotting.

But this opposition to tolls or modest gasoline tax increases to pay for roads has now been taken to a maniacal pitch, predicting "everyone is leaving the state," because conditions are so bad. That's fine with me.

I recently ran into a young man unloading a bunch of items at our town dump. "My parents are moving," he told me. "Everyone is leaving Connecticut!" he exclaimed. "Really?" I asked.

"It's all Malloy's fault," he said, sounding like a Pied Piper, leading a caravan down Interstate 95 to some promised land.

I asked him one question: "Did your parents sell their house?" "Sure," he said. "And at a profit over what they paid for it."

"Well," I said, "I guess not everyone is leaving. Your folks are moving out and someone else is moving in." Someone who wants to live here.

To those who hate living in Connecticut so much, I extend an invitation: Please leave. Enjoy your low-tax destination. And don't forget to pay those highway tolls as you drive down I-95 through New York, New Jersey and elsewhere.

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But enough already with the “I hate Connecticut” mantra. Some of us actually like living here. And losing the “haters” will only mean fewer cars on our roadways.

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