

Why We Should Have Highway Tolls — What State Leaders Aren't Telling You: Cameron on Transportation

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Nobody likes the idea of paying tolls. But they're coming back to Connecticut and state lawmakers should be honest with us and tell us why.

We are running out of money for the Special Transportation Fund.

That's the reason.

None of the re-funding alternatives are attractive: vehicle miles tax, sales tax, gas tax and yes, tolls. But tolls on our highways would *not* be a tax.

Tolls are a user fee. You only pay a toll if you drive. If you use mass transit or ride a bike, you don't pay tolls. Doesn't that seem fairer than taxing everyone, even those who don't drive?

Let me dispel a few other myths about highway tolling being spread by dishonest pols:

Tolls are not safe

When are we going to stop being told that tolls were eliminated in Connecticut because of the “fiery truck crash” in 1983 at a Stratford toll booth? Tolls are collected thousands of times a minute in New York and New Jersey without a single toll booth or fiery truck crash. E-ZPass toll collection is fast and safe.

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Washington won't let us toll

Not so. The Federal Highway Administration has told Hartford we can toll Interstate 95 and Interstate 84 if it is used to manage traffic as opposed to just raise money.

Tolls slow traffic

In fact, the opposite is true. With barrier-free tolls, cars don't slow down. Those who are willing to pay for the privilege of driving on a major highway — especially at rush hour — will experience less traffic and a faster ride because those who don't want to pay won't be on the road.

Let's just toll non-state residents

Sorry, that's against the law. These are our highways, so we all should pay for them. We all pay tolls when we drive in New York and New Jersey, so why are we now giving those states' residents a free ride in Connecticut?

Jim Cameron on our highways

- [Looking to Save the State Money? Stop Spending on Sound Barriers: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 27)
- [How a 10% ConnDOT Cut Would Affect Connecticut: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 20)
- [Predictions for Planes, Trains & Automobile Traffic in 2017: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 14)
- [Don't Blame the Trucks for I-95 Congestion: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Nov. 12, 2016)

Tolls will divert traffic to local roads

Maybe for the first few weeks. But if people would rather drive on Route 1 instead of paying a 50-cent toll on I-95, they obviously don't value their time. Let them. It will just mean a faster ride (and less traffic) on the toll road for everyone else.

Toll money will be misused

I share this concern and no one will support tolls or taxes until we have a "lock box" on transportation funds to be certain they are not misappropriated. But the absence of a lock-box is not an excuse to deny the need for funding.

Roads should be free here

Every time we hit a pothole on a highway or bridge that should have been repaired, we're paying a toll. Maintaining our interstates is expensive and paying a toll for road repairs seems cheaper than paying for blown tires, alignments and bent rims. [A recent study by the American Society of Civil Engineers says](#) those car repairs average \$864 a year for every Connecticut motorist.

But why am I the only one talking about the value of tolls? Where's the governor, our transportation advocate? Where's the commissioner of the state Department of Transportation? Why aren't they explaining the points of modern tolling?

Even the Democrats who voted tolling bills out of committee for broader debate are reluctant to make the case that it's time for tolls. And nay-saying opponents of tolls, pandering to the public, are offering no alternatives.

Shame on all of them.

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