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No Free Ride: Connecticut Needs Tolls and Gas Taxes: Cameron on Transportation

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Am I the only person in the state who thinks Gov. Dannel Malloy's plan for tolls and gas taxes makes sense? Probably. But let me try once again to overcome the usual objections and myths and explain why Malloy's plan is fair and necessary.

Tolls are taxes

No, tolls are user fees. Train fares aren't taxes, are they? If you don't want to pay a few pennies a gallon

more for gasoline, don't drive. Join us on the train and pay the highest commuter rail fares in the U.S. There is no free ride.

Taxes are already too high

That may be your perception. But in 1997 when legislators cut the sky-high gas taxes by 14 cents, why didn't they tell us that would cause us to lose \$3.7 billion in needed transportation funding? The bill is now due.

Sure, but it doesn't go to fixing the roads. That's a municipal tax. If you don't like it, complain to City Hall.

Gasoline prices are already the highest

Not so anymore. Connecticut's 39-cents-per-gallon tax is the third-highest in the Northeast, trailing Pennsylvania (59 cents) and New York (44 cents) and just ahead of New Jersey (37 cents).

Roads should be free

Just where in the Constitution does it say that? This isn't the pioneer West. We're talking about Interstate 95 and the parkways. Driving is not like going to an all-you-can-eat buffet. Think of the new paradigm as an a la carte restaurant where you pay for what you eat.

Tolls are not safe

This is another myth since the days of the 1983 "fiery truck crash" at the Stratford toll plaza on I-95. Tolls don't require barriers or booths anymore. They're electronic gantries over the highway reading your E-ZPass or license plate without slowing down.

Tolls will divert traffic to local roads

Maybe, for the first week. Then people will decide if they want to waste time in traffic or pay a few cents to get where they're going.

If we raise gas tax, why do we need tolls?

Raising the gasoline tax can be done in weeks. But tolls will take two to four years to install. By then, upwards of half of all cars will be electric, paying no gas tax. Why should a Tesla driver get a free ride?

Toll out-of-staters

Sure, something like 34 percent of all traffic in Connecticut is from out-of-state. But building tolls just at our borders is unconstitutional (and unfair). We can offer a discount to Connecticut residents, but can't charge those driving through our state while we pay nothing.

Malloy stole money from transportation

True, money has been regularly "reapportioned" from the Special Transportation Fund for years by former Govs. John Rowland and M. Jodi Rell as well as Malloy. You'll get the chance to stop that in November when there's a referendum question on the ballot for a "lock box" on the STF.

Real problem is state employee union contracts

That may be so, but the SEBAC contracts were just renegotiated and approved by the Legislature, so how do we undo that before the STF goes belly-up next year?

I've had enough. I'm leaving the state

Sorry to see you go. But when you say goodbye, remember you'll have to pay tolls to New York, Massachusetts or Rhode Island on your way out.

More of Jim Cameron's Road-Related Columns

- [Don't Blame the Trucks for I-95 Congestion: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Nov. 12, 2016)
- [Why We Should Have Highway Tolls — What State Leaders Aren't Telling You: Cameron on Transportation](#) (April 14)
- [A Vehicle Miles Tax Is Needed to Maintain CT Roads: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 16)
- [What You Can Learn by Riding with a State Trooper on I-95: Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 18)
- [The Little-Changed Merritt: 'Queen of the Parkways' — Cameron on Transportation](#) (June 23)
- [Adventures in Toll Collecting: From Woodstock's Zonked to the Malodorous Chicken Truck](#) (Sept. 3)
- [Long Haul Trucking's Bedbuggers, Chowder, Suicide Jockeys, Robots and More: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Oct. 9)
- [Who's Watching You in Your Car? The Authorities: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Nov. 27)
- [Think Gridlock on the Roads Is Awful? Wait'll You Consider Political Gridlock: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Dec. 11)
- [CT's Prospects Get Ever Darker for Transport Funding, Even for Maintenance and Plowing: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Jan. 2)

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