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Restricting Trucks on I-95 or Raising Their Tolls Further Won't Help Traffic: Cameron on Transportation

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“Why don’t we just ban all trucks from our interstate highways in rush hour?”

A mayor of a small Fairfield County town recently asked me this question. He’s a smart guy who obviously had given a lot of thought to resolving our traffic woes and believed he had the answer to the transportation crisis.

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He wasn't in favor of tolls, but liked them as a traffic mitigation tool. Charging truck drivers more during rush hour would incentivize them to travel during other times of the day. He was just taking the idea a step further — charging only at certain hours.

I told him that's probably illegal. This is an interstate, federal highway built to carry trucks. It would be a better idea to suggest merchants only accept deliveries at, say, 3 a.m. instead of 9 to 5, which is more convenient for store owners.

But the truck-haters are not satisfied. Any number of candidates are calling for truck-only tolls, pointing to Rhode Island recently launching this type of system. It's been a huge success, raking in \$625,000 in its first month of operation.

But it's also attracted lawsuits, because it is illegal — just like the mayor's idea. Tolling only big-rigs is a violation of the U.S. Constitution's "Commerce Clause." The truckers and big-box stores say it's not fair to toll them and not charge drivers of cars and small trucks. I'm no lawyer, but I think they're right.

Trucks are not the problem. Cars are the real issue.

But it's so easy to blame the trucks for delays on our roads, isn't it? Blame them, instead of ourselves. Toll them, not me. I'm not creating the traffic, they are.

Trucks are not allowed on the Merritt and Wilbur Cross parkways, so why are those roads so congested? Look at Interstate-95 in rush hour and count the number of trucks vs. single-occupancy-vehicles. Again, it's the volume of the traffic, not the kind of vehicles that are causing the delays. It's the geometry of the highway — too many exits and entrances, and too few alternatives (aside from rail).

Truckers don't want to be on the interstates in bumper-to-bumper traffic any more than you do. Those trucks are high-occupancy vehicles carrying your Amazon orders and making deliveries to the big-box stores. You put those trucks on the road, and now you want to ban them at certain hours? Then you'll be moaning about late deliveries.

You don't want to pay tolls? Trucks already do, even in Connecticut. They pay higher state gas taxes (44 cents for diesel vs. 25 cents for gasoline), even if they don't buy that gas in Connecticut. They must also pay to register their trucks in Connecticut, even if they are from out of state, thanks to the International Fuel Tax Agreement.

Add a layer of tolls on top of those costs and guess who's going to pay? You.

There's no free lunch, folks. The solution to our traffic is not to blame others, but to look in the mirror.

Cameron on Tolls and State Transportation Policy

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- [Forestalling Tolls and Tax Increases Won't Keep Bridges from Rotting: Cameron on Transportation](#) (May 27, 2018)
- [Jim Cameron Speaks to Greenwich Audience About CT's Transportation Funding Crisis](#) (March 31)
- [State Legislators Hold Ultimate Responsibility for Funding, Improving Roads and Rails: Cameron on Transportation](#) (March 21)
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