

Darienite

News for Darien

<https://darienite.com>

Tolling's Dead. Now How Will We Maintain Our Bridges, Highways, Trains? — Cameron on Transportation

Author : David Gurliacci

Categories : [Opinion](#), [Transportation](#)

Tagged as : [Cameron on State Transportation Policy 2019](#), [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2019](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#)[Jim Cameron's Transportation Column 2019](#)

Date : July 18, 2019

It seems pretty clear that Gov. Ned Lamont's tolling idea is dead. The Republicans say "no way, never" and his own Democrats can't muster the guts to take an up or down vote because they're so afraid of public reaction.

Darienite

Oh, everyone in Hartford is still doing the usual square dance, posturing and politicking, but I doubt a special session to vote on tolls will ever happen: tolls are dead.

<https://darienite.com>

But 'lest the anti-toll forces should start to rejoice, they may have won this battle but the war is far from over. Because when tolls go down to defeat, there are still plenty of secondary options, none of which you (or they) will like.

Our bridges are still corroding, our highways are still potholed and our trains are running slower than ever. Transportation is grinding to a halt, and with it our state's economy. Something must be done. The money must be found.

As one senior Lamont staffer told me, "The governor refuses to preside over another Mianus River bridge collapse. We cannot put politics ahead of peoples' safety."

- **See also:** "[Dan Haar: What Bridge Tolling in CT Would Look Like](#)" (July 17; Stamford Advocate)

It is clear that the Special Transportation Fund is headed into the red unless additional funding can be found. And if the STF is going to be insolvent, the state won't be able to borrow on Wall Street for anything, transportation or otherwise. Our bond ratings will rival a third-world nation.

So, if not tolls, where do we find the money?

Stop wasting money at state Department of Transportation: [The Reason Foundation's claim](#) the state ranks 46th in the nation in spending efficiency is bogus and has been [widely debunked](#). Even if we could save a few million by cutting the state DOT waste, we still need billions to repair our roads and rails.

Raise the gas tax: It hasn't changed a penny since 1997, not even adjusting for inflation. Like tolling, the gas tax would be a "user fee" — though not paid by those driving electric cars nor by out-of-staters who don't buy gasoline here.

Raise the sales tax: Easily done but fairly regressive as it would hit everyone in the state, even those who never drive on our highways. And again, out-of-staters get a free ride assuming they don't stop to buy anything passing through.

Raise the income tax: Another easy revenue source, but even less popular than tolling and just as politically dangerous.

Raise fares and cut service: This is what I call the Doomsday Scenario — worsening train and bus service, driving more people back to their cars. It's a sure way to save money, but at the expense of those using mass transit and adding to traffic.

Partial tolling: Maybe go back to the trucks-only option, not everywhere but just on bridges most needing

repairs? Makes sense, but the toll cynics won't believe it will be so limited.

Vehicle miles tax: It works in Oregon, California and progressive EU countries, but when the idea was floated years ago by [Malloy's Transportation Finance panel](#) it was immediately rejected. Democrats [pushed through a law](#) stopping the state DOT from even studying the concept. Paranoids fear "big brother" would be following where they drive, forgetting that their iPhones and Google (not to mention the NSA and FBI) can do so already.

Money for transportation will be found. If you're not a fan of users paying their share (via tolling), get ready for the ugly alternatives.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.