



State of Connecticut

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Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, Senator Boucher, Representative Scribner and Members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is State Senator John A. Kissel and I represent the Seventh Senatorial District which includes several border towns in our great state. I come before you today to speak in opposition to the bills proposing the reconstruction of tolls on our roadways.

The state ceased all toll collection in December of 1985 due to a number of car accidents.

Many of you may recall the most tragic incident, which occurred 1983 when a truck collided with four cars at a Stratford toll plaza resulting in the death of seven people.

Tolls would be installed at entry points into Connecticut – along I-84, I-91, I-95, I-395, the Merritt Parkway, and Route 6.

In place of actual toll booths, overhead electronic signals would be constructed to record each vehicle passing through. Although the addition of toll stations across our state would generate revenue, it comes at a high cost. Taxpayer dollars would be required to fund the construction of these eight proposed tolls, and motorists would be responsible for purchasing an electronic transponder, such as an EZ-Pass. Those vehicles that pass through tolls without an EZ-Pass would be billed by the state, resulting in a further expense to taxpayers.

Currently, Connecticut receives federal funding for infrastructure projects and maintenance along the state's interstate highways, but if Connecticut were to build toll stations that funding would become very limited. Under federal law, it appears that

Connecticut may also have to repay the federal government substantial sums if tolls were to be placed on existing highways. The federal government has the authority to collect back any monies given to the state that support roadwork.

As I stated previously, I represent the border towns in the north central part of the state. Connecticut's border towns are not welcoming to this proposal.

Traveling motorists looking to avoid the added fee may be inclined to use secondary roadways to circumvent toll stations. Putting tolls in border towns like Enfield would crowd local streets with cars that leave the interstate to avoid the tolls. With the installation of tolls, travelers will divert to local roads in order to avoid tolls. Thousands of vehicles a day will revert to this practice. Route 5 would see major gridlock. Such diversion to smaller, local roads causes immense wear. Projects to restore the damage that will inevitably be done will put a strain on already over-strained local governments.

In north central Connecticut, we frequently travel across the Massachusetts border. For example, a great many of my constituents work at Mass Mutual and travel across the border multiple times every week. They would be unfairly impacted by the tolls. In effect, border tolls would add another tax onto many of our residents who simply want to get to work.

My border towns fear that these proposed tolls will affect business. They worry travelers will be less likely to visit and invest in their communities. Connecticut's border towns would lose a great deal of revenue.

Not only will this create traffic and congestion among these border communities, but there are environmental and infrastructural impacts. The increased amount of vehicles would result in poor air quality as well as damaged roads which the state and municipalities would be responsible for fixing.

Furthermore, placing tolls at borders poses potential constitutional problems for the state. This placement could be a violation of the Commerce Clause of the United State Constitution, which could prompt difficult and costly legal battles. Also, placing tolls on already existing highways has never been done, and is currently barred by federal rules.

Reinstating tolls is essentially another tax to maintain Connecticut's costly spending habits. Connecticut drivers already pay annual property taxes on vehicles, and gas taxes of 25 cents per gallon on regular fuel and 43.4 cents on diesel. Tolls would be another financial burden on residents who pay sales, income and gas taxes.

Rather than spend money the state does not have, we in the legislature should adopt policies that reduce government excess in order to maintain our infrastructure and necessary services. It is time to support our state's families and businesses as well as welcome travelers into our state.