



CONNECTICUT BUSINESS & INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

**TESTIMONY OF ERIC J. BROWN
ASSOCIATE COUNSEL
CONNECTICUT BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
February 18, 2011**

Good morning. My name is Eric Brown and I serve as associate counsel with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA). CBIA represents thousands of businesses of all sizes throughout Connecticut that provide hundreds of thousands of Connecticut citizens with good jobs and good benefits.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Sections 1 and 2 of your agenda which concern the issues of tolling and use of the Special Transportation Fund.

CBIA recognizes that creating a first-class, multimodal, and highly interconnected transportation system in Connecticut is critically important to the economic future of our state. Even after all the good work of the legislature and previous administrations over the past decade, it is easy to look at a northeast regional infrastructure map and see the potential isolation of Connecticut as highways with 3 or more lanes, high-speed and long-range passenger and freight rail lines, as well as deep-water ports provide opportunities for all varieties of commerce to enter and move through the region without ever coming through Connecticut. If Connecticut fails to act boldly and strategically, our connection to regional, national and international corridors of commerce could become cumbersome to a point where jobs and wealth literally pass us by.

Likewise we realize that demographic, economic and political trends indicate the availability of federal dollars, so consistently and substantially relied upon for decades as the primary source of transportation funding in Connecticut, is becoming less certain. It would simply be imprudent to expect that Connecticut will be able to count on the federal government generally financing 80% of its current, let alone future, transportation needs.

Accordingly, we concur with the sentiments of many on this committee that Connecticut needs to develop a sustainable and dedicated source of revenue to support the vision of a robust, modern and well-maintained 21st-century transportation system.

The challenge of course, in these difficult economic times, is to explore and build public support for such a revenue source or sources. As we have said in the past, CBIA believes such funds should be derived, to the maximum extent practicable, from user-base activities – and tolling certainly meets that criteria. At the same time, however, without a mechanism to insure revenues collected from tolls are solely dedicated to transportation investments, we would be unlikely to support tolling, or other new revenue sources. Further, we believe the public will not support proposals that ask them to pay more for the privilege of using our transportation system without such assurance.

A 2009 study on tolling conducted for the Transportation Strategy Board by Cambridge Associates indicated that there was no silver-bullet when it comes to choosing among the variety of tolling options for our state. Each has its potential benefits and shortcomings, its proponents and opponents, and its uncertainty as to the outcome with respect to revenue generation, congestion mitigation, and travel patterns.

Governor Malloy has expressed interest in experimenting with tolling in eastern Connecticut by establishing a toll system on Route 11 to finance the completion of that highway from Colchester south to Interstate 95. If the state decides it wants to initiate tolling in Connecticut, this project should be seriously considered as a good opportunity to “experiment” with tolling. We see several benefits with this approach.

First, it would allow citizens to see and experience a modern, high-speed electronic tolling system. Educating our citizens and our policy-makers on how drastically tolling technology has changed over the past 3 decades since tolls were last used on Connecticut highways is a critical precursor, in our view, if a broader tolling system is ever to be politically feasible.

Second, it would provide the opportunity to experiment with the impact of tolls on traffic patterns. For example, at what price would this toll significantly shunt traffic off of Route 11 onto secondary roads – in this case Route 85, or onto alternative highway routes – in this case Route 2 to Norwich and then south on I-395.

Third, it would eliminate the current “dead-end” highway and complete a long-sought after north-south connection between Hartford and the southeastern Connecticut shoreline.

Forth, there may be interest in forming a public-private partnership whereby a private entity may be willing to take some of the upfront capitol burden as well as the

long-term administrative burden of the state in exchange for some of the revenues generated by the tolls.

Incrementally initiating the reinstatement of tolls in Connecticut, beginning with a toll-funded completion of Route 11, would provide the state, its citizens and decision-makers with invaluable experience that could then inform the process of deciding to what extent, when, where and how to potentially expand tolling in the state.

CBIA greatly appreciates this committee bringing forward several concrete proposals to generate discussion on tolling and the critically important issue of insuring funds raised through transportation fees are solely and irrevocably dedicated to improving our state's transportation system. We look forward to continuing to work with your committee, the General Assembly and the Governor's office on establishing a clear vision of our future, economically-driven transportation system, identifying the highest priority projects to fulfill that vision, along with an aggressive and feasible plan for completing these projects on-time and on-budget – financed through a sustainable and dedicated funding mechanism.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment.