

Marshall Collins on
behalf of Stephen Bull

Testimony by Stephen A. Bull, President/CEO of the Greater Danbury Chamber
of Commerce

On Acts which would Establish Tolls on Connecticut's Borders

Before the Legislature's Transportation Committee

Monday, February 25, 2013

10:30am, Room 1E Legislative Office Building

Hartford, CT

Good morning my name is Stephen A. Bull, President of the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce a regional business advocacy organization in Northern Fairfield County representing over 1000 members with a workforce of over 107,000 employees. I am here today in my capacity as President/CEO of the Chamber to voice our strong opposition to the imposition of tolls in Danbury.

Tolls were removed from Connecticut highways years ago for some very good reasons which are still valid today.

1. **Safety.** Tolls are a significant threat to safety on our highways. It wasn't that long ago that seven people were killed in Stratford because of the unsafe conditions which tolls created on our highways. Danbury is the gateway to New England with over 125,000 cars and trucks traveling this important artery daily. Conditions have significantly become more dangerous as traffic counts continue to escalate. Even with innovations per electronic tolling there would still need to be a cash lane. One has only to go into neighboring New York to see the mayhem caused when people who don't have EZ Pass cross lanes to get to cash lane. Many travelers have discovered I-84 in the last ten years in an effort to avoid I-95. Tolls would exacerbate an already dangerous situation. In addition there are numerous ways at the Danbury/New York border where people can get off and use back roads into residential neighborhoods. Senator McLaughlin has a very illustrative map which details this extremely important public safety issue.
2. **Congestion.** Tolls would cause intolerable congestion and delay on this extremely important artery to both commuters and commerce. I-84 is already over capacity and the much needed widening and realignment of exits is at best 10 years away. The simple fact is the current infrastructure would be unable to support tolls.
3. **Environmental.** Years ago the Federal government provided subsidies for the states that were willing to remove tolls. They did this because it is a fact that tolls cause undue pollution while cars line up idling away spewing exhaust into the atmosphere.
4. **Economic.** Tolls would also hurt Greater Danbury from an economic/fiscal standpoint. The City of Danbury reports over 5 billion in retail sales annually. The region reports over 8 billion. Many of those retail sales

numbers are coming from out of state shoppers who routinely come over the line to shop at our many fine service and retail facilities. The retail sales tax goes directly to Hartford. By placing a toll on I-84 we will most definitely create a disincentive to come to Danbury. A case in point is the Danbury Fair Mall, the largest mall in New England which attracts over 14 million shoppers from a sixty mile radius and beyond every year. A toll would say to out of state shoppers don't go to Danbury to shop go to Westchester or Putnam. In fact it is our merchants that will see a disruption of business. It is our residents, commuters and shoppers that will pay the tolls most often. More than 250 members and other businesses are located just over the New York border in the Danbury region – they will pay the tolls most often.

If the legislature believes that it so desperately needs revenue from the tolls why not implement them throughout the state? How about a toll on every bridge across the various Connecticut Rivers: New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford, Old Saybrook, New London, Glastonbury, Rocky Hill, Middletown, Enfield, Windsor, Waterbury, Norwalk, Norwich and more. Why stop at Greenwich, Danbury, Enfield, Thompson and Stonington?

The Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce believes that solving the state's fiscal nightmare is the responsibility of the entire state. If revenue is the issue, everyone should endure the hazards, pollution and economic disruption of tolls.

For these reasons we strongly urge the committee to take tolls off the agenda and to look to other revenue raising options which don't disproportionately target one area of the state and allow for a more equitable sharing of the tax responsibility. Therefore we ask that your reject toll initiatives.