



State of Connecticut

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Testimony

HB 5125: An Act Establishing Tolls on Connecticut's Highways

HB 6050: An Act Concerning Tolls at Connecticut's Borders

**HB 6051: An Act Establishing Tolls at Connecticut's Borders and Reducing the
Gasoline Tax**

Transportation Committee

February 4, 2013

Good morning, Chairmen Maynard and Guerrero, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and former fellow members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on these bills related to tolls on Connecticut's roadways.

Estimates of the funding needed to repair and maintain Connecticut's transportation infrastructure over the next few years range from \$3 billion to \$5 billion. While we have long relied on federal funding, we know that it is now and is likely to continue to be in dramatically short supply. As we heard in the presentation on tolls last week, the gas tax is also becoming an increasingly unreliable source of revenue, not just in Connecticut, but on a national level. Meanwhile, OFA is projecting growing annual deficits in the Special Transportation Fund (STF) from 2013, reaching a deficit of \$108 million in 2016.

This committee has for several years discussed tolls as way of providing revenue to fund Connecticut's infrastructure needs.

I oppose introducing tolls for several reasons.

First, the state has a history of diverting the transportation revenues it already collects into the General Fund and not using them for transportation purposes. As an example, just last year, \$70 million was taken from the STF to close the fiscal 2012 deficit. Until we have a mechanism in place to dedicate all transportation revenues, including mass transit fares and gasoline taxes, to our transportation needs, I believe it is inappropriate to seek more. I also believe that Connecticut residents will not accept paying to use our roads if they have no guarantee that their money will not be used for other purposes.

It is also true that after the largest tax increase in the state's history, Connecticut's budget still has a substantial current deficit. If our revenues cannot cover our steadily increasing expenses, then seeking still more revenues does not address the budget's fundamental structural issues. Connecticut's combined tax burden is among the highest in the country, and I believe that the public will not accept paying another obligatory tax or user fee as long as the growth of state spending has not been fully addressed.

Specifically regarding HB 5060, imposing border tolls, whether the gasoline tax is reduced or not, would unfairly penalize those residents who live in certain areas, and especially those who regularly commute to other states. We have also heard many times from businesses in border communities that the imposition of tolls would have an unfavorable effect on their inbound customer traffic.

Finally, the imposition of any obligatory tolls for the use of any highway does entail risks for traffic diversion onto alternative routes that are not designed for heavy traffic, and this is a serious consideration in many areas. Public input should be a key consideration in any such decision.

I would like to note that the excellent presentation arranged last week by Commissioner Redeker on alternatives for optional or involuntary tolling, including congestion relief components like designated express lanes, offered many avenues that I believe should be explored. But I believe we should be wary of considering any type of toll mechanism, even an optional one, unless we have first addressed the state's structural spending issues and created a lockbox for our existing transportation revenue streams.