

Testimony by  
The Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce  
Before the Legislature's Transportation Committee  
Monday, February 27, 2017  
11:00 am, Room 2C Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT

Good morning my name is Stephen A. Bull, President/CEO of the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce. The Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce represents over 1,000 employers with a workforce of over 107,000 employees in the Greater Danbury region.

**I am here today in my capacity as President/CEO of the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce to voice our strong opposition to the imposition of tolls as proposed in SB 560, SB 751, HB 5458, and HB 6058.**

Tolls were removed from Connecticut highways years ago for good reasons. Tolls remain a bad idea today.

1. **Safety.** Tolls decrease safety on our backroads and in our residential neighborhoods. A \$2 toll at the border is a tax increase of approximately \$1,000 per year on our area residents who have to commute across the border to New York. Does anyone think that they will not try and avoid that cost? There are numerous ways at the Danbury/New York border where people can get off and use back roads through residential neighborhoods. Furthermore, increasing traffic counts have made I-84 increasingly dangerous. Electronic tolls will decrease safety
2. **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.
3. **Fairness.** Tolls at the borders represent another attempt to “make someone else pay.” Whether it is out of state drivers, or residents and businesses of our border communities. Tolls are another tax, so why should

the residents of the communities in the center of the state not suffer the same increased costs?

If the legislature believes that it so desperately needs more revenue from 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, 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 burden of higher costs, safety and economic disruption.

**Additionally, the Chamber cannot support the "lock box" concepts set forth in SJ 5, SJ 8, SJ 30 and HJ 7, HJ 8, HJ 38, HJ 40, HJ 41, HJ 52, and HJ 55.**

Legislators already have the ability not to raid the Special Transportation Fund. There is no need to amend the State Constitution. Just don't take the Special Transportation Fund money and divert it to the General Fund. With any lock box, there is always a key. Such an amendment would provide no greater guarantee that the Special Transportation Fund would not be raided than there is today. We do not believe that we need to protect legislators from themselves. They already have the power to exercise that discipline.

Therefore, the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests that you reject all proposals that would authorize the reestablishment of tolls as well as a "lock box" amendment.

This completes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration.