

March 3, 2019

Dear Transportation Committee:

I am writing to you as a citizen concerned about truth, reason, and rationality in government. It seems that there is nothing that won't be used to galvanize partisan rancor, whether it be on the national, state, or local levels. Clearly the current topics being thrown around like footballs in Hartford this year are school regionalization and the big, scary boogeyman of tolls.

Despite all the soundbites, the fearmongering, and the viral social media posts, the idea of tolls themselves is truly not very controversial. On the I-95 corridor, there are very few remaining areas, from Maine to Florida, that do not have tolls. This is because our infrastructure is crumbling. It's also because we live in one of the most congested areas in the country, and have interstate highways that are used by huge numbers of travelers, commercial and personal, from many different states.

When I drive to Boston, I have to pay tolls to Massachusetts. I'm not super happy about it, but this makes sense. I'm using infrastructure that my tax dollars haven't paid for. The same is true when I cross the Newburgh-Beacon bridge, or the Tappan Zee bridge, or the George Washington bridge.

When I drive from Newtown to Danbury (West on I-84) or Southbury (East on I-84) on a Friday afternoon, I sometimes go miles without seeing another Connecticut license plate. Sometimes my children play a game where we look at all the license plates and add them up: Pennsylvania, New York, New York, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, CONNECTICUT! Why are we not asking these commuters to pay their fair share for the upkeep of the roads they're using?

I live right near I-84. Tolls would be frustrating and annoying for me, but I would rather have them than pay more in state income tax for all my neighboring commuters to drive by my town for free, or to have residents all over Connecticut, many of whom never use the interstate, to have to make it up in their income or sales taxes.

Let's look at the real reason Connecticut no longer has tolls: a horrible accident at a toll plaza. This happened years ago, and the technology now is so different that toll gantries, unlike plazas, would have a negligible effect on congestion, and would be far less dangerous.

Our highways and bridges are in dire need of repair. Our state has been run for years by people of both parties who've been promising lower taxes in magical conjunction with more services. Anyone who runs a household knows you cannot provide services without income. I am happy to pay for the services I use, including my public schools, police, and - perhaps most ubiquitous but least often thought about - my roads.

Please do not let the partisan hostage-taking sink the idea of tolls before it's been truly studied and looked at rationally. If real, reliable studies are made and show a benefit to tolling, then it really doesn't matter how unpopular it might sound at first, it's your job to govern, to ensure that we make the best decisions with the best knowledge available.

Sincerely,
Jacquelyn Kaplan
Sandy Hook,CT