

Statement to the Connecticut Transportation Strategy Board

By

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The final report of the Electronic Tolls and Congestion Pricing Study can only be viewed within the context of broader goals for mobility within the State of Connecticut.

Any road pricing system needs to be part of an integrated mobility strategy that meets the transportation needs of Connecticut's residents, businesses, and visitors while minimizing negative environmental, economic, and social impacts.

While road pricing alone will never result in a balanced and sustainable mobility system in our state, it can certainly play an important role in helping us meet that goal.

Four of the greatest transportation challenges ever to face Connecticut converge in a perfect storm on the near horizon: transportation emissions make up 40% of the state's greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming; congestion chokes several of our corridors, wasting the time, money, and health of residents and businesses; about 1/3 of our bridges are structurally deficient; and yet we'll use up our Special Transportation Fund surplus by 2011.

Our transportation policies need to help the state grow economically while reducing carbon emissions. We need to make more efficient use of our current transportation network by providing alternatives to the automobile in those neighborhoods and corridors that can support walking, biking, and transit. We also need to evenly distribute the burden of maintaining the state's transportation system, and make smart decisions to invest in only those expansion projects that better position our state for the challenges we will face in the decades to come. We need to raise the revenue necessary to maintain the system and to fund appropriate expansions.

Road pricing, if done properly, can help us work towards achieving these goals.

A road pricing system that varies by road conditions and time of day can dramatically enhance the efficient usage of the current highway system while raising the revenues to maintain it and funding enhancements to highways and transit.

As the study shows, however, no single alternative is without its challenges and none provides a quick fix. Road pricing can't help us to meet our immediate fiscal needs. We'll need to identify other strategies that can be enacted quickly in order to keep the system operating at a state of good repair and to fund capital improvements during the next few years.

Road pricing can help us meet the longer term objectives of congestion relief, reducing transportation emissions and vehicle miles travelled, and generating revenue in an equitable manner.

I will briefly address each of the fiscally positive and feasible alternatives identified by the study.

Border tolling does not impact congestion or VMT. The revenue it raises would be confined to a handful of highway corridors in the state, and it would negatively impact the labor market of any job center near state lines. I have included maps in my written testimony showing where commuters to Hartford and Stamford live. Many travel from out of state every single day. Border tolling works against positive regional initiatives such as the Hartford Springfield Knowledge Corridor, by severing economic regions that cross state lines.

Truck tolls appear an attractive revenue-generating opportunity, but they won't reduce congestion unless they vary by time and road conditions. They can also divert enough trucks to local streets to severely impact community character and congestion on local roads. Time variable truck tolling should be examined with the aim of shifting trucks outside the peak of congestion rather than shifting them off the highway altogether.

The concept of tolling eastern I95 and western I84 to pay for widening these stretches is intriguing. The study finds tolls would reduce congestion on these roads to such an extent as to remove the need for the widening projects. By limiting demand on congested stretches, tolls could effectively save the state \$2.5 billion. The downside is that these revenue streams would be difficult to tap, and diversion traffic would cause significant impact to local roads, especially in southeast Connecticut. There may be other strategies available, though, that would similarly eliminate the need for these road expansion projects.

Implementing time variable tolls in southwestern Connecticut is an appropriate strategy that would encourage efficient use of our most constrained highway infrastructure, while providing a revenue stream for targeted highway enhancements, improvements to Route 1, and transit enhancements that would

move lower Fairfield County towards a balanced mobility system meeting the needs of all users.

In regards to pricing VMT, I quote the study: “The only anticipated environmental impacts from this concept would be improvements in air quality and reductions in energy consumption...” VMT pricing is the most equitable of all the mechanisms that could fund the operation of our road system and support building the next generation of sustainable mobility infrastructure. None of the road pricing alternatives studied would be operational in less than 10 years, and VMT pricing is becoming closer to reality each and every day. Connecticut’s early pursuit of this alternative would impact the pending transportation bill reauthorization and influence federal policy, and help lead the nation towards the more sustainable transportation system that will be necessary in a carbon-constrained future.

These alternatives cannot be viewed in isolation and we cannot look to any one of them for the solution to all our problems, but variable time of day road pricing implemented throughout the road system can move us toward more efficient use of our existing system while paying for its maintenance and funding new projects which position Connecticut for generations of prosperity in an age of carbon constraint. In the short term, we should implement variable road pricing in this most congested corner of the state to reduce congestion and simultaneously create a revenue stream for mobility alternatives.