The View on Tolls:
Political Perceptions vs. Public Opinion

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An Apparent Disconnect

• Political Perception of the Public’s Attitude Towards Tolls; vs.

• Actual Public Opinion

• This Gap is a Major Impediment to the Expanded Use of Tolls

...but there are signs the gap is narrowing
Why the Disconnect

• Political Apprehension about the Very Word “Toll”

• Assumption that People Equate Tolls to Taxes
  - (May not be a good assumption)

• Assumptions that People Don’t Like Toll Plazas
  - (They’re right about this one)

• Assumption that Tolls are a Major Political Risk
  - (Maybe --- maybe not)
Growing Evidence of Support

• Both Through Opinion Polling and at the Ballot Box

• A Quick Look at Some Recent “Real World” Examples
  - Illinois Tollway
  - Miami-Dade Expressway System
  - Tacoma Narrows Bridge
  - I-15 Managed Lanes
Illinois Tollway

- Illinois Tollway has been Favorite Political Target for Some Time
- In 2000, Then New Governor George Ryan Made Removing Tolls One of His Major Issues
  - Replaced Some Board Members and Senior Management
  - For 2 years analyzed options for toll removal
  - Over 10 scenarios considered
- Released Plan in 2002 to Phase Out Tolls over Several Years
  - Did not receive required legislative approval
- Forgot to Poll the People First
  - Could have saved a lot of work
- Chicago Tribune / WGN TV: 1000+ Statewide Poll on the Governor’s Plan
Illinois Tollway; Chicago Tribune / WGN-TV Poll Results

Do you consider the tollways to be a good value for the money?

All Survey Participants

Yes 58%
No 42%

I-PASS Users

Yes 71%
No 29%
Illinois Tollway;
Chicago Tribune / WGN-TV Poll Results

Do you approve or disapprove of the Ryan plan to eliminate tolls?

All Survey Participants

- Disapprove: 41%
- Approve: 37%
- No Opinion: 22%

Regular Tollway Users

- Disapprove: 54%
- Approve: 41%
- No Opinion: 5%
Illinois Tollway;  
Chicago Tribune / WGN-TV Poll Results

Do you favor or oppose increasing state motor fuel taxes to turn the toll roads into freeways?

- Oppose: 74%
- No Opinion: 10%
- Favor: 16%
Illinois Tollway;
Chicago Tribune / WGN-TV Poll Results

Which to you is the greater problem:
The cost of tolls you pay or having to stop at toll booths to pay tolls?

- Having to Stop: 66%
- Cost of Tolls: 13%
- Don’t Know / Neither: 13%
- Both: 8%
Miami-Dade Expressway Authority

- Operates Four Urban Tollways in Miami Dade County
- Over 200,000 Daily Users
- Key Arteries for Local Travel Throughout County
- Tolls Had Recently Been Increased for First Time in Many Years
County Tax Proposal

- In 1999, County Sales Tax for Transit was on Ballot
- To Encourage Support, a Portion of the Proceeds of New Tax Was Pledged by Mayor to be used to Remove Tolls from MDX Facilities
- Assumption: Local Residents Would be Willing to Pay a Small added Sales Tax in Exchange for Elimination of Tolls
- Little or No Organized Opposition; Broad Approval of Measure Was Expected
The Miami Result

- Tax Measure Failed by a 2-1 Margin
- Clearly Did Not Show Large Scale Opposition to Tolls
- Not Clear Whether Decision was Tolls vs Tax or Highways vs. Transit
- Was Clear Evidence of the Disconnect:
  - Political Perception of Public Opposition to Tolls vs.
  - Actual Public Opinion Among Actual Toll Users
Washington State Experience

- In 1993 State Legislature Unanimously Approved Public-Private Partnerships Bill to Develop Toll Facilities
- Ten Proposals Submitted; Six Projects Selected By WSDOT
- Following Year Political Dismantling Began
  - Changes in Legislature
  - Small but Vocal Opposition
- Political Assumption: People Don’t Want Tolls
  - Three Projects killed Immediately
  - Referendum Requirement Established
  - One More Project Stopped by Legislature
  - One More Project Withdrawn by Sponsor
- Only Tacoma-Narrows Bridge Ultimately Went to the Voters
Tacoma Narrows Bridge
Tacoma-Narrows Bridge

- Existing Bridge; Formerly Tolled now Toll-Free
- Only Connection Between Kitsap Peninsula and Tacoma
- Frequent Congestion—Both Commuter and Recreation
- Proposed to Add Parallel Span to Increase Capacity
- Would Require Re-imposition of Tolls
  - $3.00 Round Trip
- Study Performed to Identify “Affected Voters”
- Referendum Held in 2000
The Tacoma – Narrows Result

• Referendum Narrowly Passed (About 52 / 48)

• Impacted Residents Voted to Re-impose Tolls on Existing Bridge
  - Even Though There are Essentially No Alternate Routes
  - Support Driven by Need to Deal With Congestion
  - Not what political perceptions expected

• Post-Script:
  One of the projects squashed by the Legislature (SR 520 Bridge) is now likely to be tolled by WSDOT as part of expansion program
I-15 Express Lanes (San Diego)

- 8 Mile Managed Lane Demonstration Project
- Previously Limited to HOV Only
- Demonstration Allowed SOV “Buy-in”
- Relatively Good Local Political Support
- Political Opposition to the HOT Concept
  - Maryland Governor Parris Glendening
  - Stopped HOT planning in Maryland;
  - “Unfair that wealthy people can buy their way out of congestion”
Existing I-15 Express Lanes
Existing I-15 Express Lanes
Existing I-15 Express Lanes and Planned Expansion

Final Build Out

- Existing Section: 2 Lane Reversible
- 4 Lanes With Moveable Barrier
- 4 Lanes With Fixed Barrier
I-15 Corridor North of Existing Managed Lanes
Telephone Survey

- Total Sample 800 (RDD) of I-15 Corridor Users
  - 600 Typically Use Regular Lanes
  - 200 Typically Use Express Lanes
- Sample Confidence +/- 3.5%
- Covered a Full Range of Incomes
- About 20% Minority
- Full Range of Ages
- 83% of Participants Were Aware of the Existing I-15 Express Lanes Project
- Conducted by Fairfax Research
“Good Idea to Have Time Saving Option on I-15”

- Strongly Agree: 70%
- Somewhat Agree: 21%
- Somewhat Disagree: 4%
- Strongly Disagree: 3%
- Don’t Know: 2%
Approval of FasTrak Program on I-15

- **FasTrak Customer**
  - Approve: 88%
  - Disapprove: 11%
  - Don’t Know: 1%

- **Other I-15 Users**
  - Approve: 66%
  - Disapprove: 28%
  - Don’t Know: 6%
Approval of FasTrak Program
By Group

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percent Approval</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Income ($000's)</th>
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"Tolls are a good way to keep the Express Lanes moving quickly" Agree or Disagree?
"What is the Single Most Effective Way to Reduce Congestion on I-15?"

**FasTrak Customer**
- Extend Express Lanes: 49%
- Add Regular Lanes: 24%
- Add Transit: 10%
- Build Other Roads: 13%
- Don't Know: 4%

**Other I-15 Users**
- Extend Express Lanes: 37%
- Add Regular Lanes: 26%
- Add Transit: 11%
- Build Other Roads: 21%
- Don't Know: 5%
Other Evidence of Growing Support

- Recent Referendum In Fort Bend County, Texas on New County-backed Tollway Program
  - Passed by a 2 to 1 margin

- "Locally Preferred Alternative" for Expanding LBJ Freeway In Dallas is to toll the new capacity

- Major Survey in Twin Cities Congestion Pricing Study Found that About Half of Participants Would Favor Adding Tolls to the Urban Freeway System if Ramp Meters Were Removed
Some Conclusions

• Public Opinion About Tolls is not Nearly as Negative as Elected Officials Perceive

• Illinois, Miami and I-15 Experience Suggests Attitude Toward Tolls is Less Negative Than Taxes
  - People Tend to Like the Concept of User Fees Which are Only Paid When the Facility is Used

• Public Does Have a Problem Waiting in Line to Pay
  - Continued Deployment of ETC and Ultimately Fully Automated Systems is a Key in Maintaining Public Support

• Caution: Still not 100% Support
  - Let’s not get carried away
Signs the "Gap" May be Narrowing

- Administration Proposal For Reauthorization Bill Has Many Pro-toll Provisions
  - Would add Toll-Paying Single Occupant Vehicles as Legally Eligible for HOV Lanes
  - Mainstreams the Value Pricing Program and would make it legal to add tolls to Interstate Routes for Congestion Management
  - Reduces Restrictions on Use of Tolls to Fund Reconstruction and Expansion of Interstate Routes
- Draft House "FAST" Bill (Kennedy MN and Smith WA)
  - Allows and Encourages Tolls Charged on "New Capacity" on Interstate Routes
  - Would Require Toll Feasibility Study for Any Interstate Expansion Project over $50M
- Recognition by Both Administration and Congress that Days of the Traditional Gas Tax May be Numbered