

Tolling FAQ's

AREN'T THE INTERSTATES ALREADY PAID FOR?

Many portions of the Interstate system are now *more than 50 years old*. As the system ages and the federal government's financial participation declines, states face huge costs to rebuild the system.

Current federal law still imposes major restrictions on states' ability to toll existing Interstate facilities. With states now facing the financial obligation of maintaining and repairing 50-year-old highways, it's time to change federal policy and *give states the maximum flexibility to use tolling* as a dedicated source of transportation revenue. This is an argument for *flexibility and options, NOT mandates*.

It is a common misconception that the Interstates are "already paid for." Infrastructure of all kinds needs routine maintenance, upgrading and eventual replacement. Though it cost \$129 billion to construct, it will cost nearly *\$2.5 trillion* over the next 50 years to rebuild the interstate system, largely at state expense. States are desperate for new, sustainable revenue streams to support their highways, especially the Interstate highways. A growing number of states are exploring (or revisiting) the benefits of tolling as part of a toolbox of funding options for renovating and upgrading their roadways.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TOLLING?

The federal contribution to the Interstate system has decreased from roughly 90 percent of the initial construction cost to less than 45 percent of today's maintenance cost. With the Highway Trust Fund in precarious shape, the federal share will decline even more in the years ahead.

As a direct user charge, tolling appropriately allocates the cost of future improvements to those who benefit directly. According to a November 2012 Reason Foundation study, the cost of collecting tolls in a mature all-electronic tolling system is equivalent to the cost to collect the gas tax.

DOESN'T THE GAS TAX FUND TRANSPORTATION?

The 18.4 cents-per-gallon federal gas tax, which was last raised in 1993 and has since lost more than 50 percent of its purchasing power, cannot sufficiently fund America's highway infrastructure. Since 2008, Congress has transferred more than \$55 billion from the General Fund to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent. Tolls provide a valuable source of revenue both to build new roads and maintain existing roads.

HOW DO TOLLS BENEFIT THE AVERAGE AMERICAN?

The primary benefits are better, safer roads; less congestion; more predictable trip times; and reduced need for taxes to pay for roads. Tolls provide money today for projects that can be built in the near future and meet demand for decades to come. If it were not for tolls, many of the best roads and bridges in the U.S. might never have been built.

ISN'T A TOLL JUST ANOTHER TAX?

No, tolls are voluntary user fees. Drivers can choose to pay tolls or take alternative routes, whereas taxes are mandatory and charged to everyone. Yes, customers of toll facilities also pay taxes, but the taxes are used to fund non-toll roads. Since toll roads are primarily self-financed and do not rely on taxes, the customer is not paying twice for the facility. In fact, without tolls, taxes would be higher.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO THE IDEA OF NEW TOLLS?

Revenue-raising measures are never popular, especially in a time of economic stress. The federal fuel tax has not been raised since 1993. However, numerous toll facilities have been approved in the anti-tax environment of recent decades, and opinion polls consistently show that motorists prefer tolls over taxes and support the expansion of toll roads to improve driver options and travel times. In one poll, 84 percent of Americans said tolls should be considered as a primary source of transportation revenue or on a project-by-project basis.

HOW DO TOLL ROADS COMPARE TO NON-TOLLED ROADS IN TERMS OF SAFETY?

Toll roads are generally safer than non-tolled roads due to better maintenance, pavement and technology. Toll operators employ state-of-the-art technology to monitor road conditions and have a financial incentive to keep their roads running as safely and smoothly as possible. The facts bear this out, as toll facilities in the United States have a much lower fatality rate than U.S. roads overall.

IS TOLLING FAIR TO LOW-INCOME MOTORISTS?

Many surveys have shown that drivers of all income levels use tolled facilities and support having the option to use high-quality toll roads. A well-designed pricing plan can be less burdensome to low-income citizens than systems that are based on regressive taxes, such as car registration fees, sales taxes and the gasoline tax.

WON'T TOLLS INCREASE CONSUMER PRICES BY DRIVING UP THE COST OF TRUCKING?

The poor state of our roads and bridges is already raising consumer prices through congestion, lost time and higher operating costs for trucking companies. The most recent Urban Mobility Report by the Texas Transportation Institute found that highway congestion cost the United States \$101 billion in 2010 and will rise to \$133 billion by 2015. By increasing the quality of infrastructure and easing congestion, tolls can produce cost savings for truckers and all consumers.

SOME STATES WANT TO PUT TOLLS ON INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS. WHY SHOULD WE ALLOW TOLLS ON ROADS THAT ARE ALREADY PAID FOR?

"Already paid for" misses the point. America's interstate highway system is aging and will deteriorate over time without substantial new investment. The future cost to rebuild these roads will be much higher than the original cost. Federal and state fuel taxes are already insufficient to maintain the interstates in good repair, much less rebuild them. Tolling is a proven, convenient, fair way to raise revenues to rebuild these highways.

Source: International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association