

EXACT
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Driving Change through Communications and Outreach

By Barbara Pruitt

Tolling is making headlines. From *USA Today* to the *Omaha World-Herald*, from *The Wall Street Journal* to *The Indianapolis Star*, HOT lanes are hot news. So is electronic toll collection, privatization, innovative transportation funding legislation, and any number of topics on how toll roads are mitigating the economic impact of congestion.

At the same time, the U.S. transportation funding crisis and growing congestion are forcing state and local governments to look at new ways to fund their systems and maximize capacity. And the Interstate Highway System's 50th anniversary this year is shining an even brighter spotlight on the need for changes in how transportation systems are funded.

IBTTA's Communications and Outreach Task Force recognizes that now is the time to enlighten the public, the media, and elected officials on how tolling presents a solution to many of the challenges facing the U.S. transportation system. Following is an overview of how the task force is driving change and how toll agencies can use the task force's initiatives as a resource in their own communications programs.

The Effort to Advance Tolling

As an outcome of IBTTA's business plan in 2005, the association's board of directors charged the task force with helping to increase awareness of IBTTA as a thought leader in the debate over how to solve America's transportation crisis. The board also asked the group to drive positive change in surface transportation policy and promote the benefits of tolling as a viable

transportation funding solution. Toward these ends, the task force's objectives are to:

- Position IBTTA as the advocate for the toll industry,
- Raise the visibility of IBTTA and the toll industry, and
- Promote the value of tolling.

While IBTTA is an international association with members in 25 countries on six continents, the Communications and Outreach Task Force made a conscious decision to focus its advocacy efforts on the U.S. transportation industry. This approach envisions sharpening the toll industry's message in one region of the world and using the lessons learned to expand advocacy efforts in other regions.

Initiatives for Change

The task force has launched the following initiatives to achieve its objectives, and each one serves as a resource for tolling agencies.

The fuel tax will never again be enough to support American infrastructure.

Framing the messages. IBTTA has composed the following key messages as a platform for thought leadership in the tolling industry. These messages represent the positions IBTTA seeks for itself and its members, and each message is an important component of the transportation "story" that media and other audiences will find compelling. Toll agencies can integrate these messages into their own communications or use them as quotes from an IBTTA spokesperson.

(1) The nation's economy depends on a strong transportation system, but that system is in crisis because of inadequate funding, deteriorating infrastructure, and growing congestion.

- America's interstate highways turned 50 years old in June. The anniversary spotlights government's inability to keep up with future maintenance costs, let alone fund improvements and new construction.
- Gas taxes--the traditional way to fund roads--are a diminishing resource. Given the rising cost of gasoline, the availability of more fuel-efficient vehicles, and political unwillingness to raise taxes, the fuel tax will never again be enough to support American infrastructure.
- Alternative road-funding sources are imperative.

(2) Tolling is a reliable, fair, and time-tested mechanism to fund, develop, and operate roads. It is also much easier to implement now with new technology.

- Unlike government funding, user-generated revenue is dependable.
- Toll financing stays in the transportation system and builds facilities with the greatest potential public benefit quickly and efficiently.
- Tolls are fair user fees that give drivers choices: If they use a toll road, they pay for that road, whereas with the gas tax, motorists pay for the funding of projects they may never use.

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- Motorists and public officials are increasingly recognizing tolling as an integral part of the answer to the U.S. transportation crisis.
- A growing trend is the reliance on user-generated toll revenue to support transportation infrastructure, as cash-strapped states search for innovative funding ideas to fill the gap created by the inadequate federal gas tax and unreliable funding.
- Thanks to technological advances, tolling can alleviate congestion and better manage traffic flow.
- Tolling offers the means to provide high-quality transportation infrastructure, subsidize other modes of public transit, and stimulate economic growth.
- No other financing mechanism can offer all of these benefits.

(4) IBTTA members are leaders in providing customer-driven mobility through their expertise in transportation finance, technology, management, and operations.

- IBTTA is the worldwide association of toll facility owners and operators and associated industry professionals.
- In 2007, we will continue working to drive positive change in surface transportation policy.

Conducting proactive media relations. IBTTA is effecting change by exposing to the media the transportation funding crisis and its solutions. This proactive effort is intended to create and lead news coverage of transportation issues and to establish IBTTA as the go-to source for transportation and tolling information.

IBTTA's recent media-related efforts include:

- A National Press Club news conference: five industry organizations, including the American Public Transportation Association, Environmental Defense, the Hudson Institute, and the Intelligent Transportation Society of America, joined IBTTA at this November 2005 press conference to challenge state governments to consider tolling when adding capacity. More than a half dozen news outlets attended, and several articles were generated from the event. Additionally, IBTTA established valuable relationships with all the reporters who attended.
- A meeting with *The Washington Post* editorial board: In March 2006, IBTTA executive director Pat Jones met with the Post's editorial board to present tolling as a solution to our current transportation challenges and to establish the association and its members as credible sources.
 - A California media tour, conducted in March 2006: Pat Jones and IBTTA member representatives from California tolling agencies met with reporters and editors at the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Orange County (Calif.) Register*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* to present a comprehensive national story with local tie-ins.

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Managing media inquiries. Even without reaching out directly, IBTTA is serving as a valued source for journalists. Growing interest in tolling is leading media to IBTTA's door. IBTTA leverages these inquiries through a variety of story angles to communicate its messages, establish relationships with media members, and plant seeds for subsequent stories.

Recent inquiries include:

- Questions from Inside ITS on technology trends in tolling;
- A Knight Ridder request for information about Super Bowl traffic; and
- Multiple inquiries regarding toll facility asset leases from newspapers in Indiana, New Jersey, Ohio, and Missouri.



Providing Speakers

IBTTA staff and board members have long been speaking out—literally, as speakers at allied industry conferences such as those hosted by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and the American Road & Transportation Builders Association. Tolling agencies, too, often invite IBTTA representatives to speak to local audiences as third-party experts who can support agency agendas.

Counseling agencies and legislators. IBTTA helps agencies effect change in public policy and public perceptions by providing guidance to agency leaders and legislators. Issues addressed can include crafting tolling policy, educating the public about the benefits of tolling, and learning about emerging technologies. Many states with new, proposed or innovative programs such as North Carolina, Minnesota, Tennessee and Texas have tapped IBTTA leadership for advice.

Collaborating with allied organizations. One of the most important points made at IBTTA's Transportation Improvement Forum last March was that solving our transportation challenges will require a joint effort from all parties affected by the system. IBTTA is inviting the federal and state DOTs, trucking associations, shippers, public transit agencies, and the American Automobile Association to participate in its conferences and publications. Additionally, IBTTA leaders have spoken at events put on by these organizations and have submitted manuscripts to their publications to keep their members and employees fully aware of the tolling solution.



Serving as an information resource. IBTTA serves as the unmatched clearinghouse for transportation and tolling information. Tollways and reports on events such as the Transportation Improvement Forum provide a depth and breadth of information that can't be found elsewhere. The association's Web site, www.ibtta.org, archives countless news clips, white papers, and industry links for members, media, elected officials, and others. The Web site also contains fact sheets and wother materials

that tolling agencies can download and tailor for their own communications needs.

Task Force Members

The members of IBTTA's Communications and Outreach Task Force comprise a team of seasoned members and communications professionals who are aided by the association's dedicated staff. The task force members are:

- Lisa Callahan, Kansas Turnpike Authority, Chair
- Barbara Pruitt, HNTB Corporation, Vice Chair
- Coby Chase, Texas Department of Transportation
- Howard "Butch" Eley, Infrastructure Corporation of America
- John "Jack" Finn, HNTB Corporation
- Steve Heminger, Metropolitan Transportation Commission
- Frank McCartney, Delaware River Joint Toll Bridge Commission
- Mark Muriello, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
- Servando Parapar, Miami-Dade Expressway Authority
- Kim Poulton, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise
- Ed Regan, Wilbur Smith Associates
- Kara Gerhardt Ross, ACS Government Solutions
- Lisa Thompson, State Road and Tollway Authority (Georgia)
- P. J. Wilkins, Delaware Department of Transportation
- Lawrence Yermack, Telvent Farradyne

For transportation agencies interested in educating and informing their state and local stakeholders and news outlets and influencing how they view transportation solutions, IBTTA is a versatile source whose resources can be shaped to support their priorities. Driving change in transportation policies and perspectives calls for industrywide collaboration. IBTTA's Communications and Outreach Task Force can help steer the way.

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